

Parent/Teacher Conference Information



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Effective Parent Conferences

Research has shown that parental involvement is the most important factor in a student's success in school. For many parents, however, that involvement is limited to attendance at parent-teacher conferences. Having positive parent conferences is creating a parent-teacher team with a shared agreement about the role of each partner in helping the student to succeed in school and in life. There is a great deal of information about parent conferences. The following suggestions are just a beginning to assist in making this a positive experience for you, the parent and the student.

Involving Urban Parents

"Teachers in urban areas face special challenges when it comes to parent-teacher conferences," said Jeanne Belovitch, then president of a Boston, Massachusetts, organization devoted to increasing the involvement of urban parents in their children's education. "In the majority of cases, they will be talking to single parents who lead very complex lives. Those teachers need to understand that just because parents can't spend much time at school; it doesn't mean they aren't interested in their children's education."

Urban parents, Belovitch told Education World, want to know that teachers respect them as educational partners, and they want teachers to provide

- detailed information about their children's progress, in a language they can understand.
- advice on dealing with homework and avoiding confrontations over it.
- information about what they can do at home to reinforce what teachers are doing at school.
- ideas for additional learning activities.
- learning materials they can use with their children.
- advice on handling discipline problems.
- information about after-school programs

"Urban parents," Belovitch added, "want to be part of the educational process, but they are often intimidated by it." She suggests that urban educators

- use ordinary language. Professional jargon intimidates urban parents and keeps them from asking questions.
- let parents know that teachers understand their situation. If parents are comfortable, they'll take in more information.
- hold conferences in the evening in conjunction with a social event, such as a potluck supper, so parents can meet other parents, share information and ideas, and find support.
- establish and maintain communication.

"If a teacher is in continuous communication with a parent and builds rapport through the student, the parent will be more motivated to attend a conference," Belovitch said. "A lot of urban parents have written schools off because of their own student experiences. Teachers can help a great deal by replacing those negative experiences with positive ones."



http://www.education-world.com/a_curr/curr291.shtml

10 things you should never do in a parent-teacher conference...and ten strategies for success. *Veteran teachers share their dos and don'ts.*

New York Teacher October 7, 1998

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, experienced classroom teachers, including master teachers. Here are their thoughts on 10 common mistakes, along with ways to have a successful session:

1. **DON'T** summon parents into the classroom and direct them to sit in front of your desk. Parents may be anxious or fearful about meeting with you, a key authority figure in their child's life. If you distance yourself, put them in a subservient position, or appear to condescend, you're undercutting the chances of a successful meeting.

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. **DON'T** begin by focusing on the student's problem. One teacher recalled a parent-teacher conference when she was on the receiving end as the mother of a second-grader. "The teacher's first words to me were: 'Well, she's very messy.' She went on in detail about my daughter's messy desk, her writing – even her hair – until I wanted to cry. There was nothing about my daughter's wonderful sense of humor or her creativity. I wondered if she even liked my daughter." The students in your class are all somebody's beloved child, and parents come in hopes that you can see their child's best.

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.")

If you have access to a camera, take photos of your students to use on a seating chart or to jog your memory before parent-teacher conferences.

As a getting-to-know assignment, ask students to write about their interests, both academically and outside of school.

3. **DON'T** dress too casually for the occasion. Some people think casual attire will make the parent feel more comfortable, but experts say that can backfire. You are a professional, and professional attire communicates that message.

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

4. **DON'T** wing it.

DO rehearse what you want to say. Practice warm-up introductions, prepare an outline, prepare a checklist of areas to cover. Plan how you will keep track of time.

5. DON'T rely on verbal descriptions of the student's work and progress. Avoid subjective statements such as "His conduct is bad." Instead cite specifics such as: "She talks out of turn," or "He won't sit in his seat."

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. DON'T point a finger at parents or place blame.

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. DON'T dominate a meeting so that parents can't ask questions or make suggestions. There's so much you want to tell them, but think hard about how 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. Allow for occasional silences, which give the parent an opportunity to ask a question or voice a concern.

DO engage parents in planning best ways to help their child. Seek their suggestions first.

