The Effectiveness of Student Led Conferencing in an Intermediate Setting

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THE EFFECTIVENESS OF
STUDENT LED CONFERENCING
IN AN INTERMEDIATE SETTING

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By
Mindy Fitterer
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THE EFFECTIVENESS OF STUDENT LED CONFERENCING IN AN INTERMEDIATE SETTING

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The studied focused on the communication between parents, teachers and students and the student self-reflection of strengths, weaknesses, and goals during Student Led Conferencing. Twenty-five students in a sixth grade classroom created student led conference portfolios and participated in fall and spring conferences with their teacher and parents. The specific parts of each of the pieces of the portfolio and conferences are examined. The results showed a highly effective rate in the desired areas.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

"While poorly conducted conferences are usually a waste of time, and can even create a negative feeling between the teacher and the parent, conferences which are conducted with skill and understanding can be extremely beneficial." (Potter 2001, p. 37)

The strongest indicator of student academic success is the link between school and home. A key element in creating the strong connection is an effective school conference. A good school conference can bridge the widening gap between the school and home. (Potter) Conferences can increase communication about student performance and get everyone working together on the same level (Culver 2000).

Teacher education programs fail to teach or demonstrate an effective parent-teacher conference. Without training teachers tend to focus on the negative when talking about students. "Educators will talk about the failure rate in a class rather than the number of students who are successful" (Galus 2003, p. 10). Teachers need to be guided on how to create a positive environment and positive feelings with the parents. Parents tend to see the conferences as an attack on their child rather than the helpful key to their child’s success (Galus).

Portland’s David Douglas School District felt the typical parent-teacher conferences were often hurried. Parents were rushed in and out of the teacher’s classroom with little engagement in their child’s education. Teachers were the only active participant in the conferences. Teachers felt the parents did not want to attend the conferences and therefore very little was accomplished (Flannery 2004).
Typical parent teacher conferences create a struggle for Guitine Middle School. They had two concerns “low parent attendance and student indifference.” (Borba 2001, p. 333) Students had no personal connection with the conferences and that was reflected onto the parents. With the absentee rate of parents increasing, so did the absentee rates of students during conference week. They needed to increase the student involvement to reach the parents (Borba).

Linda Pierce Picciotto at South Park School in Victoria, Canada found students involved with student led conferencing were encouraging their relatives to come to the conference. Students were taking the lead and creating excitement at home about their conferences. The love they had for the conferences spread from school to their home. At the schools doing student led conferencing the teachers agreed the most positive impact was the increase in parental attendance (Picciotto 1999).

When parents are attending the conferences communication goes up between the school and the parent. There are fewer disagreements with the educational process. The parent is able to see what is effective and what is not effective in their child’s education. (Student 2003) When the students are involved in the conference the he-said-she-said arguments are put to rest. In typical conferences the parent hears the student’s side of the story at home and at the conference they may hear things different. Situations like these cause the teacher to be defensive and blocks communication and understanding. (Countryman 1996) Typical conferences put no responsibility on the child, but solely on the teacher (Borba).

Typical conferences have the teacher give interpretations of the student’s work as they see it. This forces the teacher into the role as advocate for the student. The teacher
must assume what the student was thinking or how the student was feeling about the work. The actual student input is left out of the explanation. This forced no contact between the student and the parent (Countryman).

Typical conferencing may be difficult for minority parents especially if they do not speak the same language as the teacher. A Hispanic parent at Gustine Middle School stated “that the language barrier often made it uncomfortable to attend traditional parent conferences.” (Borba, p.335) During Student Led conferencing she sees their child as a “buffer” between the two cultures. The student not only can bring down the language barrier, but also the social barriers between the parent and school (Borba).

In school students are asked to take responsibility for education, but are excluded in the discussions about their education in parent teacher conferences. The student has no idea what the teacher or their parents is going to say to each other during a parent teacher conference.

“The traditional end of the year conference may be viewed with distrust by my middle level students, since they often view it as an opportunity for parents and teacher to ‘talk behind their backs’.” (Hackmann 1996, p. 31)

Students are told to sit at home while the adults discuss and make decisions about their education. Conferences are a place to open communication to increase student success, but typical conferences can create a sense of dishonesty and hostility toward education. Involving students will make them take on an equal role in communication and responsibility for their education (Hackmann 1996).

