

Preparing for Parent-Teacher Conferences: A Child's Progress Requires Detailed Feedback from the Teacher

By: Miriam Heilbrun, MS

There are certain academic areas in your child's education which require careful monitoring. While parents should be aware of their children's academic performance in general, success or failure in distinct areas can have a major impact on subsequent development. It is important for parents to ascertain whether their children are exhibiting any difficulties in the following areas in order to provide assistance as needed. Getting the right help at the right time can make all the difference.

It is imperative for parents to monitor their child's progress in developing **reading skills**. Unfortunately, at times, well-meaning teachers want to give parents positive reports; and will not mention that a child is lagging a bit behind. Then towards the end of the school year, the parents suddenly receive notification that their child needs reading help. This scenario is lamentable and can have serious consequences. A child who is "slow to pick up" may not have vital pre-reading skills in place.

Research and experience has shown that children with reading issues who are helped early enough with the right intervention can become excellent readers. I have seen children with severe reading issues progress to the point that their third grade teacher is surprised when parents ask about their reading. However, too many children are not given the opportunity to succeed. Sometimes teachers and parents feel that it is OK to take a wait-and-see attitude in Pre-1A or first grade and tarry until failure is blatantly obvious. At that point the child may have missed a critical period for training his brain to recognize and manipulate sounds, has become frustrated and anxious, and developed a negative view of himself as a learner.

Research points to significantly better outcomes with treatment provided in the pre-school or first grades. Ask your child's teacher whether s/he has recently had the opportunity of hearing your child read by themselves and where they stand in relation to others in the class. If your child is not enthusiastic about learning to read and the teacher does not have specific information about their skills, it may be worthwhile to check their progress with a specialist. A future article will provide information regarding what type of professional assistance to seek.

Other important educational areas to monitor closely are:

Chumash - in the second grade students begin to dissect words in the *Chumash* and learn to recognize roots, prefixes, and suffixes. This is often a challenging new area for a child to master as it calls upon language abilities, memory skills, and the ability to recognize parts of a whole. Parents should be especially watchful of their child's development of these skills so that their *Chumash* learning will be a joyful experience.

Multiplication - in the third grade students begin to learn how to multiply and memorize the multiplication tables. Ask your child's teacher which multiplication facts your child should know at this point. Many children (especially those who do not like to memorize) get turned off to math and fall behind when they fail to master multiplication. While their peers are speedily

calculating problems, they are slowly adding multiples in their heads. Some children do not understand the concept of multiplication all together and come to the conclusion that they are “not good in math.” Math anxiety and avoidance ensues, and a vicious cycle begins.

Multiplication can be a watershed area for many children; it’s important for parents to be aware of any difficulties before students fall too far behind. A previous article offers remedies for this problem; to obtain a copy please call CounterForce at 718-787-4412.

Fractions - Watch closely for the introduction of fractions and your child’s understanding of them. Fractions are often a difficult concept for children to master (how can a higher number actually be a smaller amount?) In my experience, many children need some supplemental teaching at home with hands-on experience of fractions.

Organization and Time-management skills - In the sixth or seventh grade (depending on the school) students’ lives change dramatically. While previously they had two teachers (Limudei Kodesh and L’mudei Chol), they suddenly have several teachers for different subjects each with their own teaching style and demands.

An entire new myriad of skills sets are required in order to deal effectively with this transition. Some students need help in developing organization skills. They need to develop a system which will facilitate keeping notes and handouts organized by subject and will help them remember what to take home in order to complete their homework, etc. Inquire whether your child usually comes to class prepared and is able to participate in an organized and calm manner.

At home, they need to know how to manage their time and prioritize tasks in order to get everything done. Some students find this transition overwhelming and need to learn how to cope with these increased demands.

With careful observation and open communication with your child’s teacher, you will be able to step in and offer your child assistance before difficulties snowball into significant problems which impede further progress and engender feelings of failure.

If your child has had a smooth ride throughout most of his/her schooling career, and is suddenly faced with a subject area that they can’t seem to keep up with on their own, a regular tutor (retired teacher or college student etc.) can be very helpful and sufficient. However, if his/her difficulties are affecting many areas of schooling, or are in some of the important areas delineated above, a person with specialized training may be required.

The remedial program at CounterForce offers remedial instruction in all academic areas. Services are provided on a sliding-scale based fee. To schedule an appointment for your child, please call Miriam Heilbrun at 718-787-4412.

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