CAN WE *talk?*
student-led conferences

Professional development for the transition

CAN WE *talk?*
student-led conferences

Empowering students to take a more focal part in delivering information about their achievements to their parents during conferences has benefits beyond them gaining greater self-esteem and confidence in their presentation skills. Some of the benefits of Student-Led Conferences, research says, include:

- Students experiencing increased accountability for their academic performance

- Improving student motivation to learn, which results in boosts to state assessment scores and decreases in discipline problems

- Parents feeling a greater sense of partnership with schools

- Parents attending conferences at a higher rate

- Teachers reporting an overall more meaningful conference experience.

What is a Student-Led Conference?

This conference format allows students to talk about their school work, describe their goals and discuss their plans for reaching their goals with their parents.

Teachers facilitate the conversation by guiding students to expound upon certain points or to invite their parents to offer feedback.

Transitioning to a Student-Led Conference

There is no one perfect way to implement this conference format. Schools that commit to implementing student-led conferences will need to set realistic goals and expectations.

Additionally, leadership at these schools will have to devote professional development time to teaching the concepts behind this conference format and the steps necessary to equip teachers, students and parents to complete this conference format.

Genuine staff buy-in is also critical in making this conference format successful.

> **"Can every conference be led by the students? My child felt he belonged and we weren't talking through him,"** – *Wichita Public Schools Parent response on a Post Student-Led Conference Survey*

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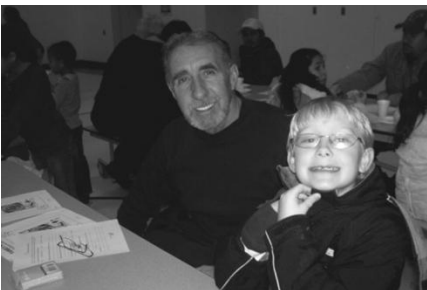## Family Engagement and Student-Led Conferences

When parents are involved in their children's education, children do better in school, reports the National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education.

Parent Teacher Conferences offer one of the most recognizable opportunities to build rapport with families while also discussing individual student achievement.

Beyond discussing individual student achievement, conferences encourage two-way communication between home and school that allows teachers to seek partnership with parents by equipping them with strategies to help extend their child's learning beyond the classroom.

When schools view parents and families as partners, they create a learning environment reflective of "Open-Door" or "Partnership" schools cited in "Beyond the Bake Sale: The Essential Guide to Family-School Partnerships. " Harvard researcher Karen Mapp, in the book, describes such schools as having a culture where people do "whatever it takes to work closely together to make sure every single student succeeds."

Benefits of Student-Led Conferences

The School Community Journal captured results from a four-state study involving more than 500 middle school students that reported since implementing student-led conferences:

1. All schools reported higher scores on state tests in reading and math since implementing [student-led conferences]
2. A significant decline in discipline problems
3. All teachers reported they plan lessons with more intent
4. No teacher voiced a desire to return to the traditional parent-teacher conference format
5. Parent participation in conferences has increased significantly to a minimum of 92 percent participation at all four schools
6. Over 90 percent of students reported setting goals for their work; of these, 49 percent indicated they have always one this and 43 percent indicated they do this because they participated in [student-led conferences]
7. Teachers reported that student work is more focused and that students have been more academically successful

The study can be found at www.eric.ed.gov, an online digital library of education and research information that is sponsored by the Institute of Education Sciences of the United States Department of Education.

Wichita Public Schools
Parent-Teacher Conference

CAN WE talk?
student-led conferences

Elementary Level Transitions to Student-Led Conferences

Elementary schools have a distinct advantage when it comes to Parent-Teacher Conferences compared with other levels: 100 percent attendance. Because many set the expectation of having 100 percent attendance, the transition to Student-Led Conferences means more parents will be able to experience and offer their feedback on the format change, which, in turn, could help schools more confidently customize their Student-Led Conference formats.

