

just the **FAQs**

answers to frequently asked questions

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Positive Meetings

These suggestions for facilitating positive meetings between parents and educators were prepared by the Department of Special Education to address the mission of Chesterfield County Public Schools, which is to work in partnership with students, families and the community to ensure that each student acquires the knowledge, skills and core values necessary to achieve personal success and to enrich the community.

What role does organization play in a successful meeting?

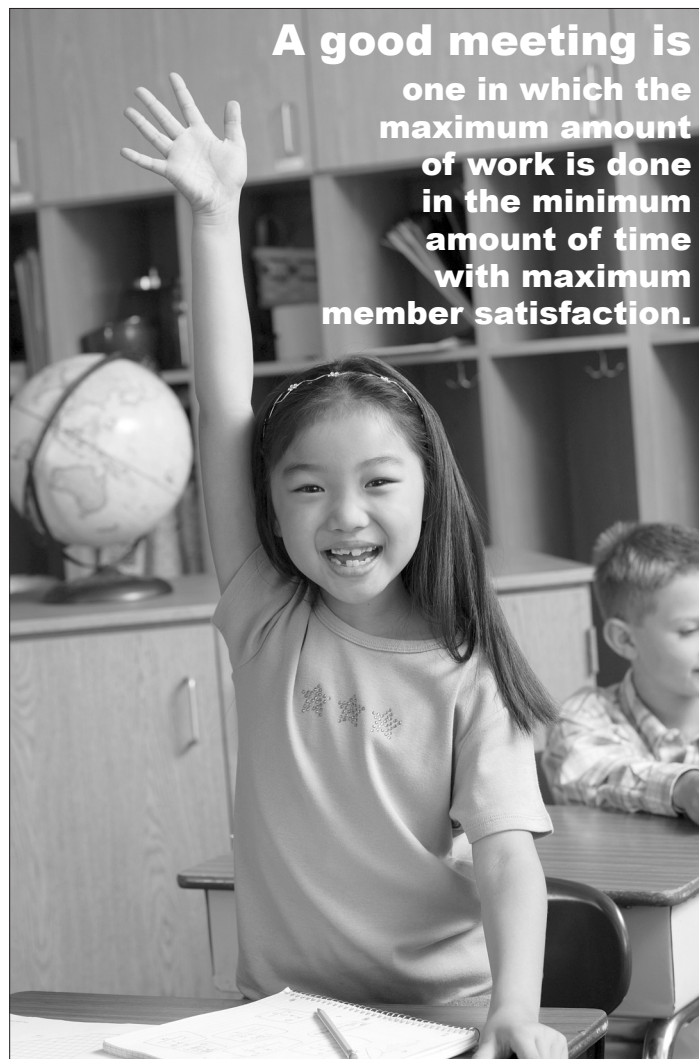
Organization has a significant impact on the success of the meeting:

Before the meeting, clarify the purpose or goal, identify the participants, choose methods and materials, develop an agenda and allocate time for each item, notify participants, arrange the room so that people can see and hear each other and make certain that all materials are ready.

During the meeting, open on time with a welcoming statement, introduce each attendee and clarify his/her role, state the purpose and goal of the meeting and go over expectations for participation. Review the agenda to make sure everyone is clear about the tasks to be accomplished.

Take one agenda item at a time, maintain an appropriate pace and manage the discussion. Address questions and concerns, check on decisions and use positive communication and body language.

Close the meeting by referring back to the agenda and summarizing decisions made, calling for agreement on actions to be taken (Who will do what by when and how? What communication must be completed?). Evaluate or comment on the meeting, tell how the results of the meeting will affect the student and thank attendees. End the meeting on time.



A good meeting is one in which the maximum amount of work is done in the minimum amount of time with maximum member satisfaction.

After the meeting, write and distribute a summary, carry out the actions generated and plan for the next meeting or any follow-up required.

Isn't communication also important?

Communication is a priority! When speaking with parents, speak clearly and avoid "education-ese." Use language that is in sync with the parents' interests, values and needs. Be specific rather than general. Show appreciation of parents, and remember that the

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meeting may have emotional aspects for them. Listen actively and use silence to really hear their concerns. Clarify what they have said.

It is estimated that 60 percent to 90 percent of communication is nonverbal. Nonverbal messages are more powerful than words, so it is important to focus on using positive body language during meetings. Consider these aspects:

- Maintain an attentive posture; mirror the other person.
- Use gestures and body movements to reinforce what is said.
- Direct eye contact is the most important body language technique used to promote positive communication.
- Voice tone, pitch, speed, volume and inflection determine how statements are heard and perceived.

Many nonverbal dimensions of communication are tied to culture. Parents from non-Western backgrounds may have different perceptions about body language. A gesture may have different meanings in different cultures. Be aware of unwritten rules about personal space and eye contact when communicating with adults from diverse cultural backgrounds.

What about the meeting environment?

It is important to consider the place and space for the meeting, addressing the tasks to be done as well as the messages and the feelings that are sought.

- Set the initial emotional tone and feel of the room; create a sense of safety by meeting and greeting parents and staff members.
- Make sure lighting and temperature (68 degrees) of the room are optimal.
- Seek cleanliness and tidiness; remove things not to be used.
- Post a sign on the door stating “Important Meeting in Progress” to reduce interruptions; ask the office staff for no intercom interruptions.
- Use a seating chart or name tents showing names and roles.

- Post the agenda and desired outcomes.
- Make sure all can see and hear each other and any visuals used.
- Seat attendees around a table, with parents near the educator they know best; remove empty chairs to promote connectedness and reduce physical and emotional divides among attendees.

How might action plans be created from a meeting?

Creating a “group memory” during the meeting fosters discussion and provides an instant record of what is discussed and decided:

- Use a flip chart (or a white board or newsprint taped to the wall) and appoint a recorder to note key points of discussion and actions to be taken.
- Make sure the group memory is visible to all attendees.
- Capture key remarks in brief, nonjudgmental notes; ask often for group confirmation of correctness.
- Label and store the group memory for future reference; use it to compose meeting summary, a follow-up memo or other documentation.

Group memory is a simple strategy with many advantages:

- Protects against data overload and enables attendees to move on once an idea is recorded.
- Saves attendees from having to take notes (unless they want to).
- Encourages group ownership of the results.
- Reduces repetition because recorder can point to an item contributed earlier.
- Fosters responsibility for follow-through because names, actions and deadlines are written during the meeting.
- Increases sense of accomplishment because attendees can see work completed.

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