Union seminar offers strategies, tips

One of the most frequently requested seminars offered by NYSUT’s Education & Learning Trust is “Parent-Teacher Conference: Strategies for Success.”

In the two-hour, interactive session, veteran-teacher instructors cover strategies and tips that apply to any grade-level teacher. The seminar uses videos, handouts and parent-teacher discussion points to help teachers prepare for a conference and to enhance communication among the teacher, student and parents.

Often, the teacher must take the lead explaining to parents how they can help their child with homework, responsibility and discipline. The seminar is representative of the union’s commitment to professional growth.

“Participants really appreciate the chance to see a model parent-teacher session,” said Barbara Luna, a teaching veteran and ELT instructor on Long Island. “At one seminar, the group chose to stay late because they got so caught up in watching the role-play.” She noted many elementary schools are moving away from traditional report cards and adding more parent-teacher sessions during the year.

For more information, or to check scheduling for ELT courses, visit www.nysut.org/elt or email ELTmail@nysutmail.org.

If you are interested in having an ELT workshop on “Parent-Teacher Conference: Strategies for Success” in your area, ask your local union leader to schedule a seminar by calling ELT at NYSUT headquarters in Latham, 800-528-6208.

RESOURCES FOR YOU

NYSUT offers a variety of materials to help teachers, including brochures for educators and parents, posters, bookmarks and more. Limited quantities are FREE for NYSUT members and leaders. It’s so easy: Browse the items by category, add items to your cart, log in and place your order electronically. Or, if you are in a hurry and like doing things yourself, publications can be downloaded in PDF format for printing from your own computer. Place your order today at:

www.nysut.org/publications
Veteran teachers share their dos and don’ts

New teachers are understandably nervous about their first parent-teacher conferences. So much to say, so little time! Even veteran teachers still may have qualms about upcoming parent-teacher conferences. To help you prepare, NYSUT interviewed experienced classroom teachers, including master teachers, who offer courses for the union’s Education & Learning Trust. Here are their thoughts on 10 things you should do to have a successful session.

1. **DO** always greet parents warmly at the door. Plan and create an inviting environment. Accompany parents to a place where you can sit together and converse comfortably. Some teachers opt to group chairs in a semi-circle near a table or other surface where they can share student work. (And make sure the chairs are big enough!)

2. **DO** start the meeting by showing that you care and know something positive about their child. Summarize the student’s strengths before raising problems. Of course, if you have a heavy student load, it can be hard to get to know each child well by early fall conferences. Three hints: Keep an index card on each child and jot down observations that you can later share (“Alex was telling us in class the other day about his winning home run.” “Tamira has a wonderful way of making friends with children who are new or feeling shy.”)

3. **DO** dress in a way that reflects the meeting’s importance and your respect for the parent(s) and their child.

4. **DO** rehearse what you want to say. Practice warm-up introductions, prepare an outline, and know something showing that you care about your child. Ask questions or make suggestions. There’s so much information parents need. Parents are most interested in specifics related to their child and will almost always have concerns or questions of their own.

5. **DO** use materials from the student’s work folder. It is much easier to demonstrate progress or show parents concretely what a student needs to do to improve.

6. **DO** use positive, nonverbal behavior. Listen reflectively. Maintain good eye contact. Lean in when you speak or make suggestions. In your suggestions, acknowledge the stresses of parenting: “I know it can be difficult to find the time to read with your child every night. Try asking your child to read aloud while you’re preparing dinner.”

7. **DO** engage parents in planning best ways to help their child. Seek their suggestions first. Allow for occasional silences, which give the parent an opportunity to ask a question or voice a concern.

8. **DO** give parents something to take home with them. They can review material more completely and refer back to it during the year. This can also save time at the conference. If you offer a handout on curriculum, for example, you won’t need to go over it verbally in exhaustive detail.

9. **DON’T** send them home empty-handed.

10. **DO** end positively with a proactive message of hope. Set goals. Review how parents can help. Mention plans for follow-through. Let parents know their support is needed and appreciated. If appropriate, send a follow-up letter.

**For more information about teacher seminars, see the back page.**