

Community Conference in Roxbury a Success!

In May 12, 2001, Parents' PLACE co-sponsored a free community conference, entitled "Families and Schools Working Together for Kids." Over 100 English, Spanish, and Cape Verdean family, school, and community members attended the conference at Roxbury Community College in Boston.



Keynote speaker Dr. Janet Williams, a Deputy Superintendent of Boston Public Schools answered questions and shared ideas about ways families could advocate for their children's education. After the keynote address, conference participants voted on their top five barriers to family involvement:

- Communication with schools
- Knowledge of the curriculum
- Culture and language barriers
- School governance
- Support for family involvement

Conference participants divided into five groups to brainstorm strategies for overcoming each barrier. Their ideas and suggestions were shared during a report-out session. After the conference, strategies were shared with Dr. Williams, other BPS leaders, and the participants.

International puppeteer Roberto Maranhao delighted the children with his interactive puppet shows, then taught the children how to create

their own puppets. His activities were a popular part of the day's events! Attendees also gathered valuable community and education resources and participated in a free raffle for prizes such as family passes to museums, educational software, gift certificates, and a new computer!

The conference was sponsored by a collaborative effort between the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative (DSNI), Parents' PLACE, the Boston Parent Organizing Network (BPON), the Center for Law and Education, The Youth Advocacy Project, the EdLaw Project, and the Dudley Neighborhood Based Team.

This conference was the first of a series of community events aimed at improving student achievement through effective family-school partnerships. The next activity will be held November 10th, at the Children's Museum in Boston.

The conference sponsors want to thank the following groups and businesses for their help and generous donations in making the conference a great success:

Boston Parents' Paper, Boston Public Health Commission, BPS Office of Communications, BPS Multicultural Communication and Placement Center, BPS Unified Student Services, Cambridge Health Alliance, Cape Verdean Community Task Force, Children's Book Shop, Children's Museum, Clay Room North, Harvard Medical School, Harvard School of Public Health/Sisters Together, La Alianza Hispana, MassHealth, Mass Mentoring Partnership, Massachusetts Parent Involvement Project, MBTA Police, Museum of Fine Arts, Museum of Science, New England Aquarium, ReadBoston, State of Young Black Boston, and YouthBuild Boston.

Developing strong study habits

Children are not born with the study habits needed to succeed in school. Instead, they must learn them. Very often children begin school without the skills they need to do well. Here are some things that parents can do to prepare their children for school as well as to improve their study habits once in school.

Start early. Reading skills are very important for success in school. Reading to your children as much as you can—daily, if possible—helps them develop a love for reading. You can also set a good example by reading often to yourself.

Encourage your child's natural curiosity. You can do this by talking to your children, listening to them, and answering their questions. Try to expose you children to many different stimulating experiences.

Once children are in school, there are many things you can do to encourage good study habits.

Set a schedule. Decide with your children what time each day homework is to be done. It is important that children take part in these decisions. They need to know that they are able to make decisions about their studying. Once you have decided on a schedule, stick to it! If there is no homework

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Save the Date!

Parents' PLACE is excited to announce a community conference, **Families and Schools Working Together for Kids II**, to be held on **Saturday, November 10th** at the Children's Museum in Boston. This event is open to all families in the Greater Boston area. For more information, call Marva at Parents' PLACE at 877-471-0980, x113.

Making the Most of Parent-Teacher Conferences



Your child will be with her teacher for more than 180 days this year—more if she is in child care. Working together with the teacher is one of the best ways to ensure your child's success in school. Now is a great time to begin!

Get to know your child's teacher. Let the teacher know how interested you are in your child's learning. Stay in touch with the teacher through visits, short notes, phone calls, or email.

Most schools schedule parent-teacher conferences over the course of the school year. The best parent-teacher conference is a sit-down, face-to-face meeting, so you and the teacher can work together for your child's success in school. However, you don't have to wait for the school or teacher to invite you. If you feel there's a problem and no conference is coming up, feel free to call and ask for one.

Before the conference

In most cases, time is limited. Preparing in advance helps the meeting move quickly.

