

**A STUDY OF  
PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCES**

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**by  
Roger Alan Peterson  
University of Minnesota  
Duluth, Minnesota  
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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The home and school are both responsible for a child's development. What happens at these two institutions affects his total behavior. In order that the child may develop a well-balanced personality structure, the home and school must cooperate in working for and planning for experiences and activities in the individual's life,

One of the most satisfactory means of attaining this cooperative planning between the home and the school is the Parent-Teacher conference.

Parent-Teacher conferences have a wide range, from the simple getting acquainted talk to the conferences in which severe mental and emotional problems must be met. They deal with cases of normal progress and adjustment, academic retardations, and personal-social problems of behavior which affects the child's whole personality.

The successful conference depends upon the relationship between the parent and the teacher. It must be a relationship which permits the parent to express his thoughts and feelings with the knowledge that he will be listened to and understood by a sympathetic and accepting person, who in understanding, helps him in turn to understand and accept both himself and his child. When such a relationship is established, the parent and teacher can move on together to intelligent and constructive planning for the child.

The conference concerns three people: the child, the parent, and the teacher. Each has specific understandings which he hopes to attain through the conference method.

For the child, he can hope to be understood as a person by his parents and his teacher and he can expect a planned program for his academic achievement as well as his total growth.

The parent should have the opportunity of discussing with the teacher the growth and development of his child, to understand what the school is trying to do for the child and to obtain a feeling of teamwork in helping the child progress toward his or her goal.

The conference gives the teacher an opportunity to discuss the needs of the pupil, to understand the family and home background and to gain the respect and confidence of the parent.<sup>1</sup>

These three individuals contribute to the conference. It is the hope of the author that this paper will help in the preparation of a conference whenever any one of the above mentioned people needs guidance.

#### PURPOSE

It is the purpose of this paper to investigate and indicate possible means for achieving a successful parent-teacher conference. This writer believes that to have a successful conference, both teacher and parent need a basic understanding of their roll in the

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<sup>1</sup> A Guide for Parent-Teacher Conferences, Altoona, Penn. School District, Division of El. Ed., Oct., 1952.

child's educational life. To exchange this knowledge with one another, it is essential for both parties to be aware of proper conference methods and techniques.

As part of this paper, a chapter is devoted to a handbook for parents to serve as a guide for future parent-teacher conferences. Another chapter is given to the teachers' part of a successful conference, dealing with such problems as conference preparation, techniques, evaluation, and the like.

It is the writer's intention to show the various strengths and weaknesses of the parent-teacher conference method, and in doing so, aid in the incorporation of this reporting vehicle into the present and the future teachers' repertoire of professional skills.

Because of the broadness of the topic, only the functioning of the parent-teacher conference at the elementary level is considered. However, the procedure is typical for all or any grade level.

A conference is always held for a purpose. The purpose must be kept in mind if the conference is to be successful.<sup>2</sup> Various committees throughout the United States have conducted polls, questionnaires and surveys to determine the value and purpose of the different types of parent-teacher relations and conferences.

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<sup>2</sup> Katherine E. D'Evelyn, Good Techniques for Conferencing, Childhood Ed. 32:119-21, Nov., 1955,

## CHAPTER II

### STUDIES CONCERNING PARENT-TEACHER RELATIONSHIPS

Franklin L. Elder surveyed parents to determine the degree of value placed on eight parent-school relations in which each of the parents participated. Of the eight types listed, 86% of the women and 84% of the men thought the individual parent-teacher conference to be very valuable. The next highest value was the observation in the classroom which 83% of the women and 81% of the men thought to be very valuable. The third most important parent-teacher relation was the September meeting of parents with teachers in the home rooms. 83% of the women, compared to 65% of the men, considered this to be a very valuable experience. As one can see, two out of the three top choices involve parent-teacher conferences; the first being an individual conference and the second being the group conference method.<sup>1</sup>

In Arlington, Virginia, the Parents' Council Study Group on Reporting<sup>2</sup> questioned 5,844 mothers and 391 fathers who attended conferences during the 1951-52 school year. Of those questioned, 5,753 parents gained a clear picture of the child's progress through the conference method; 201 parents believed that they did not gain a clear picture of the progress while 89 parents were doubtful.

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<sup>1</sup> Franklin L. Elder, Exploration in Parent-School Relations, unpublished Doctor's Dissertation, U. of Texas, 1953, pp. 161-163.

<sup>2</sup> Parents' Council Study Group on Reporting, Arlington, Virginia, NEA Research Division, April, 1953.

Of those parents who volunteered comments, 77.3% favored the conference method whereas only 2.7% did not care for conferences.

These studies from Texas and Virginia are typical of the many surveys conducted around the United States in regard to the acceptance of the Parent-Teacher conferences. More and more systems are now adopting this valuable means of communication between the home and school.

Kenneth C. Coulter<sup>3</sup> investigated this same topic, but his approach was quite different. He realized that the truest evaluation and appraisal of an individual's efforts are through conference techniques. His study concerned the number of parent-teacher conferences and the types of parent-teacher conferences held during the first half of the school year in Glen Rock, New Jersey. The following is a table showing the number and type of parent-teacher conferences held in grades one through six (446 pupils) from September to January.

