



Picatinny School News

Child, Youth, and School Services

Volume 3, Issue 3

Navigating the Parent-Teacher Conference

Want to make sure your kids do well in life? Go back to school! When parents think of November, they usually think of Thanksgiving and the countdown to Christmas. But November is important for another reason: it's a popular time for that foundation of educational success: the parent-teacher conference. So how can you make the most of it?

Number one on teachers lists? Show up, please! "We know parents are busy, but it is important to carve out time to invest in your child's education and ensure success at school," said National Education Association President Reg Weaver. "To get the most out of parent-teacher conferences, parents need to take an active role in their child's education year-round and

come prepared to discuss how their child can reach their full potential." The NEA is the largest educational organization in the country, representing 3.2 million educators. Here are their tips for getting the most out of parent-teacher conferences.

Get Ready. Do your homework prior to parent-teacher conferences. Prepare by writing notes to yourself concerning:

- Any questions about the school's programs or policies.
- Things you can share with the teacher about your child and his life at home.
- Questions about your child's progress.

Ask Important Questions. Don't be afraid to engage in a frank conversation with your child's teacher. Your goal is

to develop an action plan for your child's success at school. Good questions to ask the teacher include:

- What are my child's strengths and weaknesses?
- How does my child get along with classmates?
- Is my child working up to her ability? Where could she use improvement?
- What can we do at home to support what you are doing in the classroom?

Initiate the Action Plan. Start immediately on the action plan you and the teacher put together. Discuss the plan with your child and track his progress. Stay in touch with your child's teacher throughout the year with regularly scheduled "report card" conferences that can keep the communication lines open.

Questions to Consider Asking at Conference Time

* What subject does my student like most? Least?

* What can I do to help my student with subjects he finds difficult? How can I help my student study? Prepare for class? A good time to ask these questions is when you view samples of your son's or daughter's work.

* Is my student working to the best of his ability? Does my student participate

in class discussions and activities?

* Is my student in different classes or groups for different subjects? Which ones? How are the groups determined?

* How well does my student get along with others?

* How are you measuring my student's progress?

* What kinds of tests do you give? What do the tests show

about my student's progress?

* How does my student handle taking tests?

* What are my student's test scores in reading and math? What do the scores mean?

* Ask what grade level my student is working on. Is my student at grade level in reading and math? How about the other subjects?

Inside this issue:

<i>Volunteering in the Classroom</i>	2
<i>Benefits of Team Sports</i>	2
<i>School Calendars</i>	3
<i>Raising Well-Spoken Kids</i>	3
<i>College Planning in Middle School</i>	4



Don't Forget!

Check out www.Tutor.com/military for homework help! At Tutor.com, you get a professional online tutor whenever you need help. You work one-to-one with your tutor in our online classroom on your specific homework problem until it's done. This is a **FREE** service to military family members!

Easy Ways to Volunteer in the Classroom

Ask any parent you know and she's bound to tell you she wishes she could help out more at her child's school. We all know that parental involvement is a crucial part of a child's education, but with so many of us trying to juggle commitments at work and commitments at home, it doesn't leave a whole lot of time for volunteering in the classroom. But that doesn't mean you can't provide some valuable support to your child's teacher. Consider these non-classroom based ways to volunteer:

- **Ask your child's teacher what she needs for the classroom and buy it.** Most of the time the supplies teachers need are small necessities a school budget may not provide for: Ziploc bags, tissues, an extra pair of snow pants to keep in the classroom or simple office supplies.
- **Create a virtual bulletin board.** If you think that sitting in front of your computer won't be very helpful to your child's teacher, then ask yourself: when was the last time you really read

one of the crumpled-up missives from school that made it out of your child's backpack and onto the kitchen counter? Setting up and maintaining a classroom website that parents can check for announcements and needed supplies is a great way to volunteer. Not only does it reduce the amount of paper coming home, but it reduces the teacher's workload too; all she needs to do is email you with updates.

- **Be kind.** In-kind donations are a way to give of yourself; you may not have the money to buy supplies for the classroom, but you surely have a talent or skill from which a teacher could benefit. Put your green thumb to use: consider planting a classroom garden and providing the students with tips of how to take proper care of it. Use your artistic eye to create a community display of student artwork. Help fix the wobbly bookshelves in the classroom or, better yet, build some new ones for your child's teacher. No matter what your field of expertise is, there's a way to use your talents to improve your child's classroom.

- **Be an old-fashioned PTA parent—be a room parent.** Dedicate yourself to helping the classroom teacher prepare materials and coordinate events. Not only can a room parent help with the logistics of whatever is needed, but there's always a need for someone to help out with all the prep work that goes into daily classroom activities: cutting, laminating, photocopying and library cataloging. Most of these things can even be done in your own living room.