The school system is not set up for students to make decisions. Adults dominate and control the classroom and education. Student led conferencing gives the control back
to the student. (Student) Students are the “key communicators” about their education and assessment (Culver).

Define the Problem

Can student led conferences increase the communication between teacher, student and parents? Plus, does student led conferencing promote self-reflection of work, teach students to identify their strengths and weakness, and teach more successful goal setting capabilities?

Purpose of the Project

The portfolio will take the students through self-reflection of their work by determining their strengths and weaknesses and promote future self-evaluation of work. The project will provide a yearly plan with resources for teachers to implement student led conferencing into their classroom. The plan will guide them through the process of creating student led conference portfolios and how to get the parents involved in the conferences. Fall and spring goals will be set by the student using goal setting strategies. Finally, the student will lead a conference with their parent and teacher displaying and explaining their work.

Definition of Terms

Parent Teacher Conference – A meeting with the teacher and the parent to discuss a child’s learning and behavior.

Portfolio – A collection of a student’s work and goals.
Student Led Conference – A meeting led by a student with parents and teachers to discuss their learning and behavior.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Purpose of Student Led Conferences

"Imagine middle school students setting goals, preparing portfolios, rehearsing
semester conferences, and reflecting on whether achievement has been met.
Imagine a documented increase in parental participation and satisfaction with
school conferences.... These are a few of the outcomes from a new approach in
alternative assessment that focuses on student-led conferences" (Conderman
1998, pg. 132)

The eighth graders at Prairie Middle School in Cedar Rapids, Iowa have
implemented student-led conferences for the past four years. The school conference
attendance rate started at 35% and has risen to 93%. They have combined a portfolio
assessment with the standard parent teacher conference increasing student involvement,
ownership and empowerment. The four main components of the system are self-
assessment, communication, parent involvement, and accountability (Conderman).

Donald H. Hackmann viewed a three-way interaction between the parents,
teacher, and student. Each person had an equal part in the conferences and making
decisions regarding the student's education. The student stopped receiving information
second hand, but began being a first hand recipient and active participant. These actions
improved the school and home relationship thus increasing future contacts between all
members of the student led conference (Hackmann 1997).
Hackmann sees the student led conference as a process, not an event in a child's education. The conference is not a time to focus on the past less than average performances, but more as a time to discuss how to solve the present problems of the learner. Conference time should be used in a positive way and not as a time for negative reflection. The teacher should take on the role of creating a “plan of action that recognizes the student’s accountability for academic progress while permitting parents to support the child in appropriate ways” (Hackmann 1997, p. 2).

Second grade teacher, Diane Denney saw her curriculum changing from basals and readers to thematic studies and workshops while her evaluation and conferencing remained the same. As the method and philosophies of her teaching changed student led conferences portfolios became the centerpiece of evaluation. These new curriculums called for her to ask her students to take responsibility of their learning and these portfolios asked students to do just that. Students tend to see that evaluation is something done to them, but something that is a piece of their education (Santa 1995).

The Federal Way School District is required to bring students to the level in which they could receive their Washington State Certificate of Mastery. To achieve this goal they must pass the Washington State Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) by meeting a certain standard. The district realized for a student to meet a certain standard they must know what the standards are. Once they know what they are, they must know how to evaluate their own work to see if it is meeting the standards. They have implemented student led conferences portfolios to help students reach this level of Mastery. Classroom from first to eighth grade and tenth grade will be putting the process into action. Teachers have been taught how to create rubrics and portfolios using the
state standards for the WASL. These portfolios are the centerpiece of discussion at the student led conferences (Dickinson 2006).

Conway Middle School noticed student led conferencing was a natural progression away from standardized grading system. They viewed the standards based system as a quest schools strive to achieve. Student led conferences changed the way students think. The conferences make them ask themselves, “How can I make my work better?” (Conway n.d., p. 1) Students viewed these conferences as the “ultimate performance event” (Conway).

In the traditional grading system only the highest students receive praise. In the student led conference any student can stand out as a high achiever. When thinking about one particular student teacher Karen Utz stated, “It doesn’t mean his work is grade-level by any means, but he can talk about it, he can show what he’s done. And he’s every bit as articulate about it as a TAG student at the next table.” (Paglin 1996, p. 6) Students like this one could shine during a student led conference, but they would have never gotten that chance on a report card (Paglin).