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<sup>3</sup> Kenneth C. Coulter, Parent-Teacher Conferences, El. Sch. J., 47:385-90, Mar., 1947.

PARENT-TEACHER RELATIONSHIPS<sup>4</sup>

TYPE OF CONFERENCE	GRADES IN SCHOOL						Total
	Grade I	Grade II	Grade III	Grade IV	Grade V	Grade VI	
General parent interest	2	2	1	4	2		11
School progress	5	19	8	11	6	6	57
Group adjustment and emotional behavior problems	20	22	10	1	8	8	69
Help needed in school work	3	4	3	4	2	5	21
Health		4	1	1	1		6
Others	11	4	4	4		1	25
NUMBER OF CONFERENCES	41	55	27	25	19	22	189
NUMBER OF PARENTS REACHED	23	33	19	12	19	21	127

This table shows that the two most common reasons for parental conferences were unsatisfactory school progress and problems pertaining to group adjustments. These two topics include 126 of the totaled 189 conferences.

<sup>4</sup> Kenneth C. Coulter, op. cit., p. 385-90.

Coulter was able to draw some definite conclusions from this study. He believes that:

1. Parents are interested in their children's welfare as shown by their willingness to come to school and visit.
2. Parents recognize the fact that their child can be disturbed by other than physical ills.
3. Teachers well versed in child development can be a great aid in helping the parent raise his child.
4. The child is best served by a constant cooperation between home and school.

## CHAPTER III

### A HISTORICAL REVIEW

To better understand the development of the parent-teacher conference as a means of reporting pupil progress, a brief review of the earliest kinds of reporting is necessary.

One of the earliest records of a report to parents was published in 1840 in the Horace Mann Common School Journal. Reavis and Judd<sup>1</sup> describe one of the contributors as advocating "weekly written reports." This same contributor also believed it was difficult to commute in writing with parents because there was the danger of making reports so long that the parents would fail to obtain a clear idea of the child's accomplishment.

This 1840 teacher solved the problem by making cards of white, blue, yellow and red, representing "Entire Approbation", "Approbation", "Indifferent", and "Censure". These cards were distributed as the teacher felt they were deserved. They were inexpensive and they met with parental approval.

When the McGuffey readers were popular, children were classified according to the grade number of the books from which they could read. At the end of the term, the grade of the book and the page number were recorded and used as the beginning point when the new term began.

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<sup>1</sup>William C. Reavis and Charles H. Judd, The Teacher and Educational Administration, pp. 183-184. Boston:Houghton Mifflin Co., 1932.

During the early years of this century, when subject matter was of first importance, the child was molded to fit it. Where this was true, the following conditions usually prevailed:

1. Subject matter was selected, organized, and defined by experts.
2. Textbooks were used as centers of instruction.
3. Authoritarian methods were used to produce the environment thought to be best suited to individual progress.
4. Emphasis was on memorization.
5. Keen competition was stressed.
6. Evaluation was in the hands of the teacher exclusively who considered only the mental phase of development.

There were gradually new developments in the field of education. John Dewey's philosophy brought about many changes. The study of child development has taught us much about how children grow and learn. The definition of "needs" in the form of "developmental tasks" helps us to realize we need to teach more than the traditional subjects.

Efforts to improve the traditional report card have passed through several stages. The first step was to move from the 100-point numerical grading scale to the 5-point letter or number scale. Later, the 2-point scale appeared which distinguished only between successes and failures. Personalized letters were used, but they were often so generalized they too proved to be ineffective.

Parent-teacher conferences, which are becoming more favored, also have disadvantages:

1. Most parent-teacher conferences don't provide written records for later comparisons.
2. Conferences are more effective if the child remains with one teacher during his entire elementary schooling.
3. Many teachers are not trained to recognize symptoms of insecurity and maladjustment, two vital areas in education today.
4. Prejudices and emotionalisms on both parts may block effective cooperation.
5. Most conferences are held after school hours when both parties are not always at their best.

There are distinct advantages for the parent-teacher conference to enjoy which the traditional report card can not. These are:

1. The teacher gains a better insight into the child's background.
2. Parents have an opportunity to express their opinions.
3. Standings for comparisons of one child against another are eliminated.
4. Opportunity for friendliness between home and school is provided.
5. The teacher has an opportunity to explain school purposes and class activities.
6. The child's problems are solved cooperatively between home and school.

7. It is possible to explain child's slowness or quickness in learning in terms of his own rate of growth.

The conference method provides sufficient scope for those teachers who believe in a curriculum that develops the "whole child" and in an evaluation system that is forward looking and that attempts to prevent failure and encourage success.

## CHAPTER IV

### DEVELOPMENT OF A PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCE PROGRAM IN THE DULUTH PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM

"For the past seven years, it has been the plan in the Duluth Public Schools for all kindergarten, first and second grade teachers to have conferences with parents. This is the way we report to parents on the progress the child is making in school; his problems, failures, his successes. What is even more important, it is our opportunity to get acquainted with the parents of all the children and to learn about the child from those who know him best -- his parents. There seems to be common agreement that this is an invaluable means of improving home-school relationships. The face-to-face approach gives teachers and parents a unique opportunity to reach the high level of understanding that is essential if they are to work together to meet the child's needs.