8. DON'T send them home empty-handed.

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 use educational jargon or acronyms. This can have a chilling effect on parent communications. Some common buzzwords that you know but parents might not: whole language, math manipulatives, SAT, ACT, IEP, paradigm, inclusive, cooperative learning.

DO use clear and descriptive terms. Adjust conference to the parent's needs and levels of understanding. If you must use a buzzword, get in the habit of using parenthetical definitions: "This year we will use math manipulatives, which are objects, like this set of marbles that let kids touch and experience what is meant by mathematical symbols."

10. DON'T end the meeting on a negative note by recounting student's problem.

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.

Parent Conference Structure

Conference Structure	Think about...
Pre-Conference	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What will parents do while they wait for their conference to begin (e.g., waiting area, materials to browse, slide show to view)? • What physical setting is most conducive to conversation (e.g., placement of tables, chairs, materials)?
Opening the Conference	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How will I greet parents and help them feel welcome? How will I address the many kinds of “parents” I could meet (e.g., mother, father, relative, foster parent, guardian)? How will I know the correct pronunciation of their name? • How will I address communication issues for parents whose first language is not English? • How will I let parents know my plan for the structure of the conference so we both have an “agenda” to follow and know when we each will have time to talk (e.g., poster board near conference setting, verbal description)? Do I want their input on how we will use our time, or will we follow my plan? • How will I communicate that I know and care about their student?
During the Conference	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When/how will information and materials be shared? What educational terms or “jargon” do I need to avoid or explain (e.g., criterion-referenced test; rubric)? How will I check for understanding? • What will I do to help us follow the plan and stay within our allotted time (e.g., have clock visible; verbal cues to switch to next part of the agenda)? • How will I make sure I listen to parents and allow ample time to hear their questions and concerns? • What will I do to assure that all family members present have ample opportunity to speak (e.g., <i>Mr. Jennison, we haven't heard from you yet. What are your thoughts on this issue?</i>)
Bringing the Conference to a Close	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When and how will I signal that the conference ending time is drawing near? • How will we all know what agreements have been made? • How will parents be clear about follow-up or next steps? • How will I assure that the conference ends on a positive note?

http://assist.educ.msu.edu/ASSIST/classroom/community/strategies/communicating_families/toolparentconf.doc.

27 Tips for Parent Conferences

This list of tips comes from TSTA/NEA.

1. Invite both parents

Encourage both parents to attend conferences when possible. Misunderstandings are less common if both parents hear what you have to say, and you'll be able to gauge the kind of support both parents give the child. (Of course, remember that both mother and father may not be available. Today, when some 60 percent of adult women work outside the home, it may not always be the mother who's available to meet. And many children come from single-parent homes; you could unwittingly hurt a child's feelings by always asking to meet the "mother.")

2. Make contact early

You'll get your relationship with parents off to a good start if you contact them early in the year, perhaps with a memo or newsletter sent home to all pupils. Give parents an outline of what their children will be studying, and let them know you'll be happy to meet with them during the year. (Be sure to say how and when they may contact you for conferences.)

3. Allow enough time

Schedule plenty of time for the meeting. Twenty to thirty minutes is usually adequate. If you're scheduling back-to-back conferences, be sure to allow enough time between them (10 minutes or so) so you can make necessary notes on the just-concluded conference and prepare for the upcoming one.

4. Be ready for questions

Be prepared to answer specific questions parents may have. They're likely to ask questions such as:

What is my child's ability level?

Is my child working up to his/her ability level?

How is my child doing in specific subjects?

Does my child cause any trouble?

Does my child have any specific skills or abilities in schoolwork?

5. Get your papers organized in advance

Assemble your grade book, test papers, samples of the student's work, attendance records and other pertinent data together ahead of time. That way you won't be fumbling through stacks on your desk during the meeting.

6. Plan ahead

Have in mind a general but flexible outline of what you're going to say, including a survey of student progress, a review of his or her strengths and needs, and a proposed plan of action.

7. Greet parents near the entrance they'll use

You'll alleviate anxiety and frustration (nothing is more confusing to the uninitiated than wandering around those look-alike school hallways trying to find the right classroom) and makes parents feel more welcome.

