

Union seminar offers strategies, tips

One of the most frequently requested seminars offered by NYSUT's Education & Learning Trust is "Parent-Teacher Conference: Strategies for Success."

In the two-hour, interactive session, veteran-teacher instructors cover strategies and tips that apply to any grade-level teacher. The seminar uses videos, handouts and parent-teacher discussion points to help teachers prepare for a conference and to enhance communication among the teacher, student and parents.

Often, the teacher must take the lead explaining to parents how they can help their child with homework, responsibility and discipline. The seminar is representative of the union's commitment to professional growth.

"Participants really appreciate the chance to see a model parent-teacher

session," said Barbara Luna, a teaching veteran and ELT instructor on Long Island. "At one seminar, the group chose to stay late because they got so caught up in watching the role-play." She noted many elementary schools are moving away from traditional report cards and adding more parent-teacher sessions during the year.

For more information, or to check scheduling for ELT courses, visit www.nysut.org/elt or email ELTmail@nysutmail.org.

If you are interested in having an ELT workshop on "Parent-Teacher Conference: Strategies for Success" in your area, ask your local union leader to schedule a seminar by calling ELT at NYSUT headquarters in Latham, 800-528-6208.

10 things to remember when preparing for a parent-teacher conference



RESOURCES FOR YOU

NYSUT offers a variety of materials to help teachers, including brochures for educators and parents, posters, bookmarks and more. Limited quantities are FREE for NYSUT members and leaders. It's so easy: Browse the items by category, add items to your cart, log in and place your order electronically. Or, if you are in a hurry and like doing things yourself, publications can be downloaded in PDF format for printing from your own computer. Place your order today at:

www.nysut.org/publications



This information was prepared in collaboration with NYSUT's Education & Learning Trust.



Veteran teachers share their dos and don'ts

New teachers are understandably nervous about their first parent-teacher conferences. So much to say, so little time! Even veteran teachers still may have qualms about upcoming parent-teacher conferences. To help you prepare, NYSUT interviewed experienced classroom teachers, including master teachers, who offer courses for the union's Education & Learning Trust. Here are their thoughts on 10 things you should do to have a successful session:



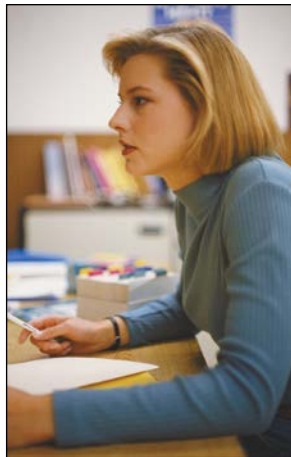
was telling us in class the other day about his winning home run." "Tamira has a wonderful way of making friends with children who are new or feeling shy.")

If you have access to a digital camera, take photos of your students to use on a seating chart or to jog your memory before parent-teacher conferences.

As a getting-to-know-you assignment, ask students to write about their interests, both academically and outside of school.

DON'T begin by focusing on the student's problem.

An Albany-area teacher recalled a parent-teacher conference when she was on the receiving end as the mother of a second-grader. "The teacher's first words to me were: 'Well, she's very messy.' She went on in detail about my daughter's messy desk, her writing — even her hair — until I wanted to cry. There was nothing about my daughter's wonderful sense of humor or her creativity. I wondered if she even liked my daughter." The students in your class are all somebody's beloved child, and parents come in hopes that you can see their child's best.



1 DO always greet parents warmly at the door. Plan and create an inviting environment. Accompany

parents to a place where you can sit together and converse comfortably. Some teachers opt to group chairs in a semi-circle near a table or other surface where they can share student work. (And make sure the chairs are big enough!)



DON'T summon parents into the classroom and direct them to sit in front of your desk. Parents may be anxious or fearful about meeting with you, a key authority figure in their child's life. If you distance yourself, put them in a subservient position or appear to condescend, you're undercutting the chances of a successful meeting.

2 DO start the meeting by showing that you care and know something positive about their child. Summarize the student's strengths before raising problems. Of course, if you have a heavy student load, it can be hard to get to know each child well by early fall conferences.

Three hints:

Keep an index card on each child and jot down observations that you can later share ("Alex



4 DO rehearse what you want to say. Practice warm-up introductions, prepare an outline, prepare a checklist of areas to cover. Plan how you will keep track of time.

DON'T wing it.

5 DO use materials from the student's work folder. It is much easier to demonstrate progress or show parents concretely what a student needs to do to improve.

DON'T rely on verbal descriptions of the student's work and progress. Avoid subjective statements such as "His conduct is bad." Instead, cite specifics such as: "She talks out of turn," or "He won't sit in his seat."

6 DO use positive, nonverbal behavior. Listen reflectively. Maintain good eye contact. Lean in when you speak or make suggestions. In your suggestions, acknowledge the stresses of parenting: "I know it can be difficult to find the time to read with your child every night. Try asking your child to read aloud while you're preparing dinner."

DON'T point a finger at parents or place blame.

7 DO engage parents in planning best ways to help their child. Seek their suggestions first. Allow for occasional silences, which give the parent an opportunity to ask a question or voice a concern.

DON'T dominate a meeting so that parents can't ask questions or make suggestions. There's so much you want to tell them, but think hard about how much information parents need. Parents are most interested in specifics related to their child and will almost always have concerns or questions of their own.

8 DO give parents something to take home with them. They can review material more completely and refer back to it during the year. This can also save time at the conference. If you offer a handout on curriculum, for example, you won't need to go over it verbally in exhaustive detail.

DON'T send them home empty-handed.

9 DO use clear and descriptive terms. Adjust the conference to the parents' needs and levels of understanding. If you must use a buzzword, get in the habit of using parenthetical definitions: "This year we will use math manipulatives, which are objects, like this set of marbles, that let kids touch and experience what is meant by mathematical symbols."

DON'T use educational jargon or acronyms. This can have a chilling effect on parent communications. Some common buzzwords that you know but parents might not: whole language, math manipulatives, SATs, ACTs, IEPs, paradigm, inclusion, cooperative learning.

10 DO end positively with a proactive message of hope. Set goals. Review how parents can help. Mention plans for follow-through. Let parents know their support is needed and appreciated. If appropriate, send a follow-up letter.

DON'T end the meeting on a negative note by recounting the student's problem.

For more information about teacher seminars, see the back page.

