
Parent-Teacher Conferences for Immigrant Parents

There are benefits of going to parent-teacher conferences; Preparation is not a bad idea

By Kat Avila, Contributing Writer | Published on LatinoLA: September 26, 2016



That time of year is coming up again, and I'm not talking about Halloween. My adult English learners have scheduled their parent-teacher conferences, and they want to know what questions to ask. So, here's an update of my [2011 LatinoLA article](#) of what you can expect.

This article is written for the parents of elementary school children. The questions are simple enough that intermediate-level English learners can easily understand and use them.

Parent-teacher conferences are held two times a year, once in the fall and once in the spring. They are about 15 minutes long. You meet with the teacher one-on-one. You ask about how well your child is doing.

How is it different from Open House? During Open House or Back-to-School Night, the teacher meets with ALL parents at the SAME time. The focus is not on your child, but on getting information about your child's class and what they will be learning during the school year. Open House is done before the parent-teacher conferences.

There are benefits of going to parent-teacher conferences. One benefit is you learn how to help your child at home, which is very important to student success. Also, you might see another side of your child. If problems come up, it will be easier to talk to the teacher.

What will the teacher talk about? The teacher will talk about what your child is like as a student, their schoolwork, homework, grades, test results, and social skills. Usually the teacher will have a folder of your child's work to show to you. Most important, he or she will share how you can help your child at home.

A classroom in the United States can be taught very differently from what you are used to. Your child can have problems in school for simply doing what a "good student" in your country does.

As an American student, your child learns to call the teacher by title and last name (family name), such as Mrs. Smith or Mr. Ramirez, and not by a generic title like "Teacher."

Your child learns to look the teacher "in the eye" (make eye contact) to show they are paying attention, and not to look down as is polite in many cultures.

Your child learns to raise their hand to SPEAK and PARTICIPATE in class. They cannot stay silent and modest about what they know. You tell your child to listen to the teacher and to be quiet in class. This is good advice, but your child is expected to speak up during discussions.

Students who do NOT speak are viewed NEGATIVELY: They DIDN'T do their homework. They DON'T have any good ideas. They are SHY and social awkward.

Your child hears the word "DON'T" a lot: "DON'T be noisy! DON'T be messy! DO NOT cheat!" This can sound VERY negative if you come from a more group-directed culture where you hear: "Let us ALL listen better. Let's ALL be neat. Let's ALL be honest. Let's ALL do better!"

To prepare for your parent-teacher conference, please make an appointment early for the best time. Tell the school if you need a translator. (Do not put this responsibility on your child's shoulders.) Do a phone

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conference if you can't go in person.

Before you go, ask your child about school. You want some idea of what is happening in class. Write down questions to ask the teacher, and bring a notepad and pen for notes.

During the conference, ask your most important questions first in case you run out of time. Tell the teacher about anything at home that may affect your child's performance.

ACADEMIC SKILLS

(Note: Where it says "my child," use your child's name instead.)

- Is my child a good student?
- Does my child follow directions well?
- What are my child's best and worst areas?
- Is my child working at grade level?
- What will my child learn this year?

A NEED FOR IMPROVEMENT

- Does my child need extra help with anything?
- What have you tried so far?
- How can I help my child at home?
- What are your recommendations?
- What websites can help my child?

HOMEWORK

- Does my child turn in homework on time?
- How much time should it take to do the homework? (If your child takes too much time, help might be needed.)
- Do you grade the homework?

SOCIAL SKILLS

- Does my child participate in class?
- Does my child express himself (or herself) well?
- Does my child use good manners?
- Does my child play well with others?
- Does my child like to work alone or in groups?

GRADES AND TESTS

- How do you grade the class?
- What kinds of tests do you give?
- How do you prepare the class for standardized tests? (also called assessment tests or progress tests)
- What do the test results mean?
- Is my child a good test-taker?

After the conference, talk to your child about what you think they should know. Share helpful information with your child's caregivers and tutors.

For more information and tips about parent-teacher conferences, see your child's school website if you haven't checked it already. The California Teachers Association website and the California State PTA (Parent-Teacher Association) website are also great sources.

Thank you for caring about your child's success at school!

NOTE TO TEACHERS AND TUTORS: Feel free to make copies of this article to give to parents.

I also have a 10-minute PowerPoint slideshow video on YouTube that covers the exact same

information at <https://youtu.be/l84YkD9i16c>

Kat Avila works in both L.A. and Orange counties. As a citizen scientist, she uploads bird counts to eBird to support work documenting global warming and the effects of pollution and loss of natural habitat due to development.

Find this story online at latinola.com/story.php?story=14167

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