1. Talk to your child. See if there are any questions she wants you to ask.
2. Make a list of the questions you want to ask the teacher. They may be general ("Is my child working to her best ability?") or more specific ("May I see something my child has written?").
3. Decide what you want to tell the teacher about your child. If there are

unusual family problems that may be affecting your child's behavior, say so without going into too much detail.

4. Be prompt. Schools work on tight schedules. You don't want to lose any of your time or take up the time of others.

During the conference

1. Begin on a positive note. Let the teacher know, for example, how much your child enjoys drawing or how pleased you are with her reading. Thank the teacher for taking time to see you.
2. Listen carefully to what the teacher has to say. Take notes if you like.
3. Ask questions and share your concerns. Start with your most important questions first, in case you run out of time. Say what's on your mind, but speak calmly and look for ways to work together on solutions. A good conference is a two-way exchange.
4. If the teacher gives you bad news about your child (e.g., she doesn't get along well with others), don't get angry or apologetic. Listen carefully. Ask questions: "Could you give me an example?" or "Does it happen often?" Find out what you can do to help. If you don't agree with the

teacher, set up a separate time to discuss the issue in detail.

5. End the conference on a positive note. Thank the teacher for her time and emphasize the actions you will both take together.

After the conference

1. Discuss the conference with your child. Emphasize the good things that were said. Tell her about any problems you discussed, and about the steps you, your child, and her teacher will take to make things better.
2. Start immediately on the action plan that you and the teacher worked out together. For example, if your child's eyes should be tested, make the appointment right away.
3. Keep in regular contact with the teacher to discuss your child's progress. This will help build strong parent-teacher partnerships that will support the best possible education for your child.

This article was adapted from "YMCA Parent Tips: Parent-teacher conferences—staying in touch for your child's sake" which is available online at <http://www.ymca.net/programs/family/ptptconf.htm>.

Parent-Teacher Conferences: Ideas for Teachers

Before the conference:

1. Contact parents well in advance to arrange for the conference. Send a personal letter or call, and confirm the appointment.
2. Develop a flexible conference schedule. Provide a schedule that gives options for working parents or parents who have more than one child in school.
3. Prepare for the conference. Prepare a folder with samples of the child's work and a list of compliments, questions, and/or concerns. Create a comfortable, private physical environment, with adult-sized chairs.
4. Establish priorities. Pick one or two areas for improvement so parents are not overwhelmed.
5. Learn from the parents. Involve parents in creating solutions to problem areas. Devote at least half the conference to parents' concerns, ideas, and questions.
6. Close the conference with some action steps. Identify concrete suggestions for how the parents and the teacher will help the child.

During the conference:

1. Establish rapport with parents.
2. Accept parents as advocates for their children. Do not interpret a parent's advocacy as belligerence or as personal criticism.
3. Express appreciation of the unique qualities of the child. Parents are more receptive to feedback if they feel you know what is special about their child. Share a brief story about the child before sharing positive or negative information on the child's performance.

After the conference:

1. Keep records. Document the conference for future reference.
2. Follow up the conference with a phone call or a note to indicate commitment on your part.

This article was taken from the Parent Involvement Tool Kit, from the Mass. Dept. of Education, Office of Community Education. For more information, call the Massachusetts Department of Education at 781-338-3000.

Questions to Ask at Parent-Teacher Conferences

Use the following questions to brainstorm and prioritize the issues you most want to discuss with your child's teacher. For an expanded list of questions, call Parents' PLACE at 877-471-0980.

What is my child learning this year?

Is my child meeting the expectations for his grade level?

What are my child's strengths and weaknesses? Does my child need special help in any area?

Does my child complete assignments regularly? Does my child follow directions?

How well does my child get along with classmates? With adults?

How does my child feel about trying new things or making mistakes?

Does my child willingly participate in class activities?

What are some specific ways I can support my child's learning at home?

What materials do you suggest I keep at home to enrich my child's education?

What should my child read at home?

How much involvement in homework do you expect from parents?

What types of standardized tests will my child take this year? What can I do to help? How are you preparing the children for the tests?

How does my child handle taking tests?

How do you evaluate the children's progress? What do your grades mean?

How much learning do you require to be done independently?

How do you accommodate the individual differences between children?

What are the school rules? What kind of discipline do you use?

