



Student-Led Conferences, October 2017

Parents

Introduction

In a traditional parent-teacher conference, the teacher and parent sit down together and discuss the student's progress and shortcomings while the student watches in silence. Student-led conferences aim to change that by putting students in charge of the conversation. Our goal is to not only make students more aware of how they learn, but to also teach them to take ownership for their part in the learning process.

What about the teachers? Well, a more appropriate name for all of this might be *student-led, teacher supported conferences*, but that's just too wordy. Regardless of what it's called, you'll sit down with your child first, but once you're done, you are still welcome to go around and talk to individual teachers if you'd like. No part of this is required, although some teachers may want you to sign a grade sheet if you can't make it. For the duration, however, your student is in charge.

Step 1: Start with the Portfolio

You'll start by sitting down with your child and their portfolio. They've been trained on what to do, so you just need to sit back and listen as they take you through their classes, highlighting their best work and talking about what they will do about improving the rest. Do your best to let them lead the conversation, and save your questions until they've finished.

Step 2: Meet the Teachers

Once you and your child have spent some time going through their work, you will have the chance to go around and meet the teachers. Again, try to let your student take charge. Let them introduce you, but **please don't just repeat the discussion you had about the portfolio**. The point is that you can get answers to questions still unanswered after meeting with your student. If you don't have any questions for teachers, you are not required to visit with them, although you are more than welcome. In order to avoid long lines, we ask that you keep your conversations with teachers to around **5 minutes**.

If lines are long or 5 minutes isn't enough time and you want to meet with a specific teacher, sign up on the sheet outside of their door and the teacher will contact you to set up a meeting.

Step 3: Be Proud of Your Student

It's scary for kids to talk to adults, especially when it's about themselves. This process was hopefully a big step forward in getting them to step up and be responsible for how they are doing in class, so make sure they know that you're proud of them for taking charge – especially if they're struggling academically.



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Students

Introduction

Nothing is worse than sitting at a parent-teacher conference and listening to your parents talk to your teachers about you. This year, we're putting you in charge. The week before your parents come in, you will gather samples of your work from every one of your classes. When your parents come to school, you will take this portfolio of your work and talk them through what you're doing in school.

The most important thing to know about this portfolio is that it's for you more than for your parents. When you're done, you should not only know what you've done that was awesome, but you'll also know why you were able to do it. If you have some work that you didn't learn as well as you could, you'll know what you can do to make sure you learn it next time. It's all about making you aware of how you learn so that you can keep doing what works and stop doing what doesn't.

What You'll Need in Your Portfolio

- A folder (We'll give you one in your 1st Hour the day before conferences)
- A sample of your best work from each class
- A sample of something that could have gone better from each class
- A reflection on each work sample
- A printout of your grades for each class (Your teacher will give you one)
- A plan of action to improve how you learn
- The conversation prompts. (This should be in the folder we gave you)

What You'll Do

Take the folder with you to each of your classes on the Wednesday before the conference. Your teachers will help you gather the work samples and write the reflections, as well as tell you how you can make up any missed or late work so that you can make a plan of action.

You'll also get the chance to practice the things you'll talk about with your parents. Your 6th Hour teacher will collect the folder at the end of the day on Wednesday and give it to the office so we can make sure it's there for you when you get here with your parents on Thursday.

Once you're here with them, you'll take them through the conversation prompts in your portfolio. Remember to take charge. These are your classes, your grades, and your life. Own it.



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Teachers

Introduction

Parent-teacher conferences are usually a bittersweet experience. Yes, it's good to talk to the parents. Yes, it's good to finally vent to them about their child's behavior. But so much of the negative conversation can be rendered unnecessary if the students can be trained to take ownership for what's happening in class. Student-led conferences won't do it alone, but it's a step in the right direction.