8. Get the name right

Don't assume that Jennifer Peabody's mother is Mrs. Peabody. She could well have been married again since Jennifer was born. Check your records ahead of time to make sure you've got the parents' names right. And don't assume that the wrinkled gray-haired gentleman coming in with Johnny is his grandfather. It could be his father, or an uncle. Politely ask. Try not to talk to the Smiths about their son "Stan" when their son's name is "Steve".

9. Avoid physical barriers

Don't sit behind your desk, while forcing the parents to squeeze into the children's desks on the front row or perch miserably on folding chairs. Arrange a conference-style seating if possible so you'll all be equals together.

10. Open on a positive note

Begin conferences on a warm, positive note to get everyone relaxed. Start with a positive statement about the child's abilities, work or interests.

11. Structure the session

As soon as the parents arrive, review the structure of the conference--the why, what, how, and when so that you'll both have an "agenda".

12. Be specific in your comments

Parents may flounder if you deal only in generalities. Instead of saying "She doesn't accept responsibility," pin down the problem by pointing out "Amanda had a whole week to finish her report but she only wrote two paragraphs."

13. Offer a suggested course of action

Parents appreciate being given some specific direction. If Jane is immature, it might be helpful to suggest parents give her a list of weekly chores, allow her to take care of a pet, or give her a notebook to write down assignments. (Of course, when you offer advice, let parents know you're only making a suggestion.)

14. Forget the jargon

Education jargon phrases like "criterion-referenced testing," "perceptual skills" and "least restrictive environment" may be just too much double-talk to many parents.

15. Turn the other cheek

In routine parent conferences, it's unusual to run into parents who are abusive and hostile. But it can happen. Try to not be rude, whatever the provocation. Hear out the parents in as pleasant a manner as possible, without getting defensive if you can.

16. Ask for parents' opinions

Let parents know you're interested in their opinions, are eager to answer their questions and want to work with them throughout the year to help make their child's education the best.

17. Focus on strengths

It's very easy for parents to feel defensive since many of them see themselves in their children. You'll help if you review the child's strengths and areas of need rather than dwelling on criticism or stressing weaknesses.

18. Use body language

Non-verbal cues set the mood of the conference. Smile, nod, make eye contact and lean forward slightly. You'll be using your body language to let parents know you're interested and approving.

19. Stress collaboration

Let the parent know you want to work together in the best interests of the child. A statement like "You need to see me as soon as possible to discuss Johnny's poor study habits" only arouses hostility, while "I'd like to discuss with you how we might work together to improve Johnny's study habits" gets the relationship off on the right foot.

20. Listen to what parents say

Despite the fact that we spend nearly a third of our lives listening, most adults are poor listeners. We concentrate on what we're going to say next, or we let our minds drift off to other concerns, or we hear only part of what a speaker is saying. You'll get more out of a parent conference if you really listen to what parents are saying to you.

21. Ask about the child

You don't want to pry, of course, but remember to ask the parents if there's anything they think you should know about the child (such as study habits, relationship with siblings, any important events in his or her life) which may affect his or her school work.

22. Focus on solutions

Ideally all parent conferences would concern only positive events. Realistically, many conferences are held because there's a problem somewhere. Things will go smoother if you focus on solutions rather than on the child's problem. Discuss what you and the parents can do to help improve the situation. Plan a course of action together.

23. Don't judge

It may not always be possible to react neutrally to what parents say, but communicating your judgments of parents' behaviors can be a roadblock to a productive relationship with them.

24. Summarize

Before the conference ends, summarize the discussion and what actions you and the parents have decided to take.

25. Wind up on a positive note

When you can, save at least one encouraging comment or positive statement about the student for the end of the conference.

26. Meet again if you need to

If you feel you need more time, arrange another meeting later rather than trying to rush everything before the kids get back from art class.

27. Keep a record of the conference

You may find it helpful later to have a brief record of what was said at the conference, what suggestions for improvement were made and so forth. Make notes as soon as possible after the conference while the details are still fresh.





