

DODGE CITY MIDDLE SCHOOL

A Guide to Parent Teacher Conferences

At Dodge City Middle School we have identified a root cause in suggesting that family engagement matters for student success. To address this root cause we have developed a plan of action demonstrating that improved parent engagement will advance school readiness, student achievement, and the development of 21st Century skills. It is our goal to increase the number of innovative approaches to education by leveraging and connecting the many settings and times in which children learn and grow to create seamless *complementary learning* systems that place families as core partners in the learning process.

PARENT TEACHER CONFERENCES

The first part of the plan is to improve parent engagement through committed actions of both families and our school working together—through parent–teacher conferences as well as other forms of engagement—to support student success. Through this shared approach, our school will reach out to and engage families in meaningful ways, and, similarly, families do their part to actively support their children’s learning and development. To accomplish this goal we have outlined the following practices when engaging parents in meaningful conversations about their child’s progress at school.

- The parent–teacher conference is not only an opportunity for parents to learn from teachers, but for you to learn from them. Nobody knows a student better than their parents. Their insights into their child’s strengths and needs, learning styles, and non-school learning opportunities can help teachers improve their instructional methods. The teachers’ efforts to better understand a student’s aspirations and perspectives make parents feel respected and build trust with them.
- Teachers can make the most of parent–teacher conferences, and other forms of family involvement, by “linking them to learning.” This means bringing events and communication back to a discussion of strategies to support student learning. Teachers can support parents with knowledge and suggestions for how to help their children learn.
- Teachers are to keep in mind all parents are proud of their children and need to hear about their strengths as well as their challenges. This helps show parents that teachers value the

unique strengths of their children and have high expectations for their ability to succeed in school and in life.

ADMINISTRATION RESPONSIBILITIES FOR PARENT TEACHER CONFERENCES

One month prior to conferences the principal will send message to parents and teachers. The principal will communicate the importance of conferences to the whole school and parents as a form of family involvement. The communications will emphasize the importance of instructional improvement strategies along with parent questions to ask at the conferences.

- Our school will include information about the availability of child-care, services, as well as alternate scheduling options.
- Parent teacher conference brochures will be mailed home to disseminate information about parent–teacher conference purposes to parents to help overall attendance.
- Establish dates for team parent nights to relay information about goals and logistics of parent teacher conferences.
- To establish a late start date to develop a format for parent teacher conference communication strategies.

Create a welcoming school environment.

- display student work throughout the building,
- allocate space where parents can wait comfortably for conferences to begin,
- have school information in multiple languages and translators available for conferences

TEACHER IN-SERVICE

A teacher in-service time will be held to share guidelines for teachers on how to structure conversations during parent–teacher conferences. Teachers will receive professional development providing information about best practices in conducting effective parent–teacher conferences. The in-service will focus on ways in discussing progress and growth by starting with the positive, letting parent know about their child’s ability level in different subjects. These conversations will help families understand student data to demonstrate progress against learning goals and to identify areas that need to be addressed. Teachers will also learn how to walk parents through assignments and assessments that are particularly demonstrative of the student’s progress and abilities.

Various in-service scenarios will be created in helping teachers construct meaningful questions and listen actively. Teachers will learn the importance of soliciting parent input into student strengths and needs, learning styles, and non-school learning opportunities by focusing on a parents hopes and dreams for their child. These scenarios will include;

- Providing suggestions for activities and strategies parents can use at home to help their child learn and grow.
- Avoiding judgments about what “they” should do and instead emphasize how “we” can work together to resolve any problems.
- Spending time in closure discussing how the teacher and the parent will support the student by being specific about the kinds of things the teacher will do and how the teacher will check in with the parent about student progress.
- Making a plan of action describing how the teacher will communicate with parents (i.e., through notes home, phone calls, email etc.) and ways parents can contact the teacher. Teachers will learn best practices in scheduling follow-ups after the on conference has occurred.

TEAM PARENT NIGHTS

A parent night will be held to share guidelines for families about goals and logistics of parent–teacher conferences. A parent tip sheet will be developed and discussed on suggested ways parents can make the most of parent-teacher conferences. The parent tip sheet will include questions related to student progress, assignment, assessments and ways to support learning at home and school. Most importantly parents will be provided information on how to follow up after the conference in making plans to check with the teacher by agreeing on other forms of communications.

TEACHER RESPONSIBILITIES FOR PARENT TEACHER CONFERENCES

Teams will disseminate information about conferences to families through flyers, notes, phone calls, and parent nights. This information will include the timing and goals of the conferences, as well as alternative scheduling options.

- The week before the conferences, send home a reminder for when and where the conferences will be held. You may also want to include an outline of your agenda to prepare parents for the conferences.
- Make your classroom comfortable for families by displaying student work, arranging seating in circles (with adult chairs, if possible), and making a private space for the conferences.

During the conference teachers will focus on student academic growth by helping parents access and interpret data about their child's attendance and performance electronically.

- Be prepared to go over student data, assignments, and assessments during the conferences.
- Think of what more you would like to learn about your students from their parents.
- Create an agenda or list of key issues you want to discuss about each student's progress and growth.