Students spend only a quarter of their active hours at school. During this time they need to work hard at acquiring the knowledge and skills which will form a foundation for their future success in life. People with a solid education in reading, math, writing, social studies and science will have better prospects of employment, earn higher salaries, make a greater contribution to society, and lead a more fulfilling life. But many other factors also contribute to success, including the qualities of creativity, intellectual curiosity, motivation, independence and resilience; and the skills of analytical and critical thinking, problem solving, communication, organization, time management and developing interpersonal relationships.

Working together with your child’s teacher will help you ensure that your child succeeds not only academically, but socially and emotionally as well. When parents and teachers work hand in hand every day to support and supplement each other’s efforts, they can build a strong foundation for the success of a child.

This tip sheet will help you start a conversation with the teacher about your child’s education – a conversation that will grow into a partnership, with you and the teacher working together to support the child.

What should you expect?

The Harvard Family Research Project suggests that a good parent-teacher conference should incorporate the following characteristics:

- A two-way conversation.

Like all good conversations, parent-teacher conferences are best when both participants talk and listen. The conference is a time for you to learn about your child’s progress in...
school: ask to see data about your child’s attendance, grades and test scores. Find out whether your child is meeting school expectations and academic standards. This is also a time for the teacher to learn about what your child is like at home. When you tell the teacher about your child’s skills, interests, needs and dreams, the teacher can help your child more.

- **Emphasis on learning.**
  Effective parent–teacher conferences focus on how well the child is doing in school. They also talk about how the child can improve. To get ready for the conversation, look at your child’s homework, tests and school notices before the conference. Be sure to bring a list of questions that you would like to ask the teacher.

- **Opportunities and challenges.**
  Just like you, teachers want your child to succeed. You will probably hear positive feedback about your child’s progress and areas for improvement. Be prepared by thinking about your child’s strengths and challenges beforehand. Be ready to ask questions about ways you and the teacher can help your child with his or her challenges.

**Before the conference:**
- Review your schedule. If you can’t come to school at the scheduled time, ask the teacher about other times when you can arrange a meeting. If coming to school is a problem, schedule a telephone conference.
- Talk with your child about school. What goes well? What subjects and assignments does the child like and do well at, and what assignments seem challenging? Is there anything the child doesn’t understand or struggles with?
- Review your child’s work, grades, and progress reports.
- Talk with others—family members, after-school staff, mentors, etc.—about your child’s strengths and needs.
- Think about ways you would like to be involved in your child’s learning so that you can discuss them with the teacher.
- Make a list of questions to ask during the conference.

**Here are some of the questions you may have on your list:**

**1. Academic Content and Standards:**
- What will the students learn this year in key subjects like Math, Science, History, and English?
- What knowledge and skills will the students be expected to master?
- How do these knowledge and skills correspond to state and national standards?
- How can parents learn more about the state and national standards?
- How are the students informed about these standards?

**2. Progress:**
- How is my child doing in class?
- Does my child turn in his or her homework on time?
- Is my child performing at grade level?
- How is he or she doing compared to the rest of the class?
- What do you see as his or her strengths?
- How could he or she improve?

**3. Assignments and Assessments:**
- What kinds of projects and assignments will the students be asked to complete?
- Can I see some of the assignments completed?
- How are the assignments evaluated?
- How is the final grade determined?

**4. Learning at Home:**
- What can we do at home to support and complement what is happening in the classroom?
- How can we know on a daily basis what homework has been assigned?
- What additional resources (books, websites, clubs) can we use?
- Share any strategies you are already using or are thinking about using at home to support the child’s academic success.

**5. Your Thoughts about Your Child:**
- Be sure to share your thoughts and feelings about your child.
- Tell the teacher what you think your child is good at.
- Explain what he or she needs more help with.

**6. Accommodating Differences in Learning:**
- What happens if the child is a slow learner and falls behind, or is a fast learner and is bored? What can the teacher do to support your child when he or she needs it?
- What additional supports for students performing above or below their grade level are available at the school or in the community?