The bottom line is it doesn't matter how you volunteer—just that you do it!

Whether you're buying, building or behind the scenes, your child (and his teacher) will benefit from your participation.



The Benefits of Team Sports



The stereotype of the cutthroat, pushy little league coach is all too familiar to most people. Why, some parents ask, should I subject

my child to competitive team sports if that's how it goes? For one thing, the news. Today's generation of children is fighting the worst obesity epidemic in history. Giving kids an excuse to exercise is reason enough to consider enrolling them in team sports. But calories aside, team sports have other benefits to kids – social, emotional, and physical ones. Here are some things that team sports teach that go well beyond scoring, battling, shooting, and winning.

- **Ego Checks.** Any parent knows that a child can be extremely egocentric. But that “my way or the highway” atti-

tude will have to stay in check on a team sport. When a kid sees that everyone gets to play, they hopefully start to think about the group as a whole, and not just themselves. Even better, they learn to be happy for other player's successes because they see how it benefits the greater team.

- **Positive Mentors.** A dedicated, thoughtful, and skilled coach can have an amazing impact on children. In fact, sometimes your child will respond better to an objective coach than they will to their own parent. When kids have early, positive experiences with coaches, they continue to seek out and learn from mentors who can help them with school, jobs, and other interests.
- **The Three “Ps”.** Just as they must practice spelling, math problems, and any other skill, kids need to learn that being part of a sport teams requires the three “Ps”... practice, patience, and

persistence. Whether it's showing up to practice when you'd rather be home with Legos, waiting your turn on the sidelines, or doing the same drill over and over again, the three “Ps” of team sports translate into important life lessons.

- **Another Reason for Family Time.** Playing catch in the yard, heading down to the local soccer field for some drill practice... these types of outings with your kids can mean a great deal in our busy parenting culture. While the official reason may be practicing for the team, an even greater benefit is the time you get to spend together. Sometimes, in between dribbling and lay-ups, an important truth is revealed or an opportunity presents itself to teach a value. Did we also mention that by practicing drills with your child and running up and down the sidelines to cheer them on, you might get into better shape, too? Score one for the family team!

What's Happening in the Schools?

Dennis B. O'Brien Elementary

11/1– PTA Meeting 7pm
11/2– Tricky Tray
11/6– Staff Development– No School
11/8 & 11/9– NJEA Convention– No School
11/12-11/15– Parent Conferences– Early Dismissal 12:48pm
11/15– Crazy Hair Day
11/12– 11/19– Book Fair
11/21– Early Dismissal
11/22 & 11/23– Thanksgiving Holidays

Copeland Middle School

11/5– PTA Meeting 7pm
11/6– Staff Development– No School
11/8 & 11/9– NJEA Convention– No School
11/12-11/15– Parent Conferences– Early Dismissal 12:20pm
11/12-11/15– Fall Book Fair
11/21– Early Dismissal 12:20pm
11/22 & 11/23– Thanksgiving Holidays

Morris Knolls High School

11/8 & 11/9– NJEA Convention– No School
11/13– End of Marking Period #1: Last Day to Drop a Full Course without Penalty
11/14– Mini College Fair
11/15-11/17– Fall Play 7pm
11/21– Early Dismissal 12:16pm/
Powder Puff Game 1pm
11/22 & 11/23– Thanksgiving Holidays



Beyond LOL Speak: Raising a Well-Spoken Kid

"WUT UP GRL?"
"NMU?"
"NM. G2G!"
"K BYE!! LYL"

Confused by the conversation above? Don't be surprised. A 2010 Nielsen study revealed that American teens text at least six times per waking hour—and as they rely more and more on texts, tweets and IMs to communicate, they usher in a new era of conversation based on speed and convenience over proper pronunciation and grammar. Case in point: "laughing out loud" becomes "LOL," "later" becomes "L8R," and "got to go" becomes "G2G." Before you know it, conversations with your tween sound more like alphabet soup than civilized dialogue.

Though it may not seem like a big deal now, raising a well-spoken child has many advantages. Eloquence makes it



easier to read and write well, which gives well-spoken students a leg up in English class and on standardized tests. It's also a valuable asset

in college and job interviews, not to mention relationships down the line. Here are seven quick tips to get your little one's tongue wagging in the right direction.

Book by book. Reading's the fastest and easiest way to boost vocabulary skills at any age, so make it a habit for everyone in your house. Don't fret if your teen opts for *Pretty Little Liars* over *Little Women*—it's more important that she choose material that interests her to keep her hooked on books.

