

Frequently Asked Parent Questions

Candid conversations based on mutual trust between families and educators are critical.

An open exchange of information and observations can shed light on a parent’s understanding of their child’s progress. Encourage families to ask questions and don’t think of the “tough” ones as problematic; use the moment as an opportunity to help families partner with you to support student academic and social/emotional growth.

Below are thought-starters to support you as you listen to families openly and navigate these conversations.



ACADEMICS AND GRADE-LEVEL ACHIEVEMENT

What’s most important for me to know about making sure my child is on track?

- Share that being “on track” means a student can consistently do grade-level work independently and has strong foundational skills (such as reading words accurately, reading smoothly, and understanding what they read).
- Emphasize that it’s important to look beyond overall grades and focus on specific skills—what the student has mastered and where they still need support. Share that multiple measures—such as classroom work, teacher observations, and assessment data—are used to get a full picture of progress.
- Explain that when students are still building foundational skills, they should both strengthen those skills and continue to engage with grade-level content so they stay connected to what they are expected to learn. Parents can make sure their child is exposed to grade-level work through online resources such as Khan Academy or other tools connected to the curriculum.
- Let families know you want to partner with them by sharing simple, specific ways they can support learning at home so their child can continue to grow and be prepared for the next grade.

Why did my child receive passing report card grades if they aren't on grade level?

- Share that grades represent more than grade-level mastery and that they are just one piece of the bigger picture. For example:
 - » *Grades often include effort and/or progress — good grades can come from participating in class, turning in homework, and/or showing significant improvement over time. Though a student may have made progress, it's possible they may still be below the grade-level standard.*
 - » *By sharing multiple measures — classroom and home observations, end-of-year benchmark tests, classwork, and grades — families can know exactly which skills to focus on. Based on this full picture of progress, let families know you want to help them make a plan for summer learning.*
- Conversations like this are deeply personal. Authentically listen to what parents have to say and validate all that they are already doing to support their child's learning.
- Consider the following signs that may give insight on how a parent is feeling and ideas for how to navigate it in a positive and actionable way.
 - » **Surprised:** *They may not have realized their child was struggling. They accept the information from the test scores, but are clearly disappointed. They may internalize the test performance as a reflection of their child or themselves.*

What to do?

- Assure them that they are not alone. Millions of parents across the country are in the same boat as they are — helping their children get on track academically.
- Explain that test scores are a diagnostic tool, not a label. Low scores help us to identify what their child struggles with and figure out what they need to be academically successful.
- Emphasize that the scores are a starting point for a bigger conversation, and action can be taken. Low scores do not reflect the abilities of the child or the parent.

- » **Frustrated:** *They want to know why their child's grades may be significantly better than their test scores. They ask the 'tough' questions about why the grades aren't consistent with test performance. They question and/or want to understand the purpose of the standardized tests.*

What to do?

- Validate how they may feel about their child as a student (Example: "I thought they were fine" or "How is this happening?"). Explain that their child can be a good student and still need additional help.
- Acknowledge there is a lot of jargon in these scores and that it can be confusing. Explain what the terminology means: What is percentile? What does grade level mean?
- Define the difference between grades and test scores: Grades evaluate not just mastery, but also effort and engagement. Test scores mainly focus on mastery.

» **Motivated to Act:** *In the moment, it may feel like they are blaming you or their child for not doing enough. They may be unsure where to start but they want to take action. It may be their first time facing their child’s academic struggles.*

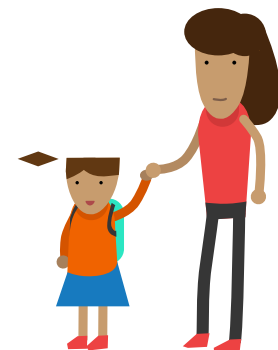
What to do?

- Validate that the news may be a lot to take in but that you want to help them take action and team up on making a summer learning plan.
- Share that while you are the teacher, the child’s achievement is a result of many other factors including the disruption to learning during the pandemic. It’s an issue millions of students across the country are facing, which is why there are resources available to help this summer.
- Assure them they have already done the hard part by getting informed about their child’s progress, and now you can work together to get their child back on track.

MY CHILD’S SUMMER LEARNING PLAN

What are the most important things I can do to help my child reach their learning goals over the summer?

- Use this simple 3-step [Parent-Teacher Planning Tool](#) to co-create a summer learning plan with families. It helps you share your observations alongside end-of-year benchmark data and classroom grades so that families know which skills to focus on during the break. It also provides a space for families to jot down what they should share with summer program leaders and/or tutors so that they can best support their child.
- Share ideas on how to create a positive and fun learning environment at home, such as:
 - » *Provide a quiet space where your child can work. If you have more than one child, create a schedule of when each child can use the space.*
 - » *Be positive and praise your child for working hard and completing assignments. Celebrate successes like learning something new that was once hard for them.*
 - » *Ask your child to explain what they are learning (make it fun by having them “teach you” or other family members!).*
 - » *Monitor your child’s learning. For example, as much as possible, pay attention to how they are completing their summer learning work/activities.*
 - » *Ask summer program leaders and/or tutors for help when you have questions or see your child needs more support.*
 - » *Model and encourage a love of reading. As much as possible, read and write alongside your child. Encourage curiosity—asking questions, exploring topics of interest, and connecting learning to real life.*



WHOLE CHILD SUPPORTS

How can I continue to support life skills development at home?

- Support Communication and Confidence. Give families ideas on how to talk to their child about their learning and ask for help when they don't understand something. Ask:
 - » *"What did you learn today?" "What felt easy? What felt hard?"*
- Build Routines That Support Strong Learning Habits. Encourage families to create simple daily routines (e.g., set time for reading, homework, and bedtime). To build independence, have children take ownership of small tasks like packing their backpack, keeping track of assignments, etc..
- Encourage Productive Struggle. Remind families that it's okay—and important—for children to work through challenges. Suggest language like:
 - » *"Let's try that again together." "What strategy could you use to solve that problem?"*

During Candid Conversations: What It Should Look and Sound Like

Even with the best intentions, candid conversations can either build trust or create confusion—these look-fors and non-examples can help you stay grounded in what effective, partnership-driven communication sounds like.

Look-Fors

- Use clear, parent-friendly language
 - » (e.g., avoid jargon like "percentile" or "proficiency" without explanation)
- Name specific skills
 - » (e.g., "reading words accurately" vs. "struggling in reading")
- Balance honesty with belief
 - » (e.g., "Here's where they need support—and here's how we'll help them grow")
- Pause to check for understanding
 - » (e.g., "Does that make sense?" / "What questions do you have?")
- Invites partnership
 - » (e.g., "Let's make a plan together")

Non-Examples

- Over-relying on generalities that can be confusing or misleading
 - » (e.g., "They're just a little behind" or "They'll be fine")
- Sending families data without explanation of what it means
- Talking more than listening to families
- Avoiding the hard truth or softening it so much it becomes unclear
- Ending a conversation without clear next steps

