



## Research Brief

### Student Led Conferences

**Question:** What is going on at the High School level with Student Led Conferences?

**Summary of Findings:** For years parent-teacher conferences have been the primary means of parent-teacher communication. Because traditional parent-teacher conferences exclude 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. But now, many schools are trying something new – student-led conferences that communicate not only how a student is doing but also why. As the name "Student-Led Conference" implies, students take the lead by sharing samples of their course work, discussing interests and goals, and working together with their parents on a preliminary plan for the balance of high school and beyond. This form of conferencing allows all three people to form a partnership that is equal among stakeholders.

Student-led conferences are designed 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.

The student-led process typically has three phases: preparation, the actual conference, and an evaluation component. To prepare students for 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. During the actual conference, discussion of academic grades is typically the primary focus, but the student-led format also provides an opportunity for students to share the contents of their portfolios and to discuss self-selected academic and social goals for the upcoming term. After the conference, students, parents, and teachers should be given an opportunity to provide their feedback concerning the effectiveness of the student-led format. If some parents want to meet with the teacher alone, teachers can give parents the option of selecting either a student-led conference or a traditional parent-teacher conference, reserving 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.

Much of what is written about student led conferences is written about elementary or middle level implementation. But much of the middle level literature should be helpful to high schools interested in them.

That said, numerous high school web sites indicated that those schools use student led conferences as part of their program. For example, Mead and Mount Spokane High School freshmen, along with their parents and advisors, recently completed Mead's first-ever high school Student-Led Conferences. Feedback from parents,



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### Research Brief

students and advisors alike regarding these conferences was extremely positive. When asked "Was this conference worthwhile?" over 98 percent of parents, 84 percent of students, and 100 percent of advisors responded "Yes." One parent, echoing the comments of many others, stated, "I liked seeing our son take ownership of his education." Another parent wrote, "These conferences gave a perspective that isn't always brought up at home." Student feedback consistently indicated satisfaction with "being in charge" of the conference and fulfillment in being able to share course work and interests with their parents. As one Mead High School student wrote, "Finally, I got to show my mom all of the hard work I had done."

#### Online Resources:

##### **Student-Led Conferences at the Middle Level. ERIC Digest.**

Hackmann, Donald G.;

Because traditional parent-teacher conferences exclude 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. Student-led conferences are a positive alternative to the traditional middle level parent-teacher conference.

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[http://www.eric.ed.gov:80/ERICWebPortal/Home.portal?\\_nfpb=true&eric\\_viewStyle=list&ERICExtSearch\\_SearchValue\\_0=%22student+led+conferences%22&ERICExtSearch\\_SearchType\\_0=eric\\_metadata&eric\\_pageSize=50&eric\\_displayNrtreiver=false&eric\\_displayStartCount=1&\\_pageLabel=RecordDetails&objectId=0900000b801b5314](http://www.eric.ed.gov:80/ERICWebPortal/Home.portal?_nfpb=true&eric_viewStyle=list&ERICExtSearch_SearchValue_0=%22student+led+conferences%22&ERICExtSearch_SearchType_0=eric_metadata&eric_pageSize=50&eric_displayNrtreiver=false&eric_displayStartCount=1&_pageLabel=RecordDetails&objectId=0900000b801b5314)

##### **Mead's First-Ever Student-Led Conferences a Success!**

Mead and Mount Spokane High School freshmen, along with their parents and advisors, recently completed Mead's first-ever high school Student-Led Conferences. Feedback from parents, students and advisors alike regarding these conferences was extremely positive. As the name "Student-Led Conference" implies, students take the lead by sharing samples of their course work, discussing interests and goals, and working together with their parents on a preliminary plan for the balance of high school and beyond.

[http://coldfusion.mead.k12.wa.us/msd/Learning\\_Services/Resources/Student\\_Led\\_Conferences.cfm](http://coldfusion.mead.k12.wa.us/msd/Learning_Services/Resources/Student_Led_Conferences.cfm)

##### **Student Led Conferences at the Secondary Level**

Karen Dickinson

The director of Curriculum and Instruction of Federal Way Public Schools explains an effective way to engage students and parents in the process of assessment that has useful outcomes for both. Each school developed its own rubrics using the theory that if you build it yourself you are more likely to use it. Teachers spent the year learning how to create standards based portfolios and had two sessions of student led conferences through their advisory. The author concludes, "Considering it was their first year, the teachers and administrators did an amazing job."