Responsibility of the Teacher

“The format is important, but I believe the success of a student-led conference is most determined by how well students are prepared.” (Hayden 1998, p. 1)

JoAnn V. Cleland believes students can take responsibility for their own learning, but teachers must make a plan to teach analyzing and articulating skills to their students. Teachers have to teach the students what is necessary for them to take on the responsibility of their own learning. With a fellow teacher, Cleland created a list of the
preparations a teacher starting student-led conferences could follow, the list includes the following:

- Determine the expected learner outcomes
- Set expectations with the students and parents the first week of school
- Plan lessons to elicit students’ demonstration and analysis of the expected learner outcomes
- Plan specific instruction on self-analysis of strategies
- Plan how to give students practice in articulating their self-analyzed progress
- Set a schedule and process for student’s preparation for leading the conference
- Plan logistics for conference time

(Cleland 1999, p. 589)

These steps are not to be set in stone, but are possible overviews of setting up student led conferences. Each step is left open to adjust to grade level and teaching style. (Cleland)

Teachers are not just the planner but also the coach. Barbara Seliner and Jeanne Bushey describe the teacher’s role as a coach to prepare the students for their center role in the conference. The teacher must explain the concept and expectations of the conferences. During the conference the students will be explaining their assessments and their successes and failures. The teacher shows them the results of the assessments and the students record and compare their results. The same is done with the report card, but on an individual one-on-one basis. A checklist is given to each student to make sure they cover everything in their conference. At each step the teacher must coach the student through the process. Along with the math and science, the students need to be taught how to take control of their own conference (Seliner 1997).
Student led conferences give teachers a chance to become a "revolutionary teacher." A "revolutionary teacher" is a teacher who can trust their students with their own educational creativity. Portfolios invite students to self reflect, show off their most successful work, and experiment with ideas that could make them a stronger learner.

"When teachers move outside their traditional paradigms and trust their students enough to grant them agency, students can transform their world and begin to develop critical consciousness." (Weasmer 2001, p. 42) To allow students to become stakeholders of their own education, teachers must push themselves into new and innovative teaching perspectives (Weamer).

As the teacher gives the student the center role in the conference they begin to see the student in a new role as the learner. Martha Dudley found that parents enjoy seeing their child take on this new role in their education. "They see their child developing into literate young people, and they gain a new or heightened appreciation of them as such." (Dudley 2001, p. 20) This new appreciation will catch on throughout all the parents and stretch to members of the community (Dudley).

Teacher's need to focus and put effort into doing student led conferencing correctly or the conference system could backfire. Dr. Richard Stiggins, the head of the Assessment Training Institute in Portland, says, "This is not an easy idea to implement. It takes careful study and preparation, and an upfront investment in professional development." (Paglin, p. 4) It can take several years of staff training and careful review before putting them into action. If the conferences are not done right the student may feel this was a time to bash them in front of their parents. Also, the parents may feel it was a waste of their time and think negatively of the school district. Feelings such as these will
discourage parents from attending the conferences. The teachers need to be clear on what
they have to do before implementing the conferences (Paglin).

During a study of one school in Western State School District, Judith Ellsworth
found teachers made the mistake of making assumptions about the student. Teachers
found their prompt of “I chose the reflection because” led to low levels of student
reflection and were disappointed by student responses. After analyzing the problem they
found that they were under estimating what a student could do with their reflections.
Students did not need to be prompted. When no prompt was being used the students
were able to begin their reflections with a more meaningful response. This study found
that teachers needed to give students the opportunities to create their own conferences
(Ellsworth 2002).

A study done at Lincoln Middle School found a common meaningful purpose
essential for student led conferencing. When the conferences were first implemented
they changed from classroom to classroom. Some were involving the conferences daily
and some just stored information in a box. They found the cause of this to be too many
purposes. Teachers need to establish an attainable common purpose for all teachers to
follow. It cannot be a far-reaching goal of creating life long skills, but something they
could establish and see during conference time. Once they are done creating their
purpose, proper staff development is necessary to be able to achieve that common
purpose (Student).

Once the conferences are created, it is very important for staff members to know
what is expected of them and more importantly when it is expected. A timeline should be
created so staff members know when they should have accomplished specific tasks in
their classrooms. These dates should be set well in advance for teachers to have adequate
time to prepare. The timeline shows what is expected of them and of the students
(Kinney 2006).

