

Parent/Guardian-Teacher Conference

Before we scheduled a conference my cooperating teacher and I discussed the most productive way to go about this assignment. A new student had just joined our class the week before and my CT thought it would be productive to have his mother, whom we had not yet met, come in and talk about her son's transition into the new classroom and home. My CT and I talked about the importance of communicating with this new family and making sure they feel comfortable with the new school and all of the policies and procedures that go along with it. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the day-to-day happenings in the classroom, clarify any questions the new student's mother might have, and to initiate a positive relationship with her.

Since the new student had been living with his grandparents for his first week of school while his parents packed up and moved from Kansas, by the time his parents got to Virginia they were quite confused about all of the new classroom and homework procedures their son had to follow. The new student had been forgetting to do some of his homework and to bring back the correct folder and books. To prepare for the meeting I made sure to have an example of all of the folders (homework, poetry, and Thursday folder), notebooks (math, writing, and poetry), and books (his reading bag and library books) that we use on a daily or weekly basis. I also made sure to have examples of ordinary work that we had done since he arrived and will continue to do each week.

The meeting started with a friendly introduction of me and my CT, leaving an opening for the mother to introduce herself in as much depth as she cared to. On the new student's first day his father was able to drop him off before flying back to pack up their old house, and he informed me that the student's mother had also attended William and Mary. I used this as a good jumping off point during the introduction portion of our meeting to ask her about it. This helped me make a more personal connection and put her more at ease. She was very friendly but was definitely confused and a little overwhelmed as the meeting began. After the introductions I told her that I thought the purpose of the meeting was to help her get acclimated to the new classroom. To make sure she felt very involved, important, and

comfortable, I said: “Since your family’s integration into our classroom is the point of this meeting, would you like to start? We really want to know how [student] is adjusting to his new home and school and what questions do you have so far?”. Her first, and main, question was about the routines with all of the folders and notebooks. I showed her examples of the homework folder, poetry folder, and Thursday take-home folder and explained the functions of each one, how often they each go home, and when they need to be brought back. I made sure to pause after each of my explanations to allow time for her to determine if she fully processed and understood the information.

After we were done looking at the folders, I told her about our daily schedule. I made sure to point out how we run reading groups, rotate centers each day (P.E. is on Wednesday so make sure your child is wearing sneakers, etc.), lunch procedures (getting a lunch card and putting money on it, allergies, etc.), and transportation procedures (parent pick-up or riding the bus). We paused to make sure there was enough time to let all of the information sink in before moving on after each point. We also discussed her son’s work and how we view his academic ability (very high so far) from what we have observed and the test results from the reading teacher. I wanted to share my opinion, but did not want to come across as a know-it-all who knows her son more than she does, so I used a lot of I-messages in a respectful way. I told her that he seems to be doing fine academically as I showed her evidence of his work (a fraction sheet, a writing and drawing sample, and his matter journal from science). I also told her that he appears to be fitting in socially (he plays actively on the playground with the other students, he raises his hand in class a lot, he has learned all of the names of the other students in the class after just over two weeks, etc.). I told her that it seems to me that he is adjusting very, very well so far by continuing to use I-messages, such as, “I see your son raising his hand a lot and I find it encouraging that he is participating so openly even though he has only been here a couple of weeks”. I also asked her, “From your perspective, how do you think he is adjusting?” She spoke to that a little bit but did not seem concerned with her son’s adjustment. He seems to be doing just fine in her eyes. She was glad he was also doing well in the school setting. To make sure I understood her meaning and to make her feel like I had really heard and understood her, I repeated back to her meaning in my own words

To end the meeting I asked, “What other questions do you have?” She thought about it for a little while and could not think of anything else. We ended the meeting by telling her about parental involvement in the class and gave her information for different ways to get involved if she wished. She was interested in coming along on the field trip to Jamestown in a couple of weeks so we told her to look out for a permission slip that would be going home later in the week. As we walked toward the exit we discussed the new student’s little siblings who would be starting preschool and kindergarten next year. We discussed the difficulty in finding a pre-school so late in the year and how the sign-up window for kindergarten which was fast closing. We advised her who to contact to get the sign-up process started. This parent-teacher relationship seems to be off to a good start. She is interested in her son’s academic and social life. She seems to want to be active in helping him get acclimated to a new environment. We will make sure to follow up with the request for information about chaperoning the field trip. It will be good to follow up on that day about how the transition into the classroom continues to go. Report cards are also going out within the next month and this will be another great time to check in with the family to see how they think their son is doing (is it on par with how he was doing with the Common Core back in Kansas or is he missing some key information, etc.).

During the meeting I tried to keep good eye contact without staring too much. I was relaxed as I sat at the table, facing the mother with my hands in my lap or resting on the table. This helped me appear open instead of crossing my arms which I am apt to do even though I do not mean to appear closed off. We sat at the small first-grade tables because the new student’s mother wanted to see his desk and how everything is organized. This made sitting a little awkward for three adults and it could have been more comfortable at the adult-sized reading table. The convenience of her son’s desk and everything in it won in the end. At the next meeting, now that she is familiar with the organization of the rooms, we will sit at the adult-sized table.

The responses from the mother were positive. She came prepared with a lot of good questions and seemed to be relieved to understand the classroom better because she did not have any more

questions after the explanations and wait time that she was given after each. I was a bit nervous to contribute so much to the meeting but I was lucky to meet with such a friendly, involved parent. Her questions and inquiry about further involvement with the class showed us that she was going to be a positive asset for us to work with as the year continues to move along.