We should, perhaps, restate our philosophy, 'Our schools belong to the people of the community and the state.' We, the teachers, are the professional people, employed to carry out the wishes of parents and citizens. If we are to achieve our objectives, what is best for our children, our community, and our country -- there must be communication, understanding, and mutual respect between the professionally expert teachers and the parents and citizens who establish, control and support our schools".<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> An excerpt taken from the Parent-Teacher Conference handbook distributed to teachers at the conference work-shop of November 19, 1956, prepared by Margaret Swanberg, Director of Elementary Education.

These paragraphs summarize the goals of the Duluth Public School system in their application of the parent-teacher conference. Under the guidance of the Elementary Office, the conference method has steadily gained favor with the classroom teachers since its beginnings in 1947.

In 1947, parent-teacher conferences were first introduced into the Duluth Public Schools. At the time, this was a radical change from the accepted procedure of the traditional report card policy and so it was decided that this experiment, for it was such, would be confined to the kindergarten teachers and a few teachers from grades one and two. A guide for parent-teacher conferences was prepared and teachers were encouraged to try this new method of reporting.<sup>2</sup>

At the end of the year, a survey was taken to determine the parents' reaction to the conference plan. These results were compiled by the elementary office and herein is a brief summary.<sup>3</sup>

Most parents favored the conference plan. Over one-half felt that a written report covering the child's progress should be sent home at the end of the school year. This was done at the kindergarten level but was not compulsory for the primary teachers who were working with this project. The main criticisms from the parents were:

1. They did not like having the conferences near the end of the year.
2. They would prefer two short conferences, one before January 1 and the other before May 1.

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<sup>2</sup> The conference guide for the school year, 1947-48 is on file with the Duluth Public School System.

<sup>3</sup> Op. Cit.

Most teachers favored the conference plan. The criticisms brought out were the same as those they had discussed before the school year, namely:

1. It was very difficult to schedule conferences with a large class (over 30 pupils).
2. There was difficulty in arranging a schedule with working mothers.
3. The conferences were too time consuming.
4. The written reports took too much time.

The trial school year of 1947-48 was considered by the elementary office successful enough to merit continuation for the succeeding year. This time, two plans were presented to the teachers and they were given the choice of choosing the one plan that suited their situation. Plan 1 was for individual conferences with all parents and a written report (the regular card) at the end of the year, Plan 2 was the continuation of the regular report cards.

The method of parent-teacher conference reporting was still officially confined to the kindergarten and primary grades, but more and more emphasis was being placed on the individual conferences in all elementary grades. The conference guide was rewritten and meetings were held in the fall of 1948 to familiarize teachers with the new reporting practice.

As the years passed, the conference method won many friends, until at last all kindergarten and primary teachers were having two individual conferences per year with their room mothers and fathers.

Soon group conferences, held at the beginning of the school year, appeared. These conferences were designed to familiarize the room mothers with the teacher and with other mothers. The group conferences also gave the teacher an opportunity to outline his plans for the year, interpret school policies, outline the developmental stages of children in his grade, discuss individual differences and readiness for learning experiences. The group conference took hold in the lower grades and by 1955, the policy was so popular, all elementary grades had group conferences at the beginning of each school year.

During the school year of 1956-57, there seemed to be a growing interest among Duluth teachers concerning parent-teacher conferences at the intermediate and upper grade levels. This interest was activated by the apparent need for changes in the report cards that are sent home with the children. As a result of these interests, a committee was set up to determine how much support any proposed new changes would have. This Report Card Committee was headed by William Lainen, Principal of the Lester Park Elementary School, with committee members selected from the teaching ranks of the Duluth system.

The point of interest for this writer was the area of parent-teacher conferences which some wanted to supplement with a report card. After much discussion, a series of plans regarding conferences and report cards was drawn up. There were five plans in all. They were:

**Plan A:**

1. A group conference would be held with room parents within the first six weeks of school.
2. An individual conference would be held with each parent sometime during the first semester of the school year.
3. Released time, based on classroom enrollment, would be provided on an arrangement similar to that now being used in grades K-2.
4. Report card issues would be reduced in number from four to three yearly, the first issue being on the 13th week of school.

**Plan B:**

1. The report card would remain the same.
2. Parents would be asked to come to school, after school hours, to pick up one of the four report card issues.
3. No released time would be given under such a plan.

**Plan C:**

1. Teachers in grades 3-6 would have conferences with parents on the same basis as are teachers in grades K-2.
2. No report card, as such, would be issued.

**Plan D:**

1. The report card would remain the same as now with the exception that the first report card issue would come at the end of the 13th week.
2. Group confereness would be conducted with room parents before the sixth week of school.

**Plan E**

No change at all would be made; reports to be issued as at present.

These five plans were discussed by the committee and it was agreed a questionnaire should be sent to the intermediate grade teachers for their comments regarding any changes that might be made in the report card or in the reporting policy. With 98% of the questionnaires returned, the majority of teachers favored Plan D. This plan called for minor changes in the format of the card, but included a group conference with room mothers before the sixth week of school.

From the results of this poll, the committee recommended that:

1. Teachers conduct a group conference with parents by the end of the seventh week of school.
2. The first report card be issued at the end of the 13th week of school to be followed by report period intervals of 6-6-13 weeks.
3. Teachers desiring to have conferences with parents of all children (one conference during the year) may do so with released time on the same basis as received by primary teachers.