Teachers must plan ahead for the changes student led conferences cause in the
classroom. First, the teachers need to create work that addresses the curriculum and
standards to be used in the student led conference. Once the students have completed the
work the teacher must have somewhere to store the work. The work will be staying in
the specified area at school and not be going home. The parents should be notified the
process of conferencing is changing and that the student work is not going home. A
teacher may invite parents to come to the class and view their child’s work there. Parents
should also be kept informed by the teacher about the process and benefits of student led
conferences before coming to the conference (Bonnett 2001).

Primary school teacher, James Delby, found out that asking “a child to lead a
classroom without any sort of preparation would be counterproductive.” (Delby 1996)
At his elementary school they prepare their students for the conferences by getting them
involved in the process. Students have class meetings to discuss their learning without
the pressures of conferences. He begins by talking about recent lessons and slowly
moves to work ranging from a larger time span. Also, they write in student journals
about school experiences, their strengths and interests. He took the concept of peer
editing and turned it into peer conferencing. He showed them how to edit each other’s
writing using positive language focusing on improvement. Lastly, he used portfolios for
them so show what they have learned. They were able to present these materials with
ease at their own student led conference (Delby).
A teacher must prepare their students for presenting the material at the conference. Kathleen Wolfley, a seventh grade teacher, prepares her students by watching videotapes from other conferences. Along with watching the format of the conference, the students learn about presentation skills. They focus on how to breathe during a conference, proper manners, and using eye contact. The students can see how important word choice and appearance are to a presentation. They can use these skills in future presentations and job interviews. Once they observed other conferences, students role-play their own student led conference (Paglin).

Teachers have responsibilities during the conference. First, they are an encourager. They encourage students to talk, not having the teacher talk. Students may need encouragement to stay focused and guided through the conference. Teacher may have to motivate parents to motivate and support their child. While still getting the required pieces done, teachers must be supportive and emphasize with the student while they work their way through the conference (Conway).

Teachers must also look at the student led conferences portfolios as a reflection piece for them. Through learning how students explain their struggles and success in learning, teachers at one school saw what was needed from them in the learning process. Teachers found ways to improve their learning and what was needed from them for students to achieve their academic goals (Ellsworth).

Responsibility of the Student

"Portfolio assessment is something students do, not something done to them."

(Paulson 1994, p. 1)
Students should be active participants in their own education and what they have learned. Students should use their portfolios to create a unique picture of their learning and achievements. Through their portfolios, students tell a story of their journey as a learner. The only way to achieve this is if they take the lead role of their education and the responsibility of their student-led conferences (Paulson).

"The primary purpose of student-led conferences is to encourage students to take responsibility for reporting their academic progress to their parents." (Hackmann 1996 p. 31) Starting at the middle grades, students should take responsibility for their education and assume a greater responsibility in their education. To increase their responsibility, the students need to self-evaluate their work and present their work to others. For this to happen, every person involved in the student’s education must allow the student to take responsibility and hold him or her responsible for taking the center role (Hackmann 1996).

Student led conferencing gives the student a chance to provide insight to the parent and teacher about parts of the student’s life they may not see. A parent can observe and understand the teacher-student relationship that is developed in the classroom. They may also observe the teaching methods and programs that are used with their child. The teacher can also see the communication between the parent and their child. A teacher can learn things about a student’s behavior by watching how they talk with their parents. A new understanding about the student can be achieved by learning the family expectations, culture, interest, or relationship (Picciotto).

During the student-led conference process, students must take the responsibility for their own academic success or failures. The students can explain how they earned a
grade rather than blaming the teacher for their educational performance. Students see school is not happening to them, but they are responsible for their schooling. Assessing their own work shows an understanding that students know they are responsible for their own actions. This understanding will not only create a better school life for the student, but an all around better life for the student (Holland 1997).

Center Middle School encouraged kids to take personal responsibility for their own learning successes and failures. They taught the students how their effort affected their success or failure in the classroom. This held them answerable for their grades. Students must be prepared to explain what actions caused them to get the grades they received. They saw a rise in student success and effort in class. Student accountability stimulated a higher success rate and student began to strive for their goals (Hackmann 1995).