Parent Conference Reminders

1. Greet the parents with a warm hello, a smile and a positive comment about the student. Have your seating arranged so that there is a seat available outside the door for any parent that may arrive early.
2. Tell the parent the purpose for the discussion. Ex.: I'd like to inform you about Mary's progress in reading. Be sure to include statements about the placement, where the student is now and what your goals are for the year. Present factual (based on data) data information concerning the purpose.
3. After discussion of a problem, tell the parent what YOU plan to do about helping this student meet his/her goal.
4. Have something available (if possible) to hand the parents and offer it to them in such a way that they want to take this material home and have it on hand for their child. A copy of your syllabus would be excellent to have ready, a summary of their grades (up to date) and some of the student work available for the parent to view.
5. When more than one teacher is going to be involved in the discussion of a child, be sure to notify the parents, therefore you will not overwhelm them. Be wary not to over burden them with all negative comments as well.
6. Above all, be sure that the parent knows that the school is willing to help the child in any way possible.
7. Let the parents do some of the talking. Much can be learned from the parents when they are given the chance to talk.
8. Listen attentively (eye contact), sensitivity (with appropriate nods and facial expressions) and empathy.
9. Listen closely to the parent. If he/she has many problems with the child, think carefully before you tell that parent anything derogatory. In cases where the child is considered a problem child by the parents, relate only academic strengths and weaknesses.
10. All information given to you should remain confidential.
11. Be positive with your remarks. WE are not here to make parents feel failure. We must also be very "up front" and straightforward with parents and not give them a wrong impression when there are serious concerns.
12. Be ethical at all times. If the parent discusses other teachers or other siblings listen only.
13. If the parent voices any criticism about the school, be positive in your answer but never defensive.
14. Be positive, confident and cooperative.
15. Close the conference by summarizing the purpose of the conference, the relevant facts and factors that have been discussed, and the plan of action or decisions that have resulted from the conference.

Saying It Better

By Diane Urban and Ruth Sammartano

How you convey information about a child can make or break a conference. Negative statements that seem judgmental may cause parents to bristle – and stop listening. Statements that are too general – or even too positive- may only confuse parents and obscure the fact that problem exists. Here are a few examples of negative statements, along with more positive ways to express the same points and to back them up with details.

Negative Style	Positive Style	Supporting details
He wastes half the morning fooling around	He has so much energy and curiosity that he sometimes has trouble keeping focused on his work.	He talks to his friends, looks to see what others are doing.
When something is difficult for him, he won't even try.	He's a good worker when he's familiar with the material. He needs to apply the same habits to unfamiliar material.	When the work is difficult, he asks to leave the room, tears the paper, throws his book on the floor.
If he doesn't like, you, you know it. He makes fun of children who aren't in his group.	He's very perceptive; he can identify other people's strengths as well as their weaknesses. That gives him an edge that he sometimes uses to pest the other children.	He know what makes others self-conscious (weight, height, braces) and he points it out to them (calls them fat, "shorty", "tinsel teeth")
He's disrespectful to adults.	He's very confident about his judgment. He often debates well, and in certain academic classes, that's good. But he needs to learn the limits of an appropriate debate.	He questions why he has to put a book away, to form a line for a fire drill, to sit properly in his seat.
He's immature.	He relates best to the younger children in the group.	He's either very quiet with more confident children, or acts silly to get attention; he's quick to cry when criticized.
His peers tease and taunt him and make him the scapegoat.	He works hard and is very polite, but seems to have trouble gaining his classmates' respect.	The others tease him about his glasses and his front teeth.
He's a follower; he uses poor judgment.	He's a very easygoing child and will do just about anything the children or I suggest. He may not always evaluate the risks associated with a peer's suggestion.	On Thursday, he put a thumbtack on Susie's seat because someone told him to; Yesterday, he swallowed something that someone told him to try.

Watch Your Language

There are many expressions which we use that leave a false or undesirable impression on parents and students. Some of these expressions are listed on the left. The list on the right contains words which we might use to leave a more positive impression.