Although the teachers in the upper elementary grades were not all in favor of compulsory individual conferences, a strong minority indicated that the conference method of reporting is widely used in the Duluth System.

One of the main factors why the conference method failed as an official supplement or replacement of the report card was the fact that all parents would have had to be contacted for a conference. Many teachers felt there were some parents with whom they would not need to confer. Hence, the failure of this program to be approved by all teachers.

Although the conference method of reporting pupil progress was not officially incorporated into the school system, it by no means is no longer used. On the contrary, many teachers who voted this proposal down have used and are using the parent-teacher conference method. The conference method will no doubt gain in popularity and use as new teachers entering into the system become acquainted with its many advantages.

CHAPTER V

HANDBOOK FOR PARENTS

Parent's Guide to Parent-Teacher Conference

I. Methods of reporting

The schools may report to the parents orally or in writing.

Among the written methods are the following types of reports:

A. The traditional report card -- ABC grading.

B. The progress report may vary from school to school. Two of the more common symbol types are the following:

I for improvement

S for satisfactory

E for excellent

or

U for unsatisfactory

W for warning

S for satisfactory

E for excellent

C. The narrative report -- an informal letter or summary.

D. The conference report.

There is much discussion concerning the first two kinds of written reports. It would be too time consuming to go into a discussion concerning grading philosophies in this paper but a parent should be concerned about two things: 1. How well is his child doing, and 2. how well can he do?<sup>1</sup> A letter grade tells

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<sup>1</sup> Wilbur A. Yauch, How Good Is Your School?, New York, Harper & Brothers, 1951, p. 162.

about only one of these. It therefore should be the parents' concern as well as that of the teacher to designate which area is being graded. The narrative report is a report in words rather than symbols and while this is an improvement, it too lacks completeness.

## II. When reports are due

- A. The first parent-teacher conference is held sometime during the first six weeks of school. This is a group conference during which time the parent is oriented to the teacher, principal, school building, school curriculum, class materials and the various philosophies and aims of the school. It is not to be used to discuss individual pupils.
- B. The second parent-teacher conference usually takes place during the next thirteen weeks. This is generally a get-acquainted period although discussion is centered around the child.
- C. In the primary grades, the third individual conference takes place in the latter half of the school year. For the intermediate grades, the third conference is optional and is set up by both teacher and parent as the need arises.
- D. In the intermediate grades (3-6), report cards are sent home after the first thirteen weeks, again after seven weeks, and then seven weeks again, and finally after thirteen weeks, which is the close of the school year. This makes a total of four reporting periods in addition to the various conferences.

### III. Conferences -- their purposes

In a good parent-teacher conference, there is opportunity for each to ask questions of the other. There is opportunity, also, to discuss problems and share information concerning the child and to plan together for an effective solution. The teacher can often explain things orally that are difficult to put in writing. The parent gives the teacher a view of the child at home and the teacher gives the parent a picture of the child among his classmates. This free flowing exchange of information between home and school enables both parent and teacher to better understand the child.

### IV. The conference itself

During the reporting periods devoted to conferences in the primary grades, time is provided by dismissing school in the afternoons. The teacher schedules a twenty minute conference with the parents of each of his pupils. Where it is impossible for parents to arrange for an afternoon conference, the teacher and parents should schedule a conference at another time. The intermediate grade conferences are to be arranged by mutual consent between the teacher and parent.

Both parents should try to attend the conferences. This may be inconvenient, but the father will be well rewarded if he can attend at least one conference.

## V. What parents and teachers bring to a conference

For a successful conference the parents and teachers meet with a common interest in a particular child. They are friendly, sympathetic, open minded. Each has a sincere respect for the other's unique knowledge of certain aspects of the child's behavior.

The conference discussion will cover topics concerning the child's academic, social, emotional and physical progress, his home life and other areas where the parent or the teacher feels a definite need for more information and knowledge.

The conference will be more successful if the parent comes prepared to express his thoughts and questions rather than leaving it to the teacher to do all of the talking.

If the parent and teacher wish to get the most from the conference, it is necessary for both to plan in advance. Thought must be given to specific problems.

One may expect the teacher to point out the child's weaknesses in his studies as well as his social, physical and emotional development. Children will not be compared with others in the class.

The parent should arrive promptly for the conference and keep within the limits of the scheduled time; others may be waiting. Remember, too, conferences should not be cancelled at the last moment. Notify the school as soon as possible if a conflict arises.

Don't wait for the next scheduled conference if the child appears to be having difficulty. Call the school and ask for a convenient time to see the teacher. Do this as often as necessary for the teacher welcomes parental interest and help.

VI. How parents can help their child's progress

- A. The growing child must have plenty of food to supply energy for work and play. His health and school progress are influenced by the food he eats. A child should come to school ready for the day's work after a wholesome and adequate breakfast.
- B. A growing body needs plenty of rest. Parents should insist that a daily schedule be followed:
- Ages: 6-9 years -- 10 to 12 hours of sleep  
9-11 years - 10 to 11 hours of sleep
- C. Children need to feel secure. Avoiding friction and other emotional tensions in the home helps to nurture this basic feeling.
- D. The child's school day is his working day. Parents must be sure that this day is not overloaded.
- E. By demonstrating to the child a genuine interest in the school and school activities, the parent shows an awareness of the child's problems.
- F. Requests for early dismissal from school should not be made unless they are very necessary.