Student led conferencing puts the student in charge of the conference – everything about the conference. Students may be put in charge of everything from scheduling the conference times to preparing the refreshments for the parents. Students may even arrange the room to create a comfortable conference setting. Beth Hebert said the student led conference “is the children’s evening, and they need to ‘run the show’ as much as possible.” (Paulson, p. 5) Students should be asked to take a center role as frequently as possible during the conference time (Paulson).

Pieces to the Conference

"Portfolios provide the opportunity for reflection that might otherwise be missing from my classroom, as we move busily through the hours and days of a school
year, always trying to fit more reading and writing into every class period. The creation of portfolios makes us stop, think, choose, and reflect, activities which my students and I need to take time” (Dudley, p. 19)

There are many different kinds of student-led conference portfolios that are involved in student-led conferencing. One type of portfolio is the handmade, nonfunctional portfolio created by the student. This portfolio contains work completed by the student and permanently put into the portfolio. In this type of portfolio are used once for a particular period of time. Handmade functional portfolios are still created by the student, but the student’s work is interchangeable. Items such as the Trapperkeeper have pocket folders for work that is kept in a student binder. Each pocket folder is dedicated to a particular subject. Loose-leaf binders have been found to be the most practical solutions. These functional portfolios require all the work to be three holed punched, but the paper can easily be stored and changed (Graves 1992).

During conference time for the observer to understand what is trying to be shown in the portfolio the person who made the portfolio must explain it. The best person to tell about the work is the person who did it. The teacher can only indicate their perception of what the student would say about their work. “Portfolios also provide students with the opportunity to communicate the story of their learning to their parents.” (Hebert 1996, p. 70). Teachers have to guide the students, but only they carry the ability to tell their story (Hebert).

To encourage talking about school at home a technique called “Two Stars and a Wish.” This paper is sent home every week or so for the student and parent to discuss. The two stars on the paper are two positive things the student has experienced. The wish
is something the student could work and improve on. The parent responds in writing at the bottom of the paper as if they were talking with the student. They share this response with the student at home and the student brings back the paper the next day. The parent should try to stay as positive and supportive as possible about the stars and wishes (Paulson).

At Prairie Middle School in Cedar Rapids teachers prepare for student led conferences by sending home a questionnaire to student’s parents. The questionnaire may ask about what the parents perceive as the students weakness or strengths, study habits, or other school traits. It may also pertain to the student’s hobbies, dreams or hopes for the future. The parents have a space for responses or comments. The questionnaire also gives them a chance to ask pre-conference questions or identify issues the parent may want to discuss at conference time. This tool can be used to prepare instruction or compare perceptions of the teacher, student, and parent (Conderman 1998).

Portfolio Portraits include a letter to the parents to begin their conferences. The letter gives an overall reflection of what is going to be included in the conference. In the letter each student tells what is in the student led conference portfolio, why they chose it, and what it shows about them as a learner. The students should see a model of what the teacher wants in the parent letter and identify any questions their parents might ask. The intended audience is the parents, but the students first write the letter to the teacher for editing and clarification (Graves).

Patti Kinney defines self-evaluation as “the process of assessing a performance against a set standard to judge the quality of work.” (Kinney, p. 34) Reflections should
be honest self-evaluations of work that will help the student create learning goals. The different formats of reflections include:

- Writing answers to highly specific questions
- Drawing a picture or making a web of the learning process to illustrate what was learned and what must be done differently next time
- Writing a letter from the teacher’s perspective explaining why the project was graded the way it was
- Filling out a checklist or a chart
- Participating in a class discussion or a one-on-one conference.
- Creating a journal entry or responding in learning logs

(Kinney, p. 34)

Whichever format is used the student should always be able to answer why they received a certain grade on a paper (Kinney).

Each subject area should be included in the student led conference portfolio with a reflection and piece of authentic student work. The student should select each piece of work. Each piece of work should have a student written reflection attached. The reflection should include:

- The reasons for selecting the piece
- Why the piece is important to include
- Detail of the performance
- Any barriers in the assignment (behavior class, absent from school, etc)

After the reflection the student should summarize their grade on the assignment and on the entire subject (Culver).
During a student led conference at McLoughlin Middle School students are required to describe a variety of projects. They may be using photographs or writings to show their parents what they have been doing in their classes. Their descriptions include the requirements of the assignment, the processes to complete it, the difficulties encountered, and the successes of each project. Their reflections focus on the efforts rather than the grade received (Paglin).