One major challenge at this level, however, is rolling out equally engaging Student-Led formats for Pre-K through 1st where children may struggle to add meaningful dialogue to the conference compared with their upper-level counterparts.

Sample information from this section is based on Adams' Elementary School's Student-Led conference plan. Adams' Principal Kimberly Jackson led the transition effort. Adams' plan featured 30-minute conferences. Half of the time students completed short academic exercises in three learning centers with their parents. Upon completion, the student led discussion about their goals and their academic and behavior goals with teachers facilitating the discussion. Teachers then asked parents to discuss their observations from the learning centers and other matters of interest or concern. Parents then received take-home materials to support their children's learning, and participated in a post-conference survey.

The results, Jackson said, were overwhelmingly positive for parents and teachers.

Training In this section includes:

- Surveying to gauge staff readiness to transition
- Using data to assess readiness to transition
- Preparing staff for the transition to Student-Led
- Preparing student portfolios

CAN WE talk?
student-led conferences

Surveying to gauge staff readiness to transition

Description: Survey **Intended Audience:** all teaching staff **Location on WPS Family Engagement Portal:** Parent-Teacher Conferences→ Student-Led Conferences **Duration of activity:** 10 minutes to complete; 30-60 minutes to tabulate depending on number of respondents **Materials Needed:** Writing instruments Assessing Current Practices Survey	1. Determine how to administer survey (staff-meeting, distribute through team leads, place in staff mailboxes, electronically, etc.) 2. Communicate the deadline that staff needs to return completed surveys. 3. Record on Task List assignment of staff member(s) to tabulate results. 4. Share results with Principal, Leadership and/or Family Engagement teams

Using data to assess readiness to transition

Description: Planning meeting **Intended Audience:** Principal, Leadership and/or Family Engagement teams **Location on WPS Family Engagement Portal:** Parent-Teacher Conferences→ Student-Led Conferences **Duration of activity:** 20 minutes **Materials Needed:** Writing instruments Phase Chart Assessing Current Practices Survey tabulation (if distributed and tabulated prior to planning meeting) Task List	1. Review tabulated responses from the Assessing Current Practices Survey (if completed before planning meeting) 2. Review Phase Chart and discuss the Six Components of Effective Student-Led Conferences. 3. Determine which phase is most appropriate for your school based on results of your team's discussion abou the Six Components of Effective Student-Led Conferences and/or your school's tabulated responses to the Assessing Current Practices Survey. 4. Discuss how to communiate with staff which phase your school will begin. 5. Complete Task List with any pending deadlines and assignments

Preparing staff for the transition to Student-Led

Description: Professional Development	1. Review Student-Led Conferneces: A Closer Look PowerPoint (adjust for time as needed)
Intended Audience: All staff	
Location on WPS Family Engagement Portal: Parent-Teacher Conferences→ Student-Led Conferences	1. Review Phase Chart with staff
	2. Discuss which phase the school will begin
Duration of activity: 15-40 minutes	3. Distribute completed Student-Led Conference Staff Memo Template
Materials Needed: Writing instruments Student-Led Conferences: A Closer Look PowerPoint Phase Chart Completed Student-Led Conference Staff Memo Template (customize for your school prior to PD) Task List	4. Have staff members fill in Task List with assignments and deadlines
	5. Allow time for Q&A

Preparing student portfolios - primary

Description: Planning Meeting/Team Time	1. Determine what information will be included by grade-levels in student portfolios (unless building leadership already established content to present)
Intended Audience: Grades 1 and 2	
Location on WPS Family Engagement Portal: Parent-Teacher Conferences→ Student-Led Conferences	2. Distribute Student-Led Portfolio Grades 1 and 2
Duration of activity: 10 minutes	3. Determine the timeline for portfolios to be completed and returned by students
Materials Needed: Writing instruments Portfolio Samples for Student-Led Conferences Student-Led Portfolio Grades 1 and 2	