VII. A parent can help the child get the most out of school if one gives him love and a feeling of security at home. Help him develop self-reliance by giving him responsibility suitable to his age. Encourage habits of obedience and respect for authority and property. Express approval to him for his constructive attempts or accomplishments. Give him time to grow -- overanxiety on your part only makes additional problems for him. Help your child to realize that it is not only a privilege, but also a responsibility to attend a public school in a free democratic nation.

#### CHARACTERISTICS OF MANY CHILDREN BETWEEN

AGES 6-12<sup>2</sup>

The following summaries may be of interest to those who have children in school. They are brief summaries of some of the characteristics found in all children as compiled by Arnold Gesell, M. D.

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<sup>2</sup> Arnold Gesell, M. D., Frances Ilg, M. D., Child Development, Harper and Brothers, New York, 1949.

CHARACTERISTICS OF MANY CHILDREN BETWEEN AGES 6-7

Physical Growth and Skills

1. Need many physical activities.
2. Dislike sitting still.
3. Like to do things for themselves.
4. Use large body movements, such as running or jumping.
5. Can hang own coats and hats.
6. Are inclined to dawdle.

Social Progress

1. Enjoy work and play in small groups.
2. Like to plan and participate in parties and excursions.
3. Respect teacher opinions and ideas.
4. Like to play with other children.
5. Change quickly in behavior toward others.

Mental Growth and Activities

1. Vocabulary development depends on extent of experience.
2. Like stories about children and animals.
3. Have short attention span.
4. Tend to be far-sighted.
5. Are much interested in themselves.
6. Enjoy dramatic play.

Years 7-8

CHARACTERISTICS OF MANY CHILDREN, AGES 7-10

Physical Growth and Skills

1. Need for motor activities continues to be great.
2. Growth in height slow but steady.
3. Gain as much as 3-5 pounds yearly.
4. Are inclined to be less boisterous than at 6.
5. Like action games, show greater interest in developing skills.

Social Progress

1. Often imitates friends.
2. Engage readily in work.
3. Choose friends, uninfluenced by social and economic status.
4. Notice differences in environment.

Mental Growth and Activities

1. Like to engage in building and manipulating activities.
2. Enjoy tall tales.
3. Can count by 1's, 2's, 5's 10's.
4. Can tell time.
5. Tend to be curious about sex.

CHARACTERISTICS OF MANY CHILDREN, AGES 7-10

Years 8-9

Physical Growth and Skills

1. Like activities requiring coordination of small muscles.
2. Have approximately normal vision.
3. Can acquire skill in games and sports readily.
4. Control muscles involved in

Social Progress

1. More interested in group projects.
2. Often exhibit improved manners away from home.
3. Pay more attention to choice of friends.
4. Seek adult approval and understanding.

Mental Growth and Activities

1. Can tell day of month and year.
2. Can make change in small amounts.
3. Interested in comics.
4. Like radio and television.
5. Interested in people, places, and the world around them.

CHARACTERISTICS OF MANY CHILDREN, AGES 7-10

Years 9-10

Physical Growth and Skills

1. Acquire ability to care for physical needs.
2. Increased skill in the use of simple tools.
3. Move about frequently.
4. Interested in different kinds of play.
5. Scorn danger but get into plenty of it.
6. Grow slowly in height.

Social Progress

1. Interested in gangs and clubs.
2. Like camping.
3. Are often reticent with adults.
4. Enjoy secrets.
5. Play in groups with boys and girls separated.

Mental Growth and Activities

1. Interested in how things are made.
2. Use arithmetic in projects involving weighing and measuring.
3. Interested in reading a variety of materials.
4. Often develop card catalogs and files for materials.

CHARACTERISTICS OF NAVY CHILDREN, AGES 7-10

Years 10-11

Physical Growth and Skills

1. Tend to be rough in games, especially boys.
2. Work hard at acquiring physical skill.
3. Often conscious of the need for safety measures.
4. Grow rapidly in weight, especially girls.
5. Seek excellence of performance of physical feats.

Social Progress

1. Can participate in team-work.
2. Compete in sports and games.
3. Like occasional privacy.
4. Desire places for own personal property.

Mental Growth and Activities

1. See different sides of questions.
2. Interested in other people's ideas.
3. Like to have rules and by-laws for clubs.
4. Use numbers beyond 100, begin to understand simple fractions.
5. Develop capacity for thought and reasoning on problems of their own.
6. Cooperate with parents and teachers more readily.

CHARACTERISTICS OF MANY CHILDREN, AGES 7-10

Years 11-12

Physical Growth and Skills

1. Grow at different rates with boys in most instances more rapid.
2. Compete in games at times but generally boys surpass the girls in accomplishments.
3. Many reach the "awkward" age.

Social Progress

1. Enjoy community affairs.
2. Interested in clubs.
3. Show emerging class spirit and group leadership.
4. Influenced by opinion of own age group rather than adults.

Mental Growth and Activities

1. Interested in earning money.
2. Have increased interest in hobbies.
3. Understand to some extent human reproduction.
4. Understand the need for sanitary measures.
5. Have pride in own artistic products.

