
GET-TO-KNOW-YOU CONFERENCES

Webster-Stanley Elementary School

Oshkosh, Wisconsin

Get-to-Know-You conferences accomplish exactly what their name implies—the chance to establish positive relationships early in the school year to help the rest of the year go more smoothly. They give parents the chance to get to know the child’s teacher, and give teachers a chance to know the child they will teach for the next nine months. The conferences started with incoming kindergartners and their parents several years ago, and are available to an additional grade each year. In the 2000-2001 school year, conferences will be held for Kindergarten through Grade 3.

Although some schools hold Get-to-Know-You conferences before school starts, we schedule conferences a week or two after school begins in order to reach everyone, including new students who register after Labor Day. Before the conference, we send home school-parent handbooks and a letter from the child’s teacher inviting the parent to sign up for a twenty-minute conference time and listing discussion topics.

Rather than follow a formal list of questions and topics, we have found that most parents just want to talk. Sometimes they talk about family situations they feel the teacher should know about. Other times, parents talk about their hopes for their child or the social or academic challenges the child faces. It is really a wonderful chance for parent to just talk about their children in a relaxed setting.

During the conference, parents, teachers, and students develop a general goal for the year and sign the student-parent-teacher compact. Parents are also introduced to any support staff that may be working with their child such as the Title I reading teacher, Reading Recovery teacher, or the speech and language clinician.

Attendance at our school’s November conferences has always been very good, but holding the Get-to-Know-You conferences has increased parent-teacher conference attendance of parents who might be intimidated by the school setting or who might have struggled in school. Teachers have found that because an initial relationship with the parent has already been established, discussions during November parent-teacher conferences can be much more focused on the student’s academic

progress. Parents also seem more willing to contact teachers outside of the conference setting with questions, or to resolve problems early in the school year instead of hoping they will “go away” or resolve themselves.

Any siblings that attend with the student and parents are invited to participate in activities in either the school library or in the school computer lab. Two work-study students from the nearby University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh staff the school library during the school year on Tuesday and Thursday nights when it is open to the community. Other UW-O students with education or technology backgrounds volunteer to staff the school computer lab.

A combination of SAGE (Student Achievement Guarantee in Education) and district funds compensate teachers for their extra time and pay for substitute teachers when conferences are scheduled during the school day to accommodate parents who are second or third shift workers. If teachers are unable to connect with a family during these set-aside times, they also make home visits or on occasion meet with a parent during his/her lunch hour at work.

Get-to-Know-You conferences have been a very positive, rewarding way of establishing productive parent-teacher partnerships that continue to grow all year long. We hope to continue them and grow with them!

Patti Vickman, Principal

(920) 424-0460; patvic@oshkosh.k12.wi.us.

Webster-Stanley Elementary VISTA volunteer Heather Martin also contributed to this article.