Should we set some goals?

Upcoming Parent's PLACE Events

This calendar lists some of the upcoming events sponsored by Parents' PLACE. For more information on any of these events, for a full list of events, or to request a workshop, please call Parents' PLACE at 877-471-0980.

OCTOBER 2001

- 10/23, Boston, 6-8 pm, *Parents Are Powerful*
 10/25, Ashland, 7-9 pm, *Parents Are Powerful*
 10/25, Boston, 6-8 pm, *Parents Are Powerful*

NOVEMBER 2001

- 11/1, Roxbury, 6-8 pm, *Parents Are Powerful*
 11/6, Hyde Park, 6-8 pm, *Raising Student Achievement*
 11/10, Leominster, *Parents Are Powerful, Mass PTA Annual Conference**
 11/10, Boston, 9 am-2:30 pm, *Community Conference at Children's Museum*

- 11/13, Worcester, 10am-12 pm, *Parents Are Powerful in American Schools*
 11/13, Boston, 6-8 pm, *Families and School Together*
 11/15, Worcester, 12-1:30 pm, *Parents Are Powerful**
 11/15, Worcester, *Creating Family Friendly Schools**
 11/29, Roxbury, 6-8 pm, *MCAS: High Stakes*

DECEMBER 2001

- 12/5, Woburn, 6:30-8:30 pm, *What Families and Professionals Can Do to Prevent School Violence*

JANUARY 2002

- 1/24, Roxbury, 6-8 pm, *Raising Student Achievement*

** Part of a conference; paid registration required*

Parents' PLACE Workshops for Families

Available in English, Spanish, and Portuguese. Contact us about workshops for school staff!

Parents Are Powerful: A workshop to promote family involvement in education

A workshop for families and community members interested in getting more involved, but unsure where or how to begin.

(Introductory Level)

Parents Are Powerful in American Schools: A workshop for new immigrant families

A workshop for families who are new to the U.S. to familiarize them with American schools and opportunities for helping their children to succeed in school and to adjust to the new culture and language.

(Introductory Level)

Families and Schools Together: How families can partner with schools to ensure that children receive a quality education

This workshop is for parents and community members who are already involved in their schools, and are looking for additional ways to forge partnerships with schools.

(Intermediate Level)

Raising Student Achievement: Family involvement really works

This workshop can be given to groups of parents, teachers, or a mix of both, as it discusses the needs and perspectives of both sides in working towards children's success in schools. *(Intermediate Level)*

MCAS: High stakes and high standards for students and schools

This workshop explains MCAS, the statewide testing system, and what lies ahead in the immediate future. Parents who want to supplement the school's efforts in helping children reach the state standards would benefit from this workshop. *(Intermediate Level)*

Coming soon...

Parents' PLACE is developing workshops on father involvement, violence prevention, and Compact for Reading (a partnership between students, parents, and schools to achieve high literacy skills).

Developing Strong Study Habits

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to be done on a given day, have your children use the scheduled time to read or work on long-term projects. It's important for children to get used to studying every day.

Provide a quiet, comfortable area for studying. See that studying gets done in the same area every day. Also make sure that your kids have the supplies they need (for example, paper, pencils, a pencil sharpener). Choose a room or area of your home where there are few distractions.

Help your child get organized. Praise your children for working hard and com-

pleting assignments. Keep in mind that homework is not always fun. Don't expect perfection.

Offer help. Be available to answer any questions that come up. Try to provide information without actually doing the homework for your child.

Give children the responsibility for their own homework. You cannot force your children to study. Children need to learn that they are responsible for studying and doing their homework. Give them more responsibility each year for their homework schedule. Don't be afraid to let them suffer the consequences if they, for example, fail to turn in an assignment. Your role is to teach responsibility, encourage them,

and provide support.

If the schedule is not working, try a different one. Two shorter study periods per day might be easier than one long one. An early evening study time may work better than one immediately after school. Keep experimenting with your routine until you find one that works.

As your children regularly use good study habits, they will develop the self-discipline they need to succeed in school and in life!

This article was adapted from "Improving Study Habits" from the Center for Effective Parenting, <http://www.parenting-ed.org/handouts.htm>.

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