Additional Elementary-Level Transitions to Student-Led Conferences Resources

Student-Led Conference Guide	A professional development guide for schools considering a transition to Student-Led Conferences
Portfolio Information Handout	A research article for staff with best practices for portfolio organization
Student-Led Research Summaries	A compilation of research related to Student-Led Conferences
Staff Reflection	A reflection for staff to gauge the effectiveness of Student-Led Conference Professional Development offerings
Elementary Planning Worksheet	A planning tool that walks elementary schools through the critical components of implementing Student-Led Conferences
Elementary Sample Teacher Script	An outline for elementary teachers to customize to facilitate Student-Led Conferences
Elementary Sample Student Script	An outline for elementary students to customize to present during Student-Led Conferences
Elementary Sample Literacy Center Activity	An example of a learning center that can be built into the Student-Led Conference schedule
Portfolio Samples for Student-Led Conferences	Specific examples of portfolio contents
Student-Led Conference Staff Memo Template	A template principals may customize to share scheduling and other logistical information about Student-Led Conferences with staff
Student-Led Portfolio Grades 1 and 2	A portfolio folder that students may use to rate their performance. The folder may also be used to hold portfolio contents.

"The student-led conferences were very powerful. The difference was that parents were able to see how their child is doing rather than being told. This type of conference brings everyone together (student, parent, teacher) as a team rather than an 'us' and 'them' scenario,"

– Response from a Second grade Wichita Public Schools Teacher in post Student-Led Conference Survey

Secondary Level Transitions to Student-Led Conferences

Adolescents' growing sense of independence; the more complicated school structure and some teachers' attitudes that parents no longer care are some barriers that impact parents' level of involvement at the secondary level. Still, teachers are key when it comes to communicating with parents how to best support their children's academic progress and, as author Dorothy Rich writes, "a parent-teacher conference is one of the best ways to fulfill the adult needs of information, for reassurance and for practical advice…"

Despite the challenges, Marshall Middle School and North High School implemented Student-Led Conference formats which we'll explore this section. At Marshall, teachers implemented Student-Led Conferences to see students take more ownership of their learning, as well as offer a different understanding of student progress to parents. Over the course of two months, teachers were trained on how to prepare students for their presentations, how to organize portfolios and how to schedule conference times. During two conference days, students welcomed their families to conferences and reviewed their portfolios together in the gym before going to review their work with a mentor teacher.

Overall responses to the conference were positive, both by staff (89% felt that the experience was good for their students and 89% would like to do SLC's again) and families (81% ranked the experience as an "8" or greater on a scale of 1-10). In addition, attendance at spring conferences was up from the total at fall conference sessions. While there were logistical details to improve upon and further training to help the transition would have been beneficial, the overall experience was very good.

Training In this section includes:

- Surveying to gauge staff readiness to transition
- Using data to assess readiness to transition
- Logistical planning to transition
- Preparing staff for the transition to Student-Led
- Preparing student portfolios

Secondary Level Transitions to Student-Led Conferences

Surveying to gauge staff readiness to transition

Description: Survey

Intended Audience: all teaching staff

Location on WPS Family Engagement Portal:
Parent-Teacher Conferences→ Student-Led Conferences

Duration of activity: 10 minutes to complete; 30-60 minutes to tabulate depending on number of respondents

Materials Needed:
Writing instruments
Assessing Current Practices Survey
Task List

1. Determine how to administer survey (staff-meeting, distribute through team leads, place in staff mailboxes, electronically, etc.)
2. Communicate the deadline that staff needs to return completed surveys.
3. Record on Task List assignment of staff member(s) to tabulate results.
4. Share results with Principal, Leadership and/or Family Engagement teams

Using data to assess readiness to transition

Description: Planning meeting

Intended Audience: Principal, Leadership and/or Family Engagement teams

Location on WPS Family Engagement Portal:
Parent-Teacher Conferences→ Student-Led Conferences

Duration of activity: 20 minutes

Materials Needed:
Writing instruments
Phase Chart
Assessing Current Practices Survey tabulation
Task List