Negative Expressions	More Positive Expressions
Must	Should
Lazy	Can do more when he tries
Trouble maker	Disturbs class
Uncooperative	Should learn to work with others
Cheats	Can do better work with help
Stupid	Can learn to be independent
Never does the right thing	Can learn to do the right thing
Below average	Working at his own level
Truant	Absent without permission
Impertinent	Discourteous
Steal	Without permission
Unclean	Poor habits
Dumbbell	Capable of doing better
Help	Cooperation
Poor	Handicapped
Calamity	Lost opportunity
Disinterested	Complacent, not challenged
Expense	Investment
Contribute to	Invest in
Stubborn	Insists on having his own way
Insolent	Outspoken
Liar	Tendency to stretch the truth
Wastes time	Could make better use of time
Sloppy	Could do neater work
Incurred failure	Failed to meet requirements
Mean	Difficulty in getting along with others
Time and again	Usually
Dubious	Uncertain
Poor grade of work	Below his usual standard
Clumsy	Not physically well-coordinated
Profane	Uses unbecoming language
Selfish	Seldom shares with others
Rude	Inconsiderate of others
Bashful	Reserved
Show-off	Tries to get attention
Will fail him	Has a chance of passing, if...

Student-Led Conferences at the Middle Level

Donald G. Hackmann

The time-honored parent-teacher conference format has traditionally excluded the student from the process. This model does little to facilitate dialogue between parent and child or to recognize the need for students to assume greater control of their academic progress. Fortunately, student-led conferences are emerging as a positive alternative to the traditional middle level parent-teacher conference.

Conference Goals

Middle level faculties have developed student-led conferences to achieve one or more of the following goals:

- to encourage students to accept personal responsibility for their academic performance;
- to teach students the process of self-evaluation;
- to facilitate the development of students' organizational and oral communication skills and to increase their self-confidence;
- to encourage students, parents, and teachers to engage in open and honest dialogue; and
- to increase parent attendance at conferences (Guyton & Fielstein, 1989; Hackmann, 1996; Hackmann, Kenworthy, & Nibbelink, 1995; Little & Allan, 1989).

Faculties using this model frequently report that, as a result of involvement in student-led conferences, parent and teacher bonds are strengthened. Both teacher and parent are more likely to initiate subsequent contacts throughout the remainder of the school year (Hackmann, 1996).

Student-Led Conference Model

Although the format and content of student-led conferences may vary from school to school, the concept remains the same: *the student is in charge of the academic conference with the parents*. The teacher simply serves as a discussion facilitator when needed. This increased accountability moves the student from passive—and frequently second-hand—recipient of information shared between teacher and parent, to active participant in a three-way interaction among parent, teacher, and student. Students assume "equal partner" status in discussions concerning their academic progress.

The student-led process typically is conceptualized as three distinct phases: preparation, the actual conference, and an evaluation component (Countryman & Schroeder, 1996; Little & Allan, 1989).

Preparation. Since the student-led model differs dramatically from the traditional parent-teacher conference, it cannot be assumed that middle level students will possess the self-confidence, organizational skills, and communication skills

necessary to lead a successful conference. Therefore, teachers must adequately prepare students and provide them with an appropriate conference structure. In the weeks prior to the conference, teachers instruct students on how to lead the conference, assist them with collecting and preparing information to be shared with parents, and describe how to explain and interpret any information to be shared. Students learn that excuses are not acceptable and understand that they must be able to present artifacts to their parents that depict their progress. Students who become actively involved may be motivated to improve their academic performance.

The student-led conference is designed to be a positive experience for the student. Therefore, students must be allowed sufficient time to prepare their conference folders and scripts. Practice is also important. Teachers should permit students to role-play various conference scenarios with student partners (Guyton & Fielstein, 1989) and should provide feedback to assist students in improving their presentations. Students gain confidence as they practice, and they also learn to anticipate questions that may be asked by their parents.

Prior to conference day, parents should be notified of the new conferencing format, and it should be clearly explained that the student will be in charge and the teacher will serve as a facilitator. Parents should be encouraged to support their child and could also be provided with a list of sample questions they may wish to ask their child during the conference (Hackmann, 1996).

The Conference. Since the student is in charge of the conference and is now adequately prepared to assume this responsibility, some school faculties question whether the teacher should be physically present at the actual conference or simply be available if needed. Schools have taken different approaches to this question. Some decide the teacher will indeed be present for the entire conference but will intervene only when necessary (Countryman & Schroeder, 1996; Hackmann et al., 1995). Other schools schedule three to four conferences in the teacher's room simultaneously, with the teacher moving freely from family to family and spending only a few minutes with each group (Guyton & Fielstein, 1989; Little & Allan, 1989).