Speak up. Family conversations around the dinner table offer a perfect opportunity to practice speaking skills. Skip stale standards like, "How was your day?" Instead, try a game in which each person shares the "rose" (something good), "thorn" (something unfortunate), and "bud" (something new) from their day. This activity helps to keep the conversation moving, but be sure to establish a "no phone" policy at the table. That way, your teen won't be distracted from family chatter by "txts" from her BFF.

Bee involved. Help your kid seek out activities that value proper speech, such as spelling bees, a debate team or drama club. If you don't see many opportunities for your child to hone her speaking skills in your community, talk with the local school board or administrators about starting a class play or district spelling bee.

Use your tools. Dig up that musty thesaurus or dictionary for a lesson on words. Spice up your speech with high-level vocabulary—"that violin practice sounds mellifluous!"—and direct your tween to the dictionary to clarify what

you mean. Make it a game by challenging kids to try to stump you with buzzwords of their own—and doling out tiny treats when they're successful!

Write. Encourage your kid to put pencil to paper and write the "old-fashioned" way to help build speaking skills. Keep your eyes open for opportunities, such as birthday and holiday invitations, thank you notes and even grocery lists! For more structured writing, try setting your child up with a pen pal.

Limit tech time. Take a break from your wired world by scheduling screen-free time for the family each week. Show your child that taking time to unplug is critical: you're not likely to get far in a face-to-face conversation with Facebook chat or Twitter speak. Opt for fresh air instead with outdoors activities. Picnics, hikes and camping trips offer great chances to catch up without an outlet or monitor in sight.

Find role models. Consider your child's favorite artist or song: probably not a model of articulation and eloquence. While there's nothing wrong with letting your kid explore her own musical taste, it's important to offer up examples of well-spoken idols as well. Finding articulate role models can be as simple as listening to talk radio in the car together. Show her that you admire eloquent speakers, and she'll eventually learn to do the same.



The School Liaison Officer works in conjunction with the Child and Youth Services Division and the local school community to address educational issues involving military children. Through partnering with the local and military community, the School Liaison Officer acts as a communication link between the installation and the surrounding school districts.

For more information, contact your School Liaison Officer.

Building 3228
Main Road
Picatinny Arsenal, NJ 07806
Phone: (973) 724-7892
Fax (973) 724-7391



How to Start Thinking about College... in Middle School!

So, your kid is in middle school. If you're like most parents, you've got your hands full with exploding backpacks and germ war lockers. When it comes to tests and papers, you're probably biting your nails (and your tongue, too!) But at least the big stakes of high school and college are still way off in the future...right?

Not exactly, says the National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC). Of course, there's still plenty of room for your child to fool around, and it's true that college applications won't really hit until twelfth grade. But, NACAC researchers have found that middle school lays important foundations for higher education. Whether it's calendars or coursework, there's a lot you can do now to pave the way for high school and college success. Here are some tips to get your middle schooler started:

Connect with the school. "We always say, consult the school counselor, even in 6th grade," says Shanda Ivory, Director of Communications for the National Association for College Admission Counseling. Don't hesitate to ask for

details about your child's full program, and check in often. Let the school know that you're open to bad news as well as good—but that you do expect to be an active partner.

Seek Solid Challenges. Kids should take the four core subjects – English, Math, Science, and Social Studies – for all three years of middle school. To smooth the way for college, however, you should also encourage your child to take foreign language as soon as it's on offer. And pay attention to math: if students can complete Algebra I by the end of eighth grade (now listed in several states' standards, anyway), it will pave the way to more advanced math and science classes in high school. Finally, check with the teacher to make sure that your child's English course includes grammar and writing as well as literature.

Build Good Study Habits. Turns out that all that fretting over flyaway papers has a purpose: kids always do better in school when they keep their stuff organized, and establish strong study routines. Get your child a planner

at the beginning of the school year and show her how to use it to keep track of homework assignments, upcoming tests, and project due dates. The NACAC also suggests taking kids often to the library, and helping them learn to use its many resources, especially for research.

Connect With Your Kid. Sure, your young teen may seem to push you away sometimes, but make no mistake: you are just as important as ever. Spend time together in activities you both enjoy; talk and listen over meals; ask plenty of nonjudgmental questions. In particular, encourage your child to dream about an exciting future, one which will include college. You might even want to plan a short day trip if there's a college nearby—not to apply, but to build good feelings and hopes for the future.

So does this "future focus" mean that your middle schooler can't ever bang around and goof up? Of course not. Kids are kids...but in today's complex world, parents can play an invaluable role in helping kids choose wisely with an eye towards the future.