CHAPTER VI  
HANDBOOK FOR TEACHERS

Forward

A Parent-Teacher Conference is a planned meeting of father and/or mother, and teacher for the purpose of discussing the child's progress and problems in the school and in the home. It has been proven to be one of the most satisfactory ways of reporting to parents. There are times when the principal, the nurse, or a person from one of the special services may also participate in the conference.

It is called to the reader's attention that this particular guide has been developed for use in the Duluth public school system. However, with very few adaptations it can become an important aid in any school or system.

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## TIMING

Parent-Teacher Conferences serve different purposes.

If the conference is held early in the year, it has special value in:

getting acquainted

getting background information

learning as much as possible about the child from the people who know the most about him - his parents

sharing purposes

If the conference is scheduled several months later, it has value in:

getting acquainted

reporting progress

discussing problems

developing a plan of action

If the conference is scheduled toward the end of the year, it has value in:

summarizing the year's progress

evaluating the progress made

discussing present and coming vocational experiences

discussing needs for the coming year

Schedule special problems and difficult conferences at a time when you are not hurried and have no other conferences.

All new inexperienced teachers should schedule the easiest conferences first.

## THE INDIVIDUAL CONFERENCE

### Number Required:

Each kindergarten, first and second grade teacher is required to have a minimum of two individual conferences per year with the parent of each child enrolled in her class. The first conference should be held before December 15th but must be held during the first semester; the deadline is one week before the end of the semester. The second conference should be held during the second semester, before May 15th if possible.

Upper grade teachers, (grades three through six), are encouraged to have as many conferences as possible. Whenever a parent requests a conference, this conference must be held as soon as it can be worked out. When upper grade teachers have conferences with the parents (parent) of all the children in their room, they are entitled to the same amount of released time the kindergarten, first, and second grade teachers have. When upper grade teachers have conferences with all, plus the report card, one individual conference is required instead of the two required in kindergarten and grades one and two.

### Released Time:

#### KINDERGARTEN

All kindergarten teachers with total enrollments of 40-55 inclusive (a.m. & p.m.) may dismiss each session once each semester. This means the teacher will have one day (two halves) each semester for conferences when children are not present. It is advisable to have these half days in different weeks.

All kindergarten teachers with total enrollments of 56 (a.m. & p.m.) and up may dismiss twice each semester. This means the teacher will have two days each semester.

If you have an assistant, consult your principal about arrangements.

For any kindergarten teacher who has 70 or over enrolled (a.m. & p.m.) and no assistant, special arrangements will be made for additional time with a substitute taking the room.

The principal will request this extra time from the Elementary Education Office.

#### FIRST AND SECOND GRADE

All first and second grade teachers with enrollments up to and including 25 children may have a half day for conferences each semester. The children will be dismissed that time.

Each teacher with 26 children or more may have two half days each semester.

Any first or second grade teacher who has an enrollment of 34 or more may have his principal request extra conference time, with a substitute taking his room.

Note: The amount of released time available for conferences the first semester will be based on the actual number enrolled as of the first statistical period; or the second semester, the actual number enrolled as of the first statistical period in the second semester.

GRADE 3 - 6

If the upper grade teacher has conferences with all the parents, he will have the same amount of released time: one half day each semester for up to 25 children, two half days for 26 or more students, and for more than 34, additional time upon the principal's request.

Tuesdays are reserved for conferences, and no meetings are scheduled for that afternoon, except in an emergency when special permission must be obtained from the Administration. Buildings will be heated through 4:30 when the custodian is notified.

LENGTH OF CONFERENCE

It is recommended that not less than 20 minutes, nor more than 45 minutes, be used for each conference. For most conferences, a half hour should be satisfactory.

Sufficient time must be reserved to achieve rapport, for the teacher to make major points, for the parent to react, raise questions, and contribute his ideas and concerns, and to work out a cooperative plan for the future. This cannot be rushed.

Neither the parent nor teacher should feel hurried or tense. There comes a point when a conference should close. If both parent and teacher feel satisfied the child's problems have been adequately discussed, if plans for a future conference or plan of action have been settled, it is the teacher's obligation to close the conference. Be alert for this and always try to end on a positive note.

### USE OF ILLUSTRATIVE MATERIAL

It is desirable to have something tangible to show the parent at conference time. Some of the following suggestions can be used to illustrate certain areas a teacher would show to a parent. With proper use, these materials can be a very effective tool.

1. Samples of child's work, organized and dated to show improvement.
2. Textbooks -- supplementary materials.
3. Child's health record.
4. Professional literature which will substantiate your remarks.
5. Creative projects.
6. School brochures.
7. Reading records or teacher designed chart of pupil progress (individual).

### VALUES OF RECORDS

Records of the conference should be taken by the teacher for the following reasons:

1. They are important as a part of the child's permanent record.
2. The question of confidential information should be received and carefully evaluated before recording.
3. Records are extremely important to protect the teacher if a question or issue is raised later.
4. Records are important when a child is transferred to another school.

## RECORDING AND EVALUATING THE CONFERENCE

Allow a five minute interval between conferences or shortly after for recording. Use the guide and conference record, and make any pertinent notes under the proper headings. The record should be free from subjective impressions. It should be brief. It should include:

1. A review of the plan or objective of the teacher.
2. Main points discussed.
3. New insights gained.
4. Conclusions reached
5. Recommendations and plan of action.

