

**Five Must-Ask Questions**

1. **What skills and knowledge will my child be expected to master this year?**

* What will my child learn this year in key subjects like math, science, history, and English?
* Are there challenging academic standards in place at this school, and how do they compare with those at other school districts? May I see them?
* How do you inform students about the academic standards they're expected to meet?
* What kind of projects and assignments have you planned that will help my child meet higher academic standards?

1. **How will my child be evaluated?**

* What kind of information do you use to evaluate students? How do you know if they're academically ready to move on to the next grade?
* How are grades determined in your classroom?

1. **What can I do to stay more involved in my child's academic progress?**

* What can I do at home to complement what is happening in the classroom?
* How can I know on a daily basis what homework has been assigned?
* How can I support teachers' efforts in implementing higher academic standards?

1. **How do you accommodate differences in learning?**

* What if my child is a slow learner and falls behind, or is a fast learner and is bored?
* Are summer school, tutoring, or other programs available for students who need more help?

1. **How are older students prepared for further learning after high school?**

* Are children encouraged to think about a wide variety of career interests?
* Are all students encouraged to take algebra by the end of eighth grade?

**Questions for the Teacher**

Most teachers appreciate parents that write down the questions they would like to ask in advance of the conference.The following list covers most of the basics you will need to know about your child’s development.

*Elementary School*

* How has my child performed in your class so far this year??
* Does he/she pay attention in class?
* What part of the curriculum does my child like most? Least?
* Does my child participate in class discussion?
* Have you noticed any special behavior problems?
* How does my child get along with the other children in class?
* Is there anything I can do to help my child do better?

*Middle School/High School*

* How has my child performed in your class so far this year?
* What skills and knowledge will my child be learning in your class?
* Will my child complete any major projects or term papers this year?
* How do you determine grades on assignments? How do you determine her overall grade for the class?
* If my child needs help, is tutoring available?
* If my child is a fast-learner how can you and the school make sure she is challenged?
* Is this a college-track class? How does this class help students build skills to succeed in college?
* What resources are available at school to help my child with your class?
* How can I help my child succeed in your class this year?
* What resources would help my child do her work better? Are there additional books or resourc

**Absolute No-No’s!**

When parents walk into the classroom for a parent-teacher conference, teachers

instantly scan them for clues their about their attitude. Will they be friendly or

hostile? Open-minded or rigid? Throughout the meeting, the parents’ words and behavior

paint a picture that will follow them throughout their child’s career at the school.

**Don’t enter the classroom clutching a stack of your child’s papers.** This may indicate to at teacher that you intend to challenge him or her. If you must bring your child’s papers, keep them concealed in a folder or in your purse until you have established a rapport with the teacher.

**Don’t criticize other teachers, the principal or the school.** Your criticism will probably make the teacher feel defensive or mistrustful of you.

**Don’t criticize other parents or children.** Keep your questions focused on your child. If you believe there is a specific instance of bullying or teasing, approach the subject calmly and prove specific examples and the names of witnesses. Remember, there are two sides to every conflict ant the teacher may have a perspective for which you are unaware.

**Don’t accuse the teacher of playing favorites or picking on your child.** Outbursts about favoritism or boys over girls, one child over another, etc., will not help your child. On the contrary, they will make teachers want to avoid you, which may mean avoiding or neglecting your child.

**Don’t fib about your child.** No child is perfect, and most conferences will include at least one or two criticisms about the child. Your denial and lack of support may put a damper on the teacher’s efforts to work with you child.

**For Your Child’s Future, Control Yourself!** Your behavior in a conference will determine the relationship you want to build with your teacher. Do you want teachers to feel comfortable that you will support their efforts your child or will you push them away?

 **Be Your Child’s Advocate**

An advocate is not an adversary! True advocacy is a largely positive process, built

upon your child’s strengths as well as challenges. As your child’s best advocate, you

are in a unique position to identify and implement positive change!

**Know the rules.** All public schools abide by specific federal and state laws and regulations. To find out the laws in your state and your rights as a parent, contact your local school district office, local parent training and information center, or state Department of Education. http://www.cde.state.co.us/gt/lawsregs

**Get to know the people who make decisions about your child’s education.** Connect with educators and administrators in both casual and formal settings. Talk with your child’s teachers on a regular basis. If you have concerns or problems that a teacher cannot or will not address, be willing to follow the chain of command through the school, and if necessary, to the district office. Remember that you as a parent have the right to request that the school evaluate your child if you think he or she may be gifted or require additional testing. Be sure that your request is in writing. This written request will put a required process into motion that will allow you to work with the school on behalf of your child.

**Keep records.** Take notes, and ask for people’s full names and contact information and, keep less formal examples of children's academic progress, such as homework papers, artwork, and writings, may be useful in establishing patterns and documenting both abilities and challenges.

