

REPORTING THREE-WAY CONFERENCES PARENT-CHILD-TEACHER

Three Way Conferences are a very powerful tool in guiding individual student's learning pathways. Learning takes place everywhere not just at a school. It benefits everyone when a student's caregivers are a part of the development of the student's learning pathway. By sharing their understanding all can contribute to the planning process.

Conferences are held in March and August. There are two report formats. One shows the student's goals for the beginning of the year and the second format evaluates these goals as well as setting the next goals (see appendix). The second goals are assessed in the final portfolio and school report.

The conference has four main functions:

1. To motivate and support students to take greater responsibility for their own learning.
2. To more closely involve parents in the life of the school and their child's education.
3. To discuss the child's progress and achievements and how this compares with NZ National Standards.
4. To plan together, setting goals for the coming months and strategies to support the child in reaching these.

Preparation for Three-Way Conferences

- Be professional
 - Dress neatly
 - Ensure teaching spaces are tidy and attractive
 - Be prepared, have child's portfolio available
- Prepare students
 - Teach students to introduce you to their parents
 - Discuss with students their achievements (e.g. in reading group) and what their next steps might be so they understand and can take an active role in the conference.
- Goal setting
 - Decide on 2 or 3 goals in each area at the most, parents may have some input.
 - Goals should be specific, measureable and achievable e.g. reach L5 reading level by learning more high frequency words, reading every night...not just get better at reading.
 - Check a few goals, early in the process with your team leader, if you are unsure.
 - You know the child so the number of goals set in each area will depend on the child's needs and ability.

The Conference

- Set up a separate (privacy) area where parents feel they can discuss matters freely. This is not an interview but a sharing time for equal partners.
- Put parents at ease, make them feel welcome and important.
- Start with a favourable comment to set a good tone for the discussion. You should show that you know the child well and like him. Any concerns should be addressed later in the discussion.
- Avoid teacher jargon e.g. self correct, basic facts.
- Do not predict too far in to the future - you should be describing the child as you see him for the current school year. Expressing opinions about a student's future achievements or limitations can do lasting damage.
- Ask about home routines for work and play. Comment favourably when a parent describes regular homework arrangements etc.
- Suggest techniques or strategies that you use successfully in class rather than telling the parent what to do which may arouse resentment.
- Be honest, if there is a problem, you must say so. To address a problem requires the parent to acknowledge there is difficulty. Provide examples of the child's poor behaviour or academic performance. Only when there is an agreement that there is a problem can you proceed to search for solutions. If the child has many problems, you may choose to focus now on only one difficulty. A clear understanding of one problem is more valuable than a superficial summary of many.
- You may have to refuse to discuss certain matters because of confidentiality or topics that do not contribute or may mislead the conference e.g. another teacher's handling of the child, a parent blaming a partner's behaviour. If the parent is determined to raise a matter you feel you cannot deal with, make an appointment or refer them to see somebody in Senior Management.
- Invite questions from parents, to be sure you have covered all aspects of the student's work and behaviour. "Is there anything else you'd like to ask me about?"
- Keep the timeframe 15 minutes. Conclude briefly by summarising the plan, give a copy to the parent and thank them for coming.

Follow-up to the conference

Every child should be able to tell you the goals they are going to work on. To help keep these goals in mind you may wish to display personal student's charts in the classroom, or glue them in appropriate workbooks. Encouraging the child to focus on his goals will make his learning more purposeful.