Keep recording at a minimum. See that all items are the most pertinent in terms of child growth and development. They should be significant in terms of future work with the child.

## EVALUATION

Do a little soul-searching following a conference, thinking it through objectively.

- Was there enough rapport so that a good relationship, a friendly atmosphere prevailed?
- What did I learn that will help me in understanding the child and his behavior?
- How did I help the parent to understand the child in relation to the school situation?
- How could I have improved the conference?
- Did I achieve the goals and objectives I had in my planning?

## PARENT ORIENTATION

In order that parents fully understand the purpose of the conference plan, a group conference will be held by each teacher during the first few weeks of school. (Not later than September 30.) This group conference may be sponsored by the P.T.A. or organized by the principal and faculty of a school. There may be a general meeting of all parents with a speaker or panel. Following this, the parents go to the individual classrooms to meet with the teacher.

Other schools will follow a plan of all of one grade level meeting at one time, or the Primary Department on one day, upper grades another. The type of conference should be worked out to fit your school and situation under the guidance of the Principal.

Because some parents may have to wait several months for an individual conference, the group conference gives them an opportunity to have their questions answered early and helps to forestall any doubts which they may have in relation to school or teacher policies.

### Suggestions for group conferences:

1. Outline the stages in the development of children and the needs of your age group.
2. Discuss individual differences. It may be pointed out to parents that physical, mental, emotional and social growth and development differ from child to child.
3. Discuss readiness for learning situations.
4. Outline your plans for the year, your schedule, and your teaching procedures.

5. Discuss grouping. Point out that grouping is based on needs, abilities, talents and interests. Explain the flexibility of groups.
6. Interpret school policies, especially those that differ from other schools.
7. Show the text books, materials, etc. to be used by the children.
8. Discuss homework, the rest a child needs, and other physical needs.

You will have many other ideas and plans to make your group conference successful. As a result, the parents should gain an overall understanding of classroom problems and procedure; also they should respect you and have faith that their child is in good and capable hands while at school.

#### Notifying Parents:

In order to avoid conflicts with other scheduled conferences in the same school, teachers should, before setting up a schedule, find out if their pupils have brothers or sisters in other rooms. The principal can work this out in a faculty meeting, arranging schedules so there will not be conflicts and to schedule two or more conferences for a mother who may have several children in the same school.

The blank "Request for Conference" should be sent to parents a week in advance. This should allow enough time to eliminate conflicts. Reminders can be sent home the day before, if the teacher feels it is necessary. The request should be sent to both parties (if both are living and living together) urging the father to be present if possible. Emphasize that both are invited and welcome.

## TEACHER PREPARATION

A conference must be well planned in advance, by the teacher. The teacher should have in mind rather exactly what he hopes to accomplish through conferring with the parent. The teacher, therefore, has certain responsibilities to insure the conference time is used wisely.

Involved are some of the following:

1. The teacher will want to know as much as possible about the child. Do this by reviewing available records such as cumulative records, personnel folder, health record, anecdotal records and the child's folder of work.
2. Assemble concrete evidence of child's growth and progress. This will include work books, art work, creative stories, pages of subject matter works, such as writing, arithmetic and language exercises.
3. Observation of child: observe social status in the group, watch for evidence of emotional adjustment, leadership, work habits, etc.
4. Analyze any specific problem.

Prepare a tentative plan for the conference. Use the conference Guide and Record Sheet for this purpose. Record any points you want the parent to read. Some teachers prefer to make their notes on a separate sheet. Include in the pre-planning the strengths and assets of the child, growth and improvements made, needs for improvement and tentative suggestions for what to do in the future.

Upper grade teachers may often include the child in the conference.

Have the child make his own evaluation sheet in advance.

Make a tape recording of the child's reading, and play for parents at conference.

#### THE CONFERENCE ITSELF

Techniques vary from conference to conference because problems and personalities of each parent are different. It is important to be acquainted with good counseling techniques. This is an art that will contribute greatly to the success of a teacher's work, and can be developed through proper preparation and attitude.

First, put yourself in the parent's place -- try to visualize what he will think of you, your approach, vocabulary, and attitude. Recognize the parent's role in the education of children. Basic to success are the feelings teachers have toward parents. Realize that inflection, quality of voice, facial expression, posture, gestures and general behaviour all supplement what is said. Decide ahead of time to avoid all argument and remarks that imply blame.

#### Meeting the Parents:

- Go to the door and greet the parent as you would a guest in your home.
- Before seating, show the parent a piece of work his child is responsible for in the room. This may include such

things as:

- Work on the bulletin board
- Arrangement of exhibit material
- Creative work
- The most comfortable chair should be given to the parent.  
If a father comes, be sure the chair is big enough so he'll be comfortable.
- Arrange for privacy. In some buildings there is a conference room; in others, the classroom will be used. Put a sign on the door asking parents to wait outside until the present conference is over. Put a table and chairs in the hall, with some pertinent reading material for those waiting.
- Post the conference schedule outside the door.
- Encourage parents to leave younger children at home. If they do come, have a hostess (upper grade child) look after them in a desirable place. Provide toys, crayons, etc. for this.
- It is easier to establish a cooperative relationship if you are not seated behind a desk. There you are the authority, not the partner.

