



## Changing Schools in Louisville

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### Building Better Parent Partnerships

"One of the essential building blocks of home-school communication is the parent-teacher conference," says the Colorado Parent Information and Resource Center. Conferences are successful when teachers and the school system create a climate that invites collaboration with parents. Creating this climate involves planning and effort.

The Center includes these ideas in a lengthy list of ways schools and parents can improve conferences. (You can find the complete list at [the Center's World Wide Web site](#).)

#### What the system and school can do:

- Use in-service meetings to orient teachers to the system's goals for conferences.
- Help teachers examine their attitudes about conferences and parents.
- Provide teachers with skills for dealing with a range of parent-related issues.
- Provide parents with information on how to help make the conference productive. Send to parents a conference planning sheet which outlines a set of questions they may want to ask teachers about what students are learning.
- Provide child care and transportation services for parents and communicate their availability.
- Ask parent volunteers to telephone parents to confirm appointments and encourage them to attend conferences.

#### What the teacher can do:

- Send a personal letter or make a phone call outlining a specific agenda that will interest the parents.
- Provide a conference schedule that will provide options for working parents and parents who have more than one child in the school.
- Provide enough time for productive conferences.

- Prepare a folder with samples of the child's work and information about what the child is expected to learn and how the child is progressing.
- Develop a relationship with parents by asking them about their work or about an interest you may know they have.
- Provide parents with opportunities to speak about their children.
- Do not interpret a parent's advocacy as belligerence or as a criticism of the teacher.
- Indicate appreciation of the unique qualities of the child. Research suggests that parents use a teacher's knowledge of a particular child's personality or interests as a screening device. They are more willing to hear a range of feedback about a child if they feel the teacher knows what is special about the child.
- Pick one or two areas for growth and improvement so that parents are not overwhelmed.
- Involve parents in creating solutions to problem areas. Devote at least half the conference to parents' concerns, ideas, and questions. Close the conference with some action steps.
- Follow-up the conference with a phone call or a note.

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