

## Thoughts on Parent-Teacher Conferences by Yuko Abe-Stein

- Send out a questionnaire before the conference so you can prepare for parents' questions and interests.
- Always begin the conference with positive remarks. This helps parents to let go of their anxiety.
- Make sure the conference is a two-way communication. Let parents know that you want to find out what the child is like at home.
- When addressing your concerns, ask if parents have seen this behavior at home.
- Emphasize that at the beginning of the school year, you are still learning about the child's learning style.
- Have anecdotes! Parents love to hear quotes, and specific observations of how the child behaves at school (i.e. characters they often play in dramatic play, what they say to other children, questions they ask teachers, contributions they make during meeting time, etc.). Always back your statements with specific anecdotes.
- Rehearse how you will phrase questions, statements, etc. The language you use when talking to parents is important! Be careful not to make the parents defensive, because then the conference will be unproductive.
- Sometimes parents have a difficult time hearing news about their child's learning challenges at school. If it is the first time they are hearing about a certain concern, they may not accept the news openly. Make your statement and revisit the situation again later. It may take many times before the parents "hear" what you are saying.
- Acknowledge, whenever it applies, that "this is common behavior with this age group." Parents feel reassured when told that their child is

behaving normally, and isn't the only one struggling, for example, with sitting still during meeting time.

- Always end the conference on a positive note.