

## Community Outreach Resource Network

### How to talk to your Principal & your Child's Teacher

In order to assist you with questions and concerns we must be able to communicate properly and respectfully towards one another, remember we are teaching future leaders and we must always set the best example at all times for our students. Often people get defensive and misunderstand what we are saying. It's even harder to do this when we are talking with someone who has power and influence over the experiences our children have in school because we are afraid that if we make the teacher angry, they will take it out in some way on our children.

When parents and educators are sitting down and talking, they need to build trust and ways of talking to each other that can be heard when discussing difficult issues, so here is what you can do to make your conversations productive with our faculty, administrators & teacher's



***Build a relationship with the principal and teacher early in the school year.***

Talking to someone about concerns you have related to culture, language and race is always better if you already have a relationship with that person. At the start of the school year, make it a point to go and meet the teacher and principal. Let them know you are a concerned parent and want to be supportive of your child's education. Tell them you want to stay in

contact with them about how your child is doing. Tell them you'd like to be called if there is any way you can help in supporting your child's school experience. And find out what are the best ways and times for talking to the teacher.

***Educators may be experts in how to teach, but you are the expert about your own***

*child*— and teachers need this expertise to know how to teach YOUR child. Part of your role is being sure that teachers have the information they need about your child. This is especially important when the teacher is of a different race or cultural background or language group than you and your child are. And, it is especially important in situations where it is possible that there may be racist or prejudicial assumptions and expectations about who your child is and what they can learn. At the first meeting you have with the teacher, tell them about your child's strengths and interests, tell them what you know about how the child learns, tell them what your child is like and what you know about the kind of classroom environment and teacher support that you think helps your child. Throughout the school year, offer information about your culture, about your family language experience.

***Try to keep lines of communication open with the people who deal with your child*** (provide positive as well as negative feedback)

***Find a good time for the harder***

***conversations.*** Here are some tips:

- Catching a teacher or principal "on the run" as you drop off or pick up your child can doom the

- conversation from the start. Arrange a time before or after school when the teacher can actually sit down with you to talk
- Ask if it is a good time to talk. If not, set up a definite time that would be good. If the teacher or educator never seems to find a good time, put it in writing. Be persistent.
- Don't try to do it when other people are around and can hear the conversation. The presence of other people can increase the teachers' defensiveness.

***Help the teacher or principal to have different ways to be learning about your language, culture and racial experience.***

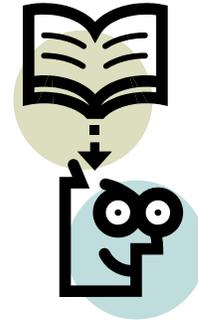
Offer to take them on a neighborhood walk to help them get to know and feel more comfortable in the community. Tell them about special community events they may want to attend. If there is music or books or movies that you feel can help them understand, bring them to the school or suggest the titles to them.

***Be concrete. Be specific. Give examples.***

***Check in with other parents of your race, language and culture about their experiences in talking with the principal and teacher.*** They may give you important tips and help you know what to expect.

***Keep the focus on how this impacts your child's learning and participation in school.*** Make it clear to the teacher or principal that you are raising these issues because you believe that the information will help them do a better job of educating your child. It is their responsibility to educate your child. It is your responsibility to see to it that they have the information they need to do that job and to protect your child against the kinds of experiences that can damage their sense of worth and their attachment to school.

***Always work toward solutions when there is a problem.*** Insist that your child's educators create positive plans for change to correct any problems that exist.



***Be sure that before the conversation ends, there is some agreed-upon strategy for addressing the concerns and what each of you will do.*** For example, the teacher might agree to keep a close look out for times when other children tease your child for their accent, and to intervene when it happens. You may agree to let her know if the situation is getting better, and to work with your son about ways to respond when that kind of thing happens again.

***Follow up with written confirmation about what was agreed on. Keep things in writing. Keep a notebook for yourself and keep all communications with school personnel about your concerns.***

***Close the loop!*** Report back to the teacher or principal about how it's going. Let them know if things are getting better or not.

***Don't give up. Never lose your cool if you can help it.*** Bring along a respected member of the community, or another parent who is respected at the school if you feel your views are not being well respected.