Teacher Laurie Mansfield gave her class “think time” on picking their work for their student led conference portfolios. She didn’t have any say in the work the student selected. After four to five weeks she discovered some of her students had not even selected one piece of work. She changed her strategy to motivate all of her students. She assigned a deadline for each of them to pick three pieces of work. Together the students and teacher selected one of those three pieces. She noticed that with a little guidance student work increased along with self-motivation (Graves).

Franklin Community School held three student led conferences a year. To accentuate the reflections, students also wrote accomplishments. They used the format “I used to ______ but now I ______.” Students were able to understand where they showed areas of accomplishments and show their parents work to support their statements. Notes were added from the teacher after each accomplishment to provoke any discussion. Students became more involved with their student led conferences when they knew what they were going to be sharing with their parents (See 1993).

Lastly, in the student’s student led conference portfolios are the goals the students have created for themselves. At the start of the year teachers prepare students for goal making by creating expectations. The students create academic goals for each subject for
their conference. The student's goals should also go beyond the report card. Physical and social goals should also be included. Throughout the year students should collect artifacts for each goal to share at a later conference (Hackmann 1996).

Talent Middle School requires three goals for the student-led conferences. First they teach the students how to write goals that are realistic and attainable. For each goal they must write the specific actions needed to obtain that goal. "For example, one of my students had a goal of improving their attendance at school. To accomplish this she was going to go to bed earlier, eat a healthier diet, and get a flu shot." (Kinney, p. 35) Two of these goals are written before the student's conference and they bring them show their parents. At the conference the teacher, parents, and students write one more and the actions needed to achieve the goal (Kinney).

Conference Night

During the conference night at Hart Middle School in Rochester, Michigan students take the lead role while teachers work in the background. One of the classrooms is dedicated to be the hospitality center. The students come here with their parents, get their student-led conference portfolios and check in. Teachers invite the student and the parent into a conference room and the student may begin their conference. The teacher may stay, but is also able to rotate rooms to join any conferences that may need them. After about ten minutes the student's core teacher joins in the conference to answer any questions or issues that need to be addressed. Once the student is finished the teacher may talk privately with the parents as the student goes back to the hospitality room. This
gives the parent time to talk about personal matters they may not want their child involved in (Culver).

Derby Middle School in Kansas conducts multiple conferences in the same room at the same time. Some moments the room can be conducting six or more conferences. Students begin by introducing their parents to their teacher. The teacher lets them know she is available for questions before the student begins to conduct their conferences. During the conference the teacher sits at each table and without interrupting the student they add a piece of positive information about the student. Since the students are the leaders of the conference it is important not to interrupt them or interfere with their presentation. Derby Middle School teachers do offer a private setting for those parents who request them (Hayden).

The student led conferences in Colegio Bolivar lasted thirty minutes but could have lasted longer. The students were incredibly honest and detailed with their self-evaluations. Carole Jenkins, a fourth grade teacher, added, “if anything, they were sometimes too hard on themselves.” (Denby, p. 378-379) The students began developing strategies to advance their learning or school behavior. The thirty-minute conferences were longer than the past conference, but parents felt they would have liked more time at the conference. Since the students were so enthusiastic and willing to share about their education, the parents would have liked more time to listen (Denby).

Before student led conference night “students expressed anxiety about discussing their work in front of their parents.” (Countryman, p. 65) The students wanted uninterrupted time to follow their script and present their student led conference portfolio. The teacher only schedules one conference at a time so they are able to give
each conference their full attention. To prevent the parent from controlling the
conference the student handed their parents an index card to write down any questions the
parent may have. Students were given fifteen minutes of time to present their
information, but after the conference they asked for five to ten more minutes so they were
able to include all their information. These actions gave students confidence and control
of the conference (Countryman).

To encourage parents to attend the student led conferences at Conway Middle
School, the school offered transportation, childcare, and flexible conference times. The
school offered bus stop locations for the parents who needed a way to get to and from the
conferences. The school made local bus tickets available to parents. Childcare was
offered for parents so they could leave younger children there during their conference
time. Parent volunteers took turns running the facility along with students from the high
school. High school students were offered service learning hours or credits for
participating. Conference times were not only available after school or in the evenings,
but also in the morning before school (Conway).

