

The Who, What and Why of Student-Led Conferences

Excerpt from Leaders of Their Own Learning

Table 5.2 The Who, What and Why of Student-Led Conferences

What Do Teachers Do?	What Do Students Do?	What's the Result?
Create quality learning targets and assessments based on state and Common Core standards. Plan curriculum and instruction around meeting the targets.	Understand that each lesson and learning activity is connected to learning targets.	Students have greater engagement and ownership of learning. They understand the purpose of their work.
Prepare students to be reflective about their work and progress toward learning targets. Make reflection an ongoing classroom practice. Model and teach reflections using written or video exemplars.	Engage in reflection and commit to making a strong effort to improve.	Over time student reflections grow deeper and more self-aware.
Establish student portfolios as a way to organize student work and reflections.	Keep track of and regularly update portfolios with new work and reflections.	Students use portfolios to tell the story of their learning journey. Students, teachers, and families have a visual reference point for discussion.
Establish a culture and practice of ongoing communication with families about the goals and work of the class and each student's individual progress.	Understand their progress and communicate with families about goals, learning, and progress.	Teachers, families, and students are stronger allies and partners in improving learning.
Plan a schedule for student-led conferences well in advance that includes preparation time for students, communication home, and conferences with debriefs.	Understand how structure and preparation will help make the student-led conference successful.	Student-led conferences are focused and productive and lead to greater student engagement and achievement.
ample time to reach out to families and schedule conferences. Advance timing and flexibility of hours will permit maximum participation. Use multiple communication formats (e.g., e-mail, website, online programs, phone, mailings).	Assist teachers in understanding family needs and communicating about scheduling conferences.	Family participation and investment in student-led conferences is high.

Table 5.2 Continued

What Do Teachers Do?	What Do Students Do?	What's the Result?
In preparation for student-led conferences, develop learning targets tied directly to Common Core speaking and listening standards (SL.4, SL.6) and provide students with time to practice these skills.	Understand what good speaking skills look like and sound like. Practice with and support other students to hone these skills.	Students meet Common Core speaking and listening standards and run a student-led conference that demonstrates their ability to organize and present information effectively.
Plan at least one class devoted to modeling and practicing a conference. Review roles, identify criteria for success, and give students an opportunity to practice in small groups and give each other feedback using the criteria.	Engage in preparation for the conference and understand what it takes to make it a successful experience for everyone.	Students have a clear understanding of their role in the conference and are confident and well prepared.
On the day of the conferences, make sure families are welcomed by name and the format and goals of the conference are reviewed by the student.	Help to welcome families and guide them in understanding the conference structure. Model graciousness, respect, and leadership.	Families feel welcomed and prepared to contribute to their child's learning.
Follow a structured agenda or protocol for the conference, and ensure the student has the lead role.	Stick to the agenda and use it to reflect on learning and goals. Strive to articulate honestly and deeply their strengths and challenges.	Students are able to share their work and reflect on their learning through preparation and a structured process.
In addition to a verbal reflection on the conference, give family members the opportunity to provide written feedback (e.g., through a simple questionnaire) and reflect on goals for their children. Give families the opportunity to sign up for a follow-up meeting with the teacher if they wish.	Assist in collecting feedback from families.	Family members feel encouraged to contribute and participate in their child's learning. The relationships among families, teachers, and students are strengthened.
Debrief the conference experience with the students through group discussion or individual writing.	Participate in the conference debrief and share ideas for improvement.	Students and teachers share ownership for effective student-led conferences.