Discussion of academic grades is typically the primary focus of the student-led conference, but grades should not be the only focus. With increased numbers of schools now using student portfolios, the student-led format also provides an excellent opportunity for students to share the contents of their portfolios and to explain why each artifact was selected

for inclusion. Additionally, the conference agenda may include discussion of artifacts that help explain grades (such as test and homework scores, homework assignments and student projects, and records of class attendance, class participation, and the number and types of missing assignments) and discussion of self-selected academic and social goals for the upcoming term. It is important to include both cognitive and affective components in the discussion, but the affective elements should not overshadow the focus on the child's academic progress.

The conferencing format should be envisioned as a process, rather than as an event. Parents and students should be discouraged from becoming fixated on past unsatisfactory performance and should be prompted to engage in mutual problem-solving. The teacher can assist families with the development of a plan of action that recognizes the student's accountability for academic progress while permitting parents to support the child in appropriate ways (Hackmann, Kenworthy, & Nibbelink, in press).

Since student-led conferences will in all likelihood include more content than a traditional parent-teacher conference, teachers find that conferences require more time. For example, Countryman and Schroeder's (1996) initial experience with student-led conferencing quickly led to the conclusion that their usual 15-minute timeframe was insufficient. Many schools recommend 20 or 30 minutes to allow for more substantive discussions (Guyton & Fielstein, 1989; Hackmann, 1996).

Evaluation. Either immediately following the conferences or shortly thereafter, students, parents, and teachers should be given an opportunity to provide their feedback concerning the effectiveness of the student-led format. This feedback is essential so that teachers can continue to fine-tune the conference model and can be responsive to the expressed needs of students and parents.

Schools employing this model note that parent attendance at conferences has increased (Hackmann, 1996) and assert that over 90% of parents and students prefer the student-led conference (Hackmann et al., in press). Students report increased self-confidence and personal satisfaction with being directly involved in the conferences. Parents begin to recognize their children's ability to assume increasing levels of responsibility and appreciate the opportunity to strengthen the lines of communication with their children. Citing a more positive and relaxed conferencing atmosphere, teachers report a reduced conference preparation workload and diminished levels of teacher stress during conferences (Hackmann et al., in press).

Traditional Parent-Teacher Conference Options

Although the majority of parents and students may recognize the benefits of student-led conferences, some parents may prefer a traditional parent-teacher conference, and others may simply desire a few minutes with the teacher to address some unresolved questions. Middle school faculties can address these parental concerns in the following ways:

- Allow parents the option of selecting either a student-led conference or a traditional parent-teacher conference;
- Reserve five minutes at the end of the student-led conference for a private conversation between parent and teacher; or

- Permit the parent to schedule a follow-up conference with the teacher, either during scheduled conference times or at a later date.

The Absent Parent

Occasionally, in spite of the best efforts of both student and teacher, a parent is unable to attend the scheduled conference. With the traditional parent-teacher conference, the teacher may never have an opportunity to meet with the parent. However, the student-led conferencing model does not require that the meeting between student and parent occur only at school. The student whose parent cannot attend or chooses not to attend the scheduled conference can still successfully conduct the conference at home.

For More Information

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Student-Led Conferences

During the school year, students in many Kansas City, Kansas Public Schools will participate in student-led conferences. Student-led conferences will be new for many students, parents, and teachers. This guide has been written for parents and others who want to better understand this form of conferencing. Additional information about student-led conferences can be obtained from your child's teacher or principal.

Why are We Having Student-Led Conferences?

We believe that student involvement in the conferences makes learning active, provides opportunities for students to evaluate their performance, and encourages students to accept responsibility for their learning. Having students take charge of the conference makes them more accountable for what they are learning. In addition, this form of conferencing creates a partnership between the home and the school that is hard to get in any other way. Both research and experience have demonstrated that student-led conferences offer many benefits including the following:

- stronger sense of accountability among students;
- stronger sense of pride in achievement among students;
- more productive student-teacher relationships;
- development of leadership skills among students;
- greater parental participation in conferences; and
- increased teacher focus on standards.

What Does a Student-Led Conference Look Like?