1. Review tabulated responses from the Assessing Current Practices Survey
2. Review Phase Chart and discuss the Six Components of Effective Student-Led Conferences.
3. Determine which phase is most appropriate for your school based on results of your team's discussion abou the Six Components of Effective Student-Led Conferences and/or your school's tabulated responses to the Assessing Current Practices Survey.
4. Discuss how to communiate with staff which phase your school will begin.
5. Complete Task List with any pending deadlines and assignments

"To use student-led conferences effectively, students must be able to tell a story about themselves as learners," – *paraphrased from "Student-Led Portfolio Conferences" by F. Leon Paulson*

Logistical planning to transition

Description: Planning	1. Discuss and complete Secondary Planning Worksheet (you may use the Phase Chart as a reference)
Intended Audience: Principal and Leadership, Family Engagement or grade-level team leads	
Location on WPS Family Engagement Portal: Parent-Teacher Conferences→ Student-Led Conferences	2. Customize Sample Teacher Script and Sample Student Script (based on your level) to distribute to staff
Duration of activity: 30-40 minutes	3. Customize Student-Led Conference Staff Memo based on components of the planning worksheet
Materials Needed: Writing instruments Secondary Planning Worksheet Phase Chart Sample Teacher Script (select Middle or High script depending on level) Sample Student Script (select Middle or High script depending on level) Student-Led Conference Staff Memo Template Task List	4. Complete Task List with any pending deadlines and assignmentsincluding the distribution of the Student-Led Conference Staff Memo

Preparing staff for the transition to Student-Led

Description: Professional Development	1. Review Student-Led Conferneces: A Closer Look PowerPoint (adjust for time as needed)
Intended Audience: All staff	2. Review Phase Chart with staff
Location on WPS Family Engagement Portal: Parent-Teacher Conferences→ Student-Led Conferences	3. Discuss which phase the school will begin
Duration of activity: 15-40 minutes	4. Distribute completed Student-Led Conference Staff Memo template
Materials Needed: Writing instruments Student-Led Conferences: A Closer Look PowerPoint Phase Chart Completed Student-Led Conference Staff Memo Template (customize for your school prior to PD) Task List	5. Have staff members fill in Task List with assignments and deadlines 6. Allow time for Q&A

Preparing student portfolios – secondary

Description: Planning Meeting/Team Time	1. Determine what information will be included by grade-levels in student portfolios (unless building leadership already established content to present)
Intended Audience: Grades 6-12	
Location on WPS Family Engagement Portal: Parent-Teacher Conferences→ Student-Led Conferences	2. Distribute Portfolio Samples for Student-Led Conferences
Duration of activity: 10 minutes	3. Determine the timeline for portfolios to be completed and returned by students
Materials Needed: Writing instruments Portfolio Samples for Student-Led Conferences	

Additional Secondary Level Transition to Student-Led Conferences Resources

Student-Led Conference Guide	A professional development guide for schools considering a transition to Student-Led Conferences
Portfolio Information Handout	A research article for staff with best practices for portfolio organization
Student-Led Research Summaries	A compilation of research related to Student-Led Conferences
Staff Reflection	A reflection for staff to gauge the effectiveness of Student-Led Conference Professional Development offerings
Portfolio Samples for Student-Led Conferences	Specific examples of portfolio contents
Middle School Sample Student Script	An outline for middle school students to customize to present during Student-Led Conferences
Middle School Sample Teacher Prompts	An outline for middle school teachers to customize to facilitate Student-Led Conferences
High School Sample Student Script	An outline for high school students to customize to present during Student-Led Conferences
High School Sample Teacher Prompts	An outline for high school teachers to customize to facilitate Student-Led Conferences
Sample Parent Letter	A letter that schools can customize to explain to families the purpose of Student-Led Conferences
Secondary Planning Worksheet	A planning tool that walks elementary schools through the critical components of implementing Student-Led Conferences
Student-Led Conference Staff Memo Template	A template principals may customize to share scheduling and other logistical information about tudent-Led Conferences with staff