STUDENT-LED CONFERENCES

What are student-led conferences?
They are parent-teacher conferences in which the child is not only present, but in charge of explaining his or her progress, reflecting on accomplishments, and setting short and long-term goals.

Why should I do student-led conferences?
- Show parents and students that their opinions and experiences are valued by the teacher
- Empower the child to take responsibility for her learning
- Give the parent and teacher a chance to hear the student reflect on his progress in his own words
- Reassure students that parents and teacher are there to support them
- Hold students accountable for their academic and behavioral choices
- Give the parent the opportunity to see the teacher and child interact
- Provide the teacher with insight into the parent-child relationship and home structure in a non-intimidating way
- Take unnecessary pressure off of the teacher by focusing on the student and his work samples
- Because parents and students love doing them! (Turn out is often higher than traditional conferences)

When should I do student-led conferences?
You should do what is best for you and your families. As a general suggestion for the first conference of the year, the student should be nearby in the room but out of earshot (reading in the library area, etc.) so that the parents and teacher can speak privately but the child can still be involved as needed. In the first conference, the parent primarily provides background information on the child and the teacher clarifies expectations and progress thus far. Later conferences can then be student-led, as often as once a quarter, with parent-teacher only conferences as needed.

What preparation do I need to do before the conferences?
Because students take responsibility for these conferences, they require very little work for the teacher. You only need to set up a class routine in which students are regularly selecting work for their portfolios. There are lots of ways to do this. One easy way is to have the children select their best work each week from their Friday Folders (or whichever procedure you use for sending home graded papers) and write on a sticky note why they chose that paper. Have students keep their papers in date order in their portfolio (a hanging file, file folder, or even a clean pizza box-ask a pizzeria to donate a class set- if you have a lot of 3D or large work samples). The day of the conference, the student pulls her portfolio and, ideally, practices presenting the papers to a buddy, to you, or to herself.

How do the conferences work?
The child shows his parent(s) his best work from the child-created portfolio and uses the sticky notes he attached to each work sample to help explain why he chose that assignment.

The child may also demonstrate how to solve a math problem that was challenging, read a passage to demonstrate a reading strategy, share a story s/he wrote and explain the writing process used,

The teacher uses the student work as a springboard for discussion during the portfolio sharing and afterwards (however the conversation flows best). As a general rule, direct questions to the child first, and follow up with questions for the parent as appropriate.

The ideal interaction is fluid, casual, and focused on all 3 parties sharing their insights in a positive way. The child typically enjoys being the center of attention and parents appreciate being asked for their opinions. The teacher is able step down from the responsibility of imparting negative information and judgment about a child’s abilities and progress, and move into the role of guiding the family towards mutually-drawn conclusions through carefully selected questioning techniques, conversation, and the sharing of observations. Conferences generally last 20-60 minutes, depending on the level of interaction between the parent and child.

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# Sample Questions For Student-Led Conferences

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<tr>
<th>Question Type</th>
<th>Ask the Child…</th>
<th>Ask the Parent…</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Attitude Toward School</strong></td>
<td><strong>How are you feeling about school right now? Do you like coming to school? What do you like about it?</strong></td>
<td><strong>Are those the kind of things you’re hearing at home, too?</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Strengths</strong></td>
<td><strong>What do you think is your strongest subject? Why do you think that?</strong></td>
<td><strong>Do you agree? Was this a strength for your child last year, too?</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Weaknesses</strong></td>
<td><strong>What subject has been the hardest for you this year?</strong></td>
<td><strong>Do you see that area as being the most difficult for your child?</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Areas of Confusion</strong></td>
<td><strong>Is there anything we've been doing in class that is not making sense to you or that you think you need to do better in? How can mom and I help you with that?</strong></td>
<td><strong>Are there any procedures or assignments that you're unsure about or that you don't think are working well for your child right now?</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Homework</strong></td>
<td><strong>How has homework been going (amount, type, etc.)? What has been helpful? Has anything felt like busywork that isn't helping you learn? What can we do to make homework really useful practice for you?</strong></td>
<td><strong>What are your feelings about that?</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Home Support</strong></td>
<td><strong>What else can we set up for you at home to help you do your best? (Find websites, games, set up a HW routine, determine how you will get books to read at home, find extra practice work, etc.)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Is there any resources or extra practice activities you’d like for me to send home?</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Social Development</strong></td>
<td><strong>How are you getting along with the other kids in the class? Who are your friends in class? Is there anything going on between you and the other kids in our class that we need to talk about?</strong></td>
<td><strong>Is this what you’ve been hearing from your child at home? Does s/he seem happy with the friends s/he’s made in our class?</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Goals</strong></td>
<td><strong>Let's set a goal for this quarter. What is the one thing you would most like to accomplish? Let’s make a plan to help you do that.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Is there anything specific that you would like to see your child improve this quarter? What can I do to help support your child and your family with that?</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Follow Up</strong></td>
<td><strong>If you think of anything else you need to do well in school, please tell your parents or me. We are here talking with you to learn about you. We’re doing that because we care so much about you and want you to be successful in everything you do. We believe you are smart and we want to do everything possible to help you be your very best.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Please call (email, etc.) if you have any questions or concerns about anything. I will be happy to meet with you as often as you like. I’m so glad you came in and we had a chance to talk about all the wonderful things your child is accomplishing this year. When we meet again, let’s talk about how your child did as far as meeting the goal we set today, and then we’ll set another goal for the remainder of the year.</strong></td>
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