In short, student-led conferences just mean that students take the lead. They meet with their parents first in order to talk them through what they've done in class that was great, what wasn't so great, and what they can do about it. Once they've gone through their progress with their parents, they come to see you if they'd like to do so. At that point, parents can meet you, confirm what they've heard, and ask any questions that remain. **This should not be a repeat of the conversation they had with their parents** and should mostly be a few clarifications. If it's taking longer, please suggest they sign up for a time on the sheet we'll put outside of your door.

What You Need to Do Beforehand

You'll be given a folder for each of your 1st hour students on Wednesday, along with the forms they'll need in order to compile, prepare and reflect on their work. This portfolio will travel with them to all of their classes and then be turned in their 6th hour teacher at the end of the day. During 6th hour, you will then help them make a plan of action based on how they are doing overall. **You'll alphabetize the folders and we'll collect portfolios at the end of 6th hour** and have during the conferences sorted by 6th hour teacher.

On Wednesday, you will need provide all students with an up-to-date printout of their grades, go over how any make-up work can be done, and help them compile and reflect on work samples for your class.

The Portfolio Should Include

- A folder (Given out during 1st Hour and collected 6th hour)
- A sample of their best work from each class
- A sample of something that could have gone better from each class
- A reflection on each work sample (short, on the form)
- A printout of their grades for each class (provided by you)
- A plan of action to improve how they learn
- The conversation prompts. (This should be in the folder we gave you)

What You Should Do at the Conference

Don't take over. Let the students introduce you to their parents. By the time they come to you, they'll have already talked about grades, how to improve them, and much more. Defer to the student as much as possible to answer parents' questions. Talk to the student instead of the parent whenever possible. Please keep meetings to 5 minutes or so, and direct any who need more time to sign up for a meeting.



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Teacher Timeline

October 2nd

Explain the premise of student-led conferences to your Tribe Time class. We'll be providing information to students, parents and the community on the subject this week as well, so what you do in class will help to clarify and answer questions. Most importantly, students should realize that the purpose of student-led conferences is to make them not only an active participant in their education, but the ones actually in charge of what happens.

Tell students to begin collecting samples of their best work, and work that could be improved. We will provide an actual folder for students to use on the Wednesday before the conference, but students should begin the process of gathering now. You are welcome to experiment with the level of control you exert over them on what they collect and how they organize it. What matters is that by the conference, they have an assortment of work to choose from when deciding what represents their best work, and what work they can improve upon.

Frontload the discussion on how they are doing and how they can improve. Whenever possible, discuss with students (as a class or individually) how they are doing and what specifically can be done to improve on assignments. Our goal is to have students so aware of what they can do to improve that they'll be the experts when their parents ask at the conference.

October 5th – All Classes

Have students pick their work samples. Let them sort through their collected work and choose a sample of their best work from your class, as well as something that could be improved. Try not to micromanage what they include. You are welcome to give suggestions on what process they can use to decide, but don't tell them exactly what to put in the final portfolio. If they don't have a physical copy, no sweat.

Continue to discuss how work/habits can be improved. They need to *know* what they can do to improve. Not think they know, and not just have a vague idea. They should *know*. This means handing out grades, going over makeup procedures, and making sure they understand not only where they stand, but how they can improve.

Have students reflect on their work. Using the form provided, students should write a few sentences on their best work and how they can improve in your class. They will use this when talking to their parents.

October 5th – 6th Hour

Reflect on their work as a whole. By now, they'll have reflected on each individual class. Have them, on the form, reflect on things they can improve on as a whole. Are their low scores usually on homework? Tests? Do they need to go to bed sooner? Learn to ask for help? Whatever it is, they should be pulling back and looking at themselves as a student. Again, don't micromanage. Give suggestions, answer questions, discuss how work can be made up and habits can be improved, but mostly try to simply facilitate their efforts rather than dictate what to write.

Turn their portfolios in to the office after 6th Hour.



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October 5th (During the Conferences)

Wait in your room for parents. We'll send them to first to meet with their parents. Once students have held the guided discussion with their parents, they'll come to you.