**Communicate effectively.** Come to meetings prepared, and know the specific outcomes you want. Be clear, calm and direct when speaking and put things in writing whenever possible. Listen, and take time to think about pertinent information. Consider when documentation or data might help your case, and present it in an orderly and readable format. While assertiveness and persistence are crucial, anger and aggressiveness can work against you and can damage important relationships.

**Know your child’s strengths and interests and share them with educators.** By highlighting a child’s capabilities and talents as well as challenges and struggles, you not only help professionals know your child as a whole person, you can also assist in identifying learning accommodations.

**Emphasize solutions.** It’s important to stress the positive, and to help identify ways to improve your child’s experience. Once appropriate programs have been identified and agreed upon, make every effort to encourage follow-through.

**Focus on the big picture.** Simply put, don’t sweat the small stuff. Knowing the specifics of a law may be important on one level, but constantly arguing technicalities can ultimately waste time and prevent positive relationships from forming. Try not to take things personally, and always consider both sides of the story. Details are important, but don’t let them get in the way of negotiating the best educational experience for your child.

**Involve your child in decision making as early as you can.** Learning disabilities are a lifelong issue. Mastering self-advocacy skills is one of the keys to becoming a successful adult. Resist the natural urge to pave every road for your child, and respect and support your child's need to take informed academic risks.

**Whatever you do, don’t apologize for your child.** Too often parents of gifted kids start off conversations with “I’m sorry to bother you…” I know I’ve done it. Don’t apologize for being an advocate for your child and trying to ensure they get the education they deserve and yearn for.

**Ten Tips for a Successful**

**Parent-Teacher Conference**

Parent-teacher conferences usually only last about 20 minutes and that’s not much time to have a meaningful conversation about how your child’s education if you don’t have a plan. You will want to use this limited time to its best advantage.

1. Visit <http://www.thompsonschools.org//Domain/1475> and view TSD’s Gifted Education Philosophy Statement (or rules, regulations, and parameters) for gifted education. From this statement you can loosely determine whether your child’s gifted needs are being met.
2. Ask your child if there is anything that he or she would like you to discuss with the teacher.
3. Jot down everything that you want to talk about at the conference in advance.
4. Arrive promptly or a few minutes early, if it is scheduled.
5. Begin with positive comments about the teacher of classroom.
6. Avoid lengthy discussions of topics that are not related to the purpose of the conference.
7. Be open-minded to suggestions from the teacher.
8. Keep your emotions under control.
9. Take note about what has been discussed to share with your child.
10. Express appreciation for the conference.
11. **DO NOT** stay beyond your allotted time.
12. To document the meeting, send a note of thanks listing any points you want to confirm (“My understanding is that Stacy will . . .”) and any follow-up details you discussed. Keep a copy of the note and all other conference materials in a single file. Add to the file throughout the school year.



**Secondary Conferences**

“Drop In Conferences”, where parents just see the teachers they want when

they want, sometimes means standing in lines and it always means **SHORT**

conversations. Parents can set up specific times to meet with specific teachers and

schedule these in advance. While these are also short, they are sometimes more productive for GT families.

The biggest complaint teachers shared is that the GT families want to talk longer than they are allowed. Please remember that most teachers have anywhere from 150 - 180 students at the high school level? Below are questions and strategies to help you get the most from your time with your middle or high school parent-teacher conference.

**How is your student performing?** Low, Average, High. If they are the high level conferences are sometimes difficult for those parents and teachers as these students are doing what the need to be doing and performing well or above average and may times it becomes a great conversation about your student! Or maybe you feel as though you don’t have anything to talk about. See below for some other tips on how to expand the conversation. If your student is at the average to low level, talk about what more can and needs to be done to bring that student up to a high or above average level and engage them more in class.

* **What area is your student identified in?** For example…Math. Talk with the Math teacher and remind them that your student is identified GT in Math. All teachers know that they are GT but don’t always know what area it is in. This as it is a nice reminder to those teachers who their GT students are in their subject area.
* **Talk about your student’s strengths and how they can help make those stronger.** Also talk about their weaknesses and ways to transform those into strengths. What helps your student’s confidence? Is there something the teacher can do to help increase that?
* **Ask about differentiation and if it is necessary with your student.** Are they bored in Science and say it’s too easy? Does the teacher need to be differentiating assignments for your student or are they doing well with the regular assignments.
* **Are they involved in other areas of the school?** If you student loves Science, are they involved in any clubs or extracurricular activities around science? Ask that teacher what more they could become involved in.
* **What are you willing to do as a parent? What is the student willing to do?**

“Parents please remember that these are very long days and nights for us so please be patient. We want to respect your time and we will also respect yours.”