<http://www.newhorizons.org/strategies/assess/dickinson.htm>



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#### **Student-Led Conferencing Using Showcase Portfolios.**

Benson, Barbara; Barnett, Susan;

This book explains to teachers and administrators the processes for creating student showcase portfolios to be used in student-led conferences. The portfolio is an assessment document of student performance, while the student-led conference truly demonstrates student learning. Creating portfolios without the purpose of sharing them with an authentic audience is too much work with too little reward for students and teachers. These strategies are discussed in the following chapters: (1) "Informing Everyone"; (2) "Building Student Portfolios"; (3) "Planing and Preparing Student-Led Conferences"; (4) "Conducting Conferencing"; (5) "Reflecting and Celebrating"; and (6) "Improving Student Learning: The Evidence." One resource section contains sample forms, and the other discusses additional types of portfolios.

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#### **Student-Led Conferences: A Growing Trend**

For years parent-teacher conferences have been the primary means of parent-teacher communication. But now, many schools are trying something new -- student-led conferences that communicate not only how a student's doing but also why.

[http://www.education-world.com/a\\_admin/admin112.shtml](http://www.education-world.com/a_admin/admin112.shtml)

#### **Student-Led Conferences Hold Kids Accountable**

Would you like to find a way to actively engage students in their learning process and increase parent attendance at conferences? Student-led conferences can accomplish those two objectives. Included: Highlights of research about student-led conferences.

[http://www.educationworld.com/a\\_curr/curr323.shtml](http://www.educationworld.com/a_curr/curr323.shtml)

#### **Student-Led Parent Conferences: How To Launch and Manage Conferences That Get Parents Involved and Improve Student Learning.**

Picciotto, Linda Pierce;

Student-led parent conferences allow students to gain significant insights about themselves as learners in ways traditional parent-teacher conferences do not. This guide draws on two teachers' experience to help other teachers implement student-led parent conferences that will enhance parent involvement and student learning. Chapter 1, "Why Use Student-Led Conferences," describes the process and outlines benefits for parents, students, and teachers. Chapter 2, "Looking Back at Our First Student-Led Conferences," discusses planning steps for student-led conferences, including incorporating all parts of the curriculum, preparing a schedule, discussing the plan with parents, preparing forms for the student-led conference, and preparing students for the conferences. Chapter 3, "How the Conference Centers Worked," highlights the materials and activities used at the reading, writing, math, science, art, gym, and refreshment table conference centers. Chapter 4, "Discoveries and Responses," presents findings from implementing student-led conferences,



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especially parent and student feedback, and addresses special family situations. Chapter 5, "Activities at the Centers and Parents' Questions," describes possible activities for the various centers and lists questions for parents to ask their child during the activity. Chapter 6, "Other Teachers, Other Schools, Other Schedules," shares the approaches of six other teachers as examples to assist in designing a schedule. Chapter 7, "Reports and Comments on Conferences," discusses the three-way report card as a replacement for the traditional report card, in which parent, child, and teacher make comments regarding each center.

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#### **Implementing Student-Led Conferences. Experts in Assessment Series.**

Bailey, Jane M.; Guskey, Thomas R.;

This book explains how teachers can serve as facilitators as students lead their parents through discussion of their work. The 9 chapters are: (1) "Philosophy and Purpose of Student-Led Conferences" (relevance, responsibility, and reporting to parents); (2) "Roles and Responsibilities of Participants" (teacher, student, parent, administrator, office staff, and support teacher role); (3) "Designing Formats for Student-Led Conferences" (individual or student-involved conferences, simultaneous conferences with multiple families, and presentation or showcase conferences); (4) "Preparing Students to Lead Conferences" (e.g., portfolios, making time for reflection, role-playing, and preparing students); (5) "Preparing Parents and Colleagues for Student-Led Conferences" (communicating the concept, preparing parents, and introducing the concept to colleagues); (6) "Organizing for Student-Led Conferences: It's All in the Details" (e.g., scheduling, arranging facilities, and encouraging parent participation); (7) "Anticipating and Handling Unique Solutions" (e.g., parents who cannot attend, potentially abusive parents, and students with special needs); (8) "Evaluating Student-Led Conferences" (e.g., gathering comments from parents, students, and colleagues); and (9) "The Role of Student-Led Conferences in Authentic Assessment and Reporting." Student conference resources are included.

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Submitted By: Mike Muir, Maine Center for Meaningful Engaged Learning

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