

Parent—Student—Teacher Conferences Guidelines

Communicating with parents is one of the most important things we do as teachers. It is a continuous process which provides opportunities for teachers and parents to work towards common goals and to support student learning. This process includes ongoing dialogue about student progress and achievement as well as the student’s social, emotional and physical well-being. The parent-teacher interview is a very powerful method of communication and tool for supporting student learning.

Parent-Student-Teacher Conferences are formal opportunities for communicating information about student learning. As such they should be formally planned and executed to ensure that they achieve their purpose. In line with mandated requirements and the College policy, teaching staff must be available to attend formal scheduled Parent-Student-Teacher Conferences throughout the year.

Proposed Structure for Conferences

Parent-Student-Teacher conferences will take place approximately six-seven weeks into each semester. Conferences will run throughout a single school day and into the evening. Conferences will start at 10 am. This will allow sufficient preparation time for staff.

The day would focus on personal learning, require or invite student attendance and is therefore not counted as a pupil free day. Conferences in Sessions I—IV provide for more time.

10:00—11:40	Session I (10 minute conferences)	10 conferences
	Break	
12:00—01:40	Session II (10 minute conferences)	10 conferences
	Break	
02:20—04:00	Session III (10 minute conferences)	10 conferences
	Break	
04:20—06:00	Session IV (10 minute conferences)	10 conferences
	Break	
06:20—08:00	Session V (5 minute conferences)	18 conferences

It is expected that full time teaching staff be available for all sessions throughout the duration day. Part time staff would be required to negotiate their fractional equivalent prior to the conference.

Key Implementation Strategies

Successful parent-teacher conferences, like any professional activity, are the result of careful planning. The following is provided as a guide to ensure that formal parent-student-teacher conferences are well prepared, operate effectively and achieve their purpose:

Prior to the conference

- Manage bookings and organise time to meet with the parents and students;
- Find out the names of those who will be attending the conference;
- Prepare a discussion agenda for the conference including:
 - specific information regarding a student's progress: marks, grades, work habits and work samples;
 - recommendations for future learning;
 - ideas for how parents can support learning;
- Seek feedback from students (self assessment).

During the conference

A parent-student-teacher conference may be led by either the teacher or the student. However, student led conferences require preparation with the students prior to the conference.

- Make the parents feel comfortable. Greet all people attending formally and begin the conference on a positive note;
- Work through the prepared discussion agenda providing specific information about;
 - student progress (marks, grades, work samples);
 - attitude to learning and work habits;
 - areas that require attention;
 - recommendations for future learning and suggestions for home activities to support the educational program.
- Provide opportunity for parents and students to ask questions or contribute to the discussion;
- Conclude the conference on a positive note.

After the conference

- Keep a record or short notes of the discussion agenda for each student;
- Take notes on any issues identified that require follow-up;
- Refer any concerns directly to the appropriate school leader;
- Set a timeline for the communication of any follow-up or follow-up action.

Suggestions for Successful Conferences

Students learn best when parents are involved in their children's education. When parents and teachers work together, students achieve higher test scores and grades, demonstrate positive behavior and attitudes—resulting in improved long-term academic achievement. The key to a successful conference lies in good communication and careful planning. Some strategies for a successful conference include:

- **Invite both parents and students to attend the conference:** Encourage both parents and students to attend conferences when possible. Misunderstandings are less common if both parties hear what you have to say.
- **Make contact with parents early in the piece:** You will get your relationship with parents off to a good start if you contact parents early in the semester. As a minimum, contact must involve providing the unit outline to each student. The unit outline will give parents an overview of what the students will be studying and what assessment is involved. Diary notes, information letters and phone calls also help keep parents informed. Parents should never be surprised with "bad news" at the conference.
- **Plan the discussion agenda prior to the conference:** Have in mind a general, but flexible outline of what you're going to say, including a record of student progress, a review of strengths and needs, and a proposed plan of action for improving student learning.
- **Allow sufficient time for the conference:** If you're scheduling back-to-back conferences, be sure to allow enough time each hour so that you can make necessary notes on completed conferences. If you know that more time is needed for a conference, organise an alternative time prior to the scheduled conferences. Similarly, if during a conference, your professional judgment indicates that more time is needed, inform the parents and advise that a follow-up is required and will be organised at a later time.
- **Greet parents and students on arrival at the conference:** Stand up and greet the parents. Avoid remaining seated behind the desk. You can look up names on the database or you could have the student introduce their parents. This will help alleviate anxiety, help the parents to feel more welcome and get the interview off to a positive start.
- **Start with a positive:** Begin on a warm, positive note about the student's abilities, school work or interests.
- **Be specific:** Tell the parents what they want to know. Identify:
 - Identify clearly what the student has achieved (support with work samples, grading sheets, marks, etc.);
 - Identify specific aspects of student work that requires attention; and
 - identify what the parents can do to support student learning.

- **Avoid general comments:** Be precise. Parents struggle if you deal only in generalities. Instead of saying, "She doesn't accept responsibility," be precise and pin down the problem. Point out that "she has had over a week to complete the task during class time".
- **Avoid using jargon:** Educational jargon like "progression points," "VELS dimensions" will be confusing to many parents. Instead, use language such as "at this level she is expected to be able to develop a basic plan for an essay".
- **Avoid direct comparisons with other students:** Do not make direct comparisons with other students (marks or progress) or referring to other students in the class.
- **Be prepared to answer specific questions:** are likely to ask questions such as:
 - What is my child's ability level with this subject?
 - Is my child working up to his/her ability level?
 - Does my child cause any trouble?
 - Does my child have any specific skills or areas that they need to work on?
 - What can I do to help my child?
- **Stress collaboration:** Let the parents know you want to work together in the best interests of the student. A statement such as "You need to see me as soon as possible to discuss John's poor study habits" may arise hostility. "I'd like to discuss with you how we might work together to improve John's study habits" is more likely to have a positive influence on the discussion.
- **Ask about the student:** Ask parents if there's anything they think you should know about the student (such as study habits, relationship with siblings, important events in his or her life) which may affect school work.
- **Be aware of your body language:** Nonverbal cues set the mood of the conference. Smile, nod, make eye contact and lean forward slightly. Use your body's language to let parents know you're interested and approving.