

Wednesday, April 30, 2008

Quick Tips

Tips for Parent-Teacher Conferences

The year-end drama of conducting Parent-Teacher Conferences heightens about this time of year. This is when campus leaders begin collecting the names of students that you may not promote to the next grade level.

And, all sorts of recriminations, anger, blame-leveling and unpleasantness ensue unless a teacher prepared for this eventuality with the proper groundwork.

If you didn't prepare, and if you insist on "holding back" a student; prepare for stormy seas. You might have to weather anything from a tidal wave, gale-force chop or the "Perfect Storm."

And, even with the full support of every campus administrator, you need to "batten down the hatches" and be prepared to ride out the rough seas.

And while you are tossing and turning in the churn of emotion and hard feelings, "pray" (The supreme Court doesn't have to know what you are up to in the privacy of your own thoughts) that you will do better to prepare (and protect) yourself next year. Sidebar For a short list of tricks and tactics that you can use to make Parent-Teacher Conferences more enjoyable (bearable), visit A to Z Teacher Stuff Teaching Heart Scholastic Parent-Teacher Interviews/Conferences from About.Com There are a lot of resources that can help you, but proactive planning and common sense management are your best bets.

Think: "What can go wrong?" Expect: "Whatever can go wrong probably will." Be Ready: "You can weather the storm if you calk the leaks, close the port holes, and seal the hatches." Otherwise, you are left to flounder "like a cork on the waves." The "Indirect Approaches" The most effective strategy, if you start early enough in the school year, is to keep in constant, positive contact with all student's parents. Then, begin laying the groundwork for retaining the student early on. But, don't make a direct suggestion to the parents because, maybe rightly, the parents will conclude that you have given up on their child, and that the "kid's fate is doomed."

Instead, problem-solve with the parents and invite them "on board" as active partners.

Then, they will see (and experience for themselves) the challenges that their child faces when wading into the dangerous waters of high-stakes testing tide in a grade that the child will be frustrated in.

In a "fairy tale scenario," the parents might enlist your help in getting the school to retain their student. Of course, you labor intently to provide all the extra help that the "not-on-the-high-stakes-pace student" might need.

In the real world, other scenarios play out. For example; The parents refuse to sign the papers for Special Education referral and testing

The parents do not speak English, and you don't speak their language

The parents are in jail, and you can't talk to them

The child is gifted, bored and making trouble

The child misses part of the school year because the family is picking crops in other states

The family does not want any notice or publicity, possibly because they do not have the requisite passports, visas, work permits or other residency documentation

Endless combinations of the above; Indirect Suggestion There are a number of indirect approaches to getting parents to believe that the idea to retain their child came from them. Some of these include: Telling success stories about students who were retained in the past (while maintaining confidentiality, of course)

"Salting" an Internet resources list of links with "pro-retention" sites. Note: Keep this resource list balanced with about 40% of the "experts" favoring the "retention option" while 60% favor other strategies, such as Special Education, one-on-one tutoring, parent training, etc.

Describing the upcoming year of struggle in slightly unfavorable terms while describing the upcoming year as a "retainee" in slightly favorable terms. (Again, keep this subtle. You don't want to be found out, exposed, or retaliated against)

Note: Avoid any mention of sanctions the school will receive if the student is "placed" in the next grade level and flounders on the high-stakes test You can lay the groundwork for the retention decision with planning, communication with parents, and with plenty of effort on behalf of their child.

You work for the welfare of each student; show it.

Parents respond to teachers that demonstrate that the interests of their child predominate in the school's decision-making process.

In the end, you want parents to come aboard as loyal crew members instead of unhappy, disaffected, belligerent passengers that wish to foment a mutiny.

Working to keep parents as your strongest allies ensure smooth sailing in choppy seas. Treat the parents of your students as if they are traveling with "First Class" tickets.

If you are the master teacher that you should be, the parents already know how fortunate their child is to be in your

classroom. This is your "upgrade" to the joys of teaching. Consider yourself fortunate.

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Quick Tips at 07:00