

THE ART OF ASKING QUESTIONS

Many of us are **afraid to ask questions**- maybe we were raised to not ask, are afraid to sound dumb, uneducated, or annoying. Some of us don't have a problem asking questions but we **may not know the right way to do it** - and if we are not answered, or get a negative response to our questions, or are told that this is not the time or place to ask, we may not want to do it again.

Becoming more confident and skilled at asking questions can be a real super-power!

Knowing Where to Start

For most concerns related to our child's learning or well-being at school, the teacher is the best person to approach first.

- You do not have to wait for Back To School Night or Parent Teacher Conferences to meet with your child's teacher!
- Email or send a written note or message the teacher on Canvas
- You may call the school office to schedule a time to talk with your child's teacher, either at the school or by telephone.
- If you need help with translation, the community assistant can help
- When you call the school's main number, there is an option for Spanish.

When in doubt, or if you need translation, ask for the **Community Assistant!**

See the [Problem-Solving Guide](#) for step-by-step who to talk to about different topics

How to Ask Questions Effectively

There are no "stupid" questions, but *how* you ask can make a big difference!

- **Be clear about what it is you hope to learn or get from someone.** *If the person you approach is not someone who can give you the information or help you need, ask to be directed to the person who can.*
- **Try to approach people in a positive way.** *If the person you approach feels attacked or blamed or simply overwhelmed by your anger or frustration, they may get defensive and not be able to focus as well on getting your problem resolved.*
- **Give some context, but start with the question before getting into details.** *In general, keep your message (spoken or written) short, clear, and to the point. Give the other person a chance to engage; you can always provide more information or context if they ask for it or don't seem to understand the situation.*
- **Take notes!** *At the end of the conversation, you can review the main "take-aways" to be sure that you and the person you're engaging with have a common understanding, including any next steps that you or they will take.*

Asking Questions in a Meeting

Informal Meetings - when you're called on (you've raised your hand); or - if it is a really informal or small meeting - any time that feels right

Formal Meetings - School level: ELAC, PTA, SSC | District Level (DELAC, CAC, LCAP PAC)
& Board Meetings:

- Public Comment (can make a comment or ask a question on any topic, usually at the beginning of the meeting- watch the time- they'll tell you whether you have 1, 2 or 3 minutes)
- On the agendized item (when specifically allowed- usually written on the agenda; raise your hand and wait to be acknowledged)
- Parking lot (at end of meetings)
- Anytime on CHAT during virtual meetings, but try to keep it to the topic at hand

How to Ask Questions in a Meeting

- *Take a breath and pat yourself on the back for being brave*
- Be **prepared**- Take notes on what you want to say
- Know what you hope to **accomplish**
- Watch your **tone** - seek to maintain or build rapport
- Keep in mind the time available, and purpose of the meeting
- Provide BRIEF **context** if necessary
- If the question is very sensitive or the response may require preparation ahead of time, **send ahead of time**. If not able to do that, acknowledge that you don't expect a full answer NOW, but would like it answered by next meeting

Pro-Tips!

When you are trying to resolve a more complex problem or address a systemic issue:

- Figure out who can help address the issue and schedule a time to meet or talk.
- Let the person know ahead of time what you are hoping to get from the meeting, so that they can prepare.
- Take notes and review what was agreed upon and who will do what next (and by what date!)
- If you need to go “up the chain of command” to resolve something, keep a record of emails sent and received.
- For issues that affect more than a few students, gather others’ testimony (to document the issue) and ideas (or desired outcomes).