Don't take over the conversation. Let the students be in charge. They'll initiate introductions, ask their parents if they have questions for you, etc. As often as possible, turn responsibility for the discussion back onto the student. Parents will need training on going to their student for answers and you for confirmation, but it will help them in the long run. It won't be possible with every student, but when a parent asks you a question, let the student answer when you can.

Keep it brief. If things are obviously going to take a while, have them sign up outside your room to set up a meeting with you at a later time.

Don't repeat. Try to avoid letting them rehash what they've talked about in the cafeteria. This should be clarification questions or simple introductions. If an 'A' student comes in with their parents, don't ask why they are here – thank them for being involved and introduce yourself. Most involved parents just want to know who is teaching their child.

Be positive. Above all, remember that this, for many parents, is the only contact they'll have with the school all year. Make sure it's positive and it'll do wonders for the community perception of us as educators.

Do not make this a part of their grade, unless you are offering an alternate means of getting the same points. For example, they could get points for visiting with you or getting their grade sheet signed. We will send out a list of which students didn't attend based on which folders don't get picked up, and we'll send those folders home with instructions. Again, this shouldn't be required as the only way to get points. It punishes kids with parents who aren't as involved.



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Student/Parent Conversation Prompts

Welcome Them

- Thank them for coming.
- Thank them for all the help they give you at home.

Be the Teacher

- Explain why you're in charge of this conference.
- Ask them to let you be in charge of the conversation.

Talk about Your Classes

- For each class, show your parents:
 - Something you've done in class that shows what you've learned.
 - Something you've done in class that you could have done better.
- For each thing you did well or could work on, tell your parents specifically:
 - What you did to make sure you learned it.
 - What you can do to learn what you haven't yet.

Let Them Ask Questions

- Don't wait until you meet with the teacher. Let your parents ask *you* the questions before you go to the teachers. You are not required to visit teachers if they don't have any questions after talking to you.

Optional: Introduce Them to Your Teachers

- If your parents would like to meet with a teacher, it's your job to handle introductions. **Don't just repeat the same conversation you had with your parents.** Let them ask any questions you couldn't answer, introduce them, but you answer as much as you can.



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Reflection & Plan Instructions

Reflection on Best Work

Don't summarize the assignment. Instead, write down what you did to learn the material and complete the assignment. Did you tell your friends you couldn't talk until the assignment was done? Did you ask the teacher to explain it again? Did you ask your parents for help? Be specific.

Reflection on Work That Needs Improvement

Again, don't summarize the assignment. Instead, write down what you did that might have made it hard for you to learn the material and complete the assignment. Did you doodle instead of listening to instructions? Did you get distracted by a note from your friend? Are you not understanding what's explained by the teacher?

More importantly, what can you do about it? Can you talk to the teacher and ask for extra help? Can you get with another student and work on a concept? Can you see if your parents can explain it in a different way? Be specific about what you can do to improve.

Making an Action Plan (During 6th Hour)

Once you've reflected on your work in every class, pull back and look for patterns. Do you succeed when you relate well to the teacher? Does it make it harder to do your work when you've been playing football after school? Do you need to make a change on how and when you ask for help?

You are in school to learn how to learn, so this is your chance to look back and make a plan so that you know you'll succeed going forward.



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Reflection Form

1st Hour Best Work (Not a summary, but why it's your best work)

1st Hour Work to Improve (Not a summary, but how you can improve)

2nd Hour Best Work (Not a summary, but why it's your best work)

2nd Hour Work to Improve (Not a summary, but how you can improve)

3rd Hour Best Work (Not a summary, but why it's your best work)

3rd Hour Work to Improve (Not a summary, but how you can improve)



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4th Hour Best Work (Not a summary, but why it's your best work)

4th Hour Work to Improve (Not a summary, but how you can improve)

5th Hour Best Work (Not a summary, but why it's your best work)

5th Hour Work to Improve (Not a summary, but how you can improve)

6th Hour Best Work (Not a summary, but why it's your best work)

6th Hour Work to Improve (Not a summary, but how you can improve)

Plan of Action (What Did You Learn, and What Comes Next?)
