



The Evolution of Parent/Teacher Conferences

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After the first report card is sent home, it is time for conferences. COVID-19 forced schools to rethink conferences, and some of those elements have remained. Below, I will outline different conference models and recommend which model is best.

Parent/Teacher Conference

This conference is focused on the relationship between caregivers and the teacher. The child is not required to attend. Teachers schedule these conferences at an appointed time. When caregivers arrive, the teacher has information to share about the child's progress, including test results such as NWEA or the reading level. At the end, caregivers can ask questions or express concerns.

Student Led Conference

During the school day with the teacher, students complete a sheet of information to share with their caregivers. The sheet normally includes grades, academic and behavior goals set by the students, and results on district assessments, NWEA, etc. There is typically not a specific time slot but instead a block of time where students and their families can come to the school. When the caregivers and child arrive at the conference, they go to the teacher's classroom, and the student goes over the information. Many times, students have selected work they are proud of to share. Then, if the caregivers have questions, they can talk to the teacher. Also, if the student is a secondary student, they do the initial task of going over their sheet in their homeroom class and then take their caregivers to teachers they would like to talk to.

Team Conference

There are a lot of similarities between student led conferences and team conferences. The main difference is that teachers are not in their classrooms. Instead, teachers from the same grade level are in one location of the building like the gym. Students rotate with their caregivers from table to table. The focus is on the student and teacher relationship. The student and teacher talk to discuss goals and the student shares what they need from the teacher to be successful. Caregivers can add in their concerns or thoughts at the end. The one downside is not getting into the classroom to see the set up and structure.

Virtual Conference

As the name suggests these conferences happen remotely. They can occur with one or more teachers. A huge bonus is that relatives who do not live in the same city with the student could join such as an aunt, uncle, or grandparent. Students need as many adults as possible rooting for them. The virtual conference can allow the teacher to share a screen to the learning platform students are using or to simply explain some key areas in the online gradebook.

What is the final verdict? I'm a torn between the team conference and virtual. I typically don't give out my cell number to families. Once I leave work, if it is not email, I am not communicating with caregivers. However, a Zoom call could allow you to talk to students and their caregivers from the comfort of your home. I know some people may scoff at "working" at home, but I see this as a one time occasion. Typically, conferences happen during the school day and after the school day. If you are already going to be working outside of contract time, might as well do it from home.

Team conference is a strong contender as well because all the teachers are in the same place. As a teacher, I hated getting cornered by aggressive parents who would not see reason. Team conferences help parents show remain calm and seeing all the teachers in one location expedites talking to them. In a secondary school, teachers could be spread far out in a building. Last, administrator can easily observe teachers to ensure conferences are of quality.

Teachers and caregivers, which do you prefer?