

Family-Teacher Learning Conversations¹

Holding structured grade-level-specific [learning conversations](#) with families is a powerful way to form partnerships and improve student learning. The goal of these conversations is to share with families how their students are performing and to discuss how families and teachers can work together to help students develop crucial academic skills. Ideally, these types of conversations should be held several times a year. Follow up with positive communication and further conversations to evaluate progress and revise goals and strategies.

A family-teacher learning conversation takes about an hour and can take place as part of an event that the school is already hosting. For example, a back-to-school night can be restructured so that families meet with teachers in the classroom. Other possibilities include literacy or math nights, family workshops, open houses, parent-teacher conferences, and holiday celebrations.

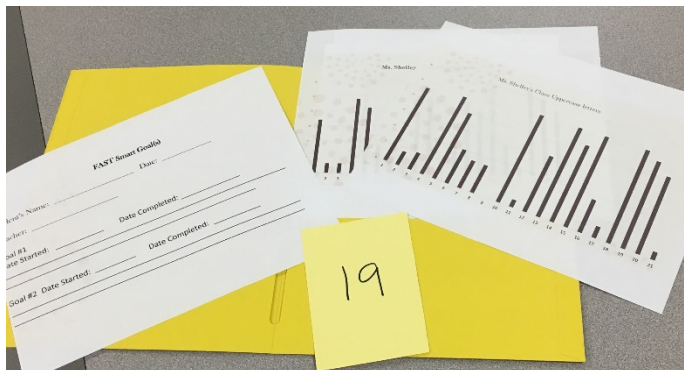
Steps to holding a family-teacher learning conversation include:

1. Icebreaker/Welcome (10-12 minutes)

- Welcome families and seat them in small groups.
- Conduct an icebreaker to get families interacting. For example, ask families to share with the group: “What are some things you are doing at home to help your child learn?” Have someone at each table record participants’ responses. After you have given time for discussion, ask tables to report out, and chart the answers.
- Listen closely, and affirm what families say. This builds trust, establishes a more personal relationship, and provides valuable information that you can build upon.
- Additional ideas for icebreakers can be found [here](#).

2. Share Data on Key Skills (10 minutes)

- Share with families one to three key learning expectations for the year, and share data on the skills/standards where students need the most help.
- Explain what the skills/standards are and how they are measured. Provide families with data on how their student is performing for each learning expectation. For example, “In fluency, fourth graders should be able to read 105 words a minute correctly and with expression. Our fourth grade students average about 62 words a minute, and only 15 percent are at grade level. Your child’s average is # words per minute.”
- To confidentially share class data to families, utilize numbers for each student instead of names. Provide each family with a folder containing class data graphs and the number assigned to their specific student.



¹ Adapted from the Connecticut School, Family, Community Partnerships’ [Parent-Teacher Conversations About Learning](#)

3. Model a Teaching Strategy (5 minutes)

- “Here is something that you can do at home to help your child with this skill.” Pick 1-2 strategies that families can easily use at home and provide families with all of the required resources.
- Explain *and* model the strategies for families.

4. Practice the Teaching Strategy (10 minutes)

- This is a crucial step! Adults are far more likely to follow through with a task if they have confidence in their abilities. Allowing families to actually practice the activities will increase the likelihood that they will use them at home.
- Ask families to pair up. One person can play the role of the child while the other person practices the approach the teacher just shared. Allow enough time for everyone to practice. During this time, walk around and coach families as needed.

5. Goal Setting (5 minutes)

- Help each family set goals for their child. For example: “If your child is at 62 words a minute in fluency now, where would you want/expect him to be three months from now?” Coach parents to set realistic goals.
- Utilize a goal sheet to help track and record data. Send the goal sheets home with families, but be sure to record the goals that families set for their students.

6. Brainstorm Supports (10 minutes)

- Ask families, “How else can I help you and your child accomplish this goal and make growth?” Chart families’ questions and ideas.
- For example, families may suggest: “Can we come watch you teach this in class? Can you record any weekly progress in my child’s planner? Can you send us more ideas about how to help at home? Can we borrow books and learning games from the class library?” Utilize this information as you plan your family engagement strategies for the year.

7. Closing (5 minutes)

- Ask for any lingering questions, explain how you will follow up, and share your contact information.

8. Follow-Up (at the next meeting or at another time during the year)

- Take the time to revisit the goals that were set by families.
 - Did the families practice the strategies provided by the teacher at home?
 - Did the child achieve the goal that was set by the families and teachers? Celebrate all growth.
 - What additional supports do families need to continue to work on this goal?
- What comes next? What are the next sets of skills students and families should be focusing on? Go through the process again to create new goals.

Additional information focused on family-teacher conversations about learning, including videos covering each step, can be found [here](#).