



Student-Led Conferences

Flip traditional parent-teacher conferences on their head and put students in charge of the discussion.

Why do it?

Student Led Conferences (SLCs) promote...

- **Student Ownership, Responsibility & Engagement.** When students reflect on their experience in school, celebrate strengths, and identify areas for growth *with adults who care about them*, they take ownership of their learning. They are also more likely to stay on track and care about the quality of their work.
- **Family Engagement.** SLCs help families understand what the school values and what learning at the school looks like *for their student*. Parents who might avoid attending parent-teacher conferences, assuming it will be all bad news, come to student-led conferences, leading to greater family involvement and school pride.
- **Equity.** SLCs provide a window into each unique student's experience. They are an opportunity for students to ask for the support they need, and for teachers and parents to ensure those needs are met.

How to do it

Set up a schedule and invite families. Whether you adapt your existing parent teacher conference schedule or design a new sign-up procedure, be sure to communicate the purpose and available times to families so all students have the opportunity to have an SLC with their teacher and a significant adult.

- Student led conferences are usually 15 - 30 minutes in length.
- Translate communications home for non-English speaking families, and schedule extra time if students will be translating for their parents during the conference.
- Don't forget to schedule breaks for snacks, lunch or dinner.
- In middle and high schools, where students have multiple teachers, SLCs often take place with a single teacher.

Prep your students. Help your students select work they are proud of and articulate how the work provides evidence of a learning goal or skill. It is helpful for the teacher to identify a set of *academic and character goals* he/she has for students, and for students to use "I can..." statements to articulate their learning in relation to these. Watch video models of SLCs together (see resource list below) and have them identify what makes an effective SLC. Then have them practice with a peer so they are ready to *lead* the conversation. Useful prompts for students to prepare include:

- What learning goals and skills have I accomplished so far?
- What work shows evidence of my learning or new skills?
- What learning goals and skills am I still working on?
- How could my family and teacher help me reach my learning goals?

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Let students lead the discussion. During the SLC, resist the urge to turn the conference into a conversation between teacher and parents. The student should welcome his/her family to the SLC and speak for the majority of the time. As Ron Berger of EL Education notes, SLCs run into trouble when adults take over or dominate. The adults should focus on asking open-ended questions to understand the student's experience such as:

- Tell us more about that.
- What did you learn from that experience?
- What new learning goals do you have? What skills would you like to learn?
- How can I support you in reaching your goals?

Reflect on the experience. Provide time for students to debrief the experience immediately after or the next day:

- Journal prompt - *How did it feel to share your learning with your family?*
- Pair-share with a peer in response to the above question
- Class share-out/discussion

Tips & Tricks

Help students reflect on their learning, not describe an assignment. Without an opportunity to prepare and discuss their learning in advance of the SLC, students may default to describing assignments instead of talking about their learning. Build in time to help students identify what they *now know* and *can do*, as opposed to listing the assignments they completed.

Be Flexible. Not all students will have a parent able to attend. In this case, help the student identify a significant adult in their life who can be there (another staff member, a community organization leader, a mentor, coach, social worker, etc.) or consider an at-home option where family members record comments and reflections.

Don't wait. SLCs are powerful when they serve as progress checks, helping teachers and parents learn where students are experiencing success and where they need more support.

Resources

- Edutopia video of elementary and middle SLCs: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L_WBSInDc2E
- Video of a 7th grade SLC from EL Education: <https://vimeo.com/45140230>
- What is an SLC?: <http://bit.ly/2ofhCsk>
- "How to" video for having a great SLC: <http://bit.ly/2ngr2Er>
- EL Education has a great chapter on SLCs in their book, [*Leaders of their Own Learning*](#).

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