Prior to the conference, students will collect work that reflects what they have learned. Students will be taught how to select work samples and how to evaluate their work to determine their strengths and weaknesses. This work will usually be assembled in a portfolio or folder. As the students conduct the conference, they will explain skills they have learned and share goals they have set for themselves.

A block of time will be scheduled for you and your child to conference together. While a teacher or other staff member will serve as the conference facilitator, the student will lead the conference.

As your son or daughter shares his or her work, you may want to ask questions such as:

- What can you tell me about this assignment?
- What did you have to do to complete this assignment?
- What skills did you have to use?
- What would you do next time to improve your work?
- What goals have you set?
- How can I help you meet your goals?

Given our district's emphasis on literacy, your son or daughter will be asked to speak about the reading skills he or she is developing. Your child will provide you with a copy of the reading expectations. Your child's principal will have copies of the expectations if you do not receive a copy during the conference.

At the end of the conference, you will be asked to complete a quick survey that will help us evaluate the effectiveness of the conference. You can complete the survey at school immediately after the conference. If time does not permit you to complete the survey at school, it can be filled out at home and returned to school with your son or daughter.

What's the Role of the Parent in Student-Led Conferences?

We believe that student-led conferences are an important experience for all students and hope that all parents will be able to participate. Your role is critical to the success of the conference.

Your first role is as a listener. Having a parent audience for learning gives students a powerful reason to learn and work hard.

Your second role as a parent is to talk with the student about the work that will be presented. You will gain a better understanding of the academic expectations set for your child.

Your third role as a parent is to identify ways you can support the student to achieve goals that will be set for the next grading period.

What's the Role of the Student During Student-Led Conferences?

Students should be able to explain academic standards, discuss how the standards are reflected in their classroom work, and be able to set goals for improving performance during the next academic term.

What's the Role of the Teacher in Student-Led Conferences?

Teachers have several roles in preparing and conducting student-led conferences. Critical to the success of the conferences are three major activities:

- The teacher makes sure that all students know and can discuss the academic standards.
- The teacher makes sure conference materials are available for students and parents.
- The teacher schedules and organizes the conferences to ensure successful communication.

What Should a Parent Do if He or She Cannot Attend the Conference?

Student-led conferences can be a very special time for you and your child. Please make yourselves available for these conferences. Schools will try to accommodate parent schedules. However, if it is not possible for you to attend alternate appointment times, you may want to ask a grandparent, another relative, or perhaps a family friend to take your place.

What Should a Parent Do if He or She Wants a Private Conference with the Teacher?

If, after attending the student-led conference, you wish to schedule an appointment to speak privately with the teacher, please let the teacher know.

Conference Forms and Communication

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Parent Teacher Conference Record

Student Name: _____ Grade: _____ Subject: _____

Date: ___/___/20___

Parents/ Guardians in attendance: _____

Student present: yes no

Parents'/ Guardian' comments and concerns:

Teacher comments and concerns:

Misc. Info:

Plan of action:

Conference Reminder



A conference has been scheduled for you:

When: _____

Where: _____

Time: _____

How To Get the Most From Parent-Teacher Conferences

When parents and teachers work together, they make an unbeatable team. Parent conferences can help build the teamwork that helps kids learn better. Some planning by parents can help make conferences a success.

1. **Think about what you want to learn in the conference. Prepare some questions. For example:**
 - How is my child doing in class?
 - Does my child use time well? Does he/she have good work habits/
 - Does my child turn in homework? Does he/she have any missed assignments?
 - Does my child have friends? Does he/she get along with others?
 - What can I do at home to support what you are doing?
2. **Talk with your child.** Ask what he/she thinks the teacher will say. Ask if he/she has any concerns. And talk about likes, dislikes, problems, and successes.
3. **Ask the teacher to explain anything you don't understand.** Special programs and testing situations are sometimes referred to by initials. For example the FCAT is the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test.
4. **Be prepared to talk and listen.** Tell the teacher what you see at home. Talk about your child's interests. Tactfully, talk about any concerns. And be sure to let the teacher know about anything that might affect your child's learning.
5. **Follow-up.** Stay in touch with the teacher. Give phone numbers and/or email contact information.