#### RECOMMENDED CONFERENCE TECHNIQUES

##### Rapport Summarization

1. Your opening remarks should be pleasant and positive. No matter how you feel, greet the parent with a smile.
2. A relaxed, friendly, sincere attitude on the part of the teacher will help establish and maintain good relationship.

3. The parent should be assured of the confidential nature of the conference.
4. Be a good listener. Try to have the parent tell you about the child first. Guide him away from personal things which are not important and which may embarrass him later.
5. Show interest in what the parent wants to discuss, make it his moment. Respect his reason for behavior, then lead the discussion on to the consideration of other factors. How the parent feels about his child is important.
6. If the parent has a suggestion for a plan of action, accept it. One goal is to get the parent to take the initiative toward solution of a problem. Watch for all possible clues and concentrate on each.
7. If the parent has no ideas for a plan of action, be ready with a plan for joint consideration.

"This might be a possibility."  
"What do you think?"  
"You know better than I if this will work."  
"We might try this and see what happens."  
"It may take a while to find the reason."

The parent then feels the final decision is his.
8. Be willing to take criticism from the parent on the defensive. Do not argue or blame someone else (especially another teacher).
9. Be truthful, don't hide trouble, but have concrete suggestions based on fact. Direct criticism is fatal to rapport.

10. Interpret educational jargon to the parent, such as 'immaturity', 'readiness', etc., if you use it, but avoid whenever possible. Use simple everyday language.
11. Do not get ahead of the parent. Pace the conference to the parent's acceptance and thinking.
12. Do not assume a parent wants advice, or set yourself up as an authority. Realize there are some problems which should be referred to a specialist.
13. End the conference on a positive note.
  - something definite both teacher and parent will do
  - follow up on promises of reports
  - definite plan of action (follow up with nurse, doctor, guidance counselor)
  - definite plans for next conference
14. Express appreciation for the parent coming for the conference.

#### WAYS TO CONCLUDE THE CONFERENCE

1. The teacher may review the plans which have been set up, checking areas of responsibility.
2. Make definite plans for the next conference.
3. Arrange for reports (telephone or note) on progress of a specific problem.
4. Make notes for follow up with specialist.
5. If the time is up and the parent still wishes to talk, try tastefully to terminate the conference.
  - express regret the time is up and point out another parent is waiting
  - invite the parent to return and visit during the school day.
  - thank the parent for coming.

### SUGGESTIONS FOR CONFERENCES

1. Indicate areas where the child needs to improve. Be honest and frank in your evaluation.
2. Be a good listener. Remember, this is not to be a one-sided report.
3. Be careful of emotions. Slow down when a parent becomes upset.
4. Space your conferences. Leave enough time for each conference so there will be no overlapping.
5. Begin your conferences early. Start immediately after the group conference and try to have one or two every week.
6. Be sensitive to the degree of understanding of each parent.
7. When discussion wanders, restate a question to get a new start.
8. Allow the parent to do his own thinking.
9. Realize the parent is superior to the teacher in some areas of experience.
10. Ask only questions which you yourself would not resent answering about yourself under similar circumstances.
11. Have evidence of what you are doing to help the child at school and have concrete suggestions of what parents can do.

WHAT TEACHERS CAN LEARN FROM PARENTS

What particular problem a child has

With friends

With health

With fears

What attitude a child has in the home

Toward brothers and sisters

Toward parental discipline

Toward home responsibilities

What attitude a child has toward school

What he likes best

What he dislikes

How a child spends his leisure time

With friends

With hobbies

With home responsibilities

With T. V.

What talents, interests and hobbies a child has

In collecting, modeling, nature, sports

In cowboys, magic, space, travel, science

In music dancing, writing, drawing

Special helps needed by a child

In the school

In the home

With the aid of special services

### THE DISINTERESTED PARENT

There are always a few parents who never come for a conference, or who fail to show up for an appointment. Usually these are the ones the teacher feels it is most necessary to see.

1. Make every effort possible to get the parents to school by rescheduling as they suggest.
2. Make a home visit. (Always let the parent know you are coming.)
3. If this fails, a telephone call or calls should be made.
4. Enlist the aid of the child to encourage a visit by his parent.
5. Try to involve the parent in some type of room or school responsibility.
6. If all else fails, send home a written anecdotal report. Before writing them off, in order to be fair, think through these.
  1. One or the other parent may be ill or caring for a sick child.
  2. Work schedules and home responsibilities may make it impossible for them to come.
  3. Parents may be unable to obtain a baby sitter.
  4. There may be no means of transportation, or no money for bus fare.
  5. Some parents may be timid about coming to school and meeting strangers.

### SMALL GROUP CONFERENCES

There may be some advantage in having small group conferences later in the year where a "like problem" exists, and the group is small enough to afford each parent an opportunity to get something from the conference. This might be the parents of the children in a reading group who visit together and then have the conference. These do not take the place of an individual conference, but two such small group conferences can be substituted for one individual conference.

Groups might consist of:

Parents of a small group who are not ready for formal reading.

Parents of children in same reading group; or parents of a few children who need an enriched program.

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