Even with the success of student led conferencing some parents want the
traditional options or choose not to attend at all. One way to accommodate the parents
who want the traditional parent-teacher conference is to let the parents choose not to do
the student led conference at all. Their conference may be conducted in the traditional
format or they can reserve the last five minutes of the student led conference for private
conversation. These parents can also set up a follow up meeting during conference week
or at a later time. For the absent parent the student led conference can be conducted at
home between the student and the parent (Hackmann 1997).
Student led conferences cannot just happen once a year. For the student led conference portfolios to work the students must keep their portfolio current. The students must have time to update their work and re-reflect on their learning. Goals must be watched to see growth and when it is appropriate to create new goals. Student led conference portfolios should be ongoing throughout the year and carry on with the students year after year (Graves).
CHAPTER III
PROCEDURE

The purpose of the project was to create a student led conference that will increase communication between the parents, teacher, and student while students self-reflect on their strengths, weaknesses, and goals. Currently at Tieton Intermediate School we have a form of student led conferences, which vary in every building and even by each grade level. We have been receiving complaints and inquiries to why we are doing student led conferences. Parents felt the conferences were not benefiting the students and questioned the purpose of student led conferences. Tieton had no justified answer to these questions. In fact, we did them because we had been doing them for years. My purpose was to find the answers to these inquiries and create student led conferences that are well researched and thought out.

Setting and Subjects

The setting for the student led conferences is a 6th grade classroom at Tieton Intermediate School in Tieton, WA. Tieton Intermediate School is in a rural setting where the primary income is agriculture. The school has grades 4th through 6th which includes about 270 students. The school is 38.5% white, 60.4% Hispanic, and 1.1% other. (Office 2006) The study will be done in one of the three sixth grade classrooms at Tieton Intermediate School.

The classroom has thirty students, but only twenty-five will be participating in the conferences. Students with special disabilities and monolingual students participate in a
similar form of conferences in a different setting. The classroom has thirteen girls and twelve boys. The ethnicity of the classroom is 52% white, 44% Hispanic, and 4% Philippino. Parents participating in these conferences chose to have the conferences primarily in English or Spanish. Nine out of twenty-five chose to have the conferences spoken primary in Spanish with a translator present. Out of the twenty-five students three were receiving special education services, nine were in Title I, and four were in receiving English as a Second Language (ESL) assistance.

Procedure

The first step of the project was to research the effects of student led conferences. With the research from Chapter II, Review of Literature, the researcher, Mindy Fitterer, can gain enough information to thoughtfully look at our current student led conference program. Each individual aspect of the student led conferences needed to be looked at and see what was needed and how to improve current practices. The researcher needed to create a vision of what needed to happen to create an effective student led conference.

Through research there was three main parts to each student led conference. The student reflections, assessment of the student’s strengths and weaknesses, and finally a goal plan. Each part was integrated to produce a description of interests of the student as learners and indicated what is needed to be successful. All of these parts are needed for a smooth running conference to occur.

As recommended by Patti Kinney, a proper implementation of a conference timeline can provide teachers with what is expected of them and keep everything in a timely manner before conferences occur. (Kinney) Using a previous conference timeline
the researcher created a rough outline using the conference dates of the 2005-2006 school year. The rough outline covered each part of the student led conference and the anticipated time it would take for the students to complete each task.

The first area to be acknowledged was the student self-reflections. Starting at the beginning of the year, the students began collecting pieces of work that demonstrated what they were learning. The review of literature stated there must be a place to store the student work. A file folder system was created to store work they wanted to include in their portfolio. (Bonnett) In each reflection the student uses these pieces of work to show their strengths and weaknesses in a particular subject. Included with every sample of work the students must write a reflection piece using the reflection template. The students were not required to pick any certain section of work, but what they selected was an accurate show of their abilities.

Along with each piece of work from the subject areas the students had to create an “Ah-ha”. The researcher copied the format of the Ah-has from Franklin Middle School. (See) They thought about what they had learned during school and wrote about what they used to think and what they think now. They even had to go a step farther and explain how they made that change and show evidence of that change in their thinking.

After the reflections the students focused on their assessments of their strengths and weaknesses. Prairie Middle School sent a questionnaire home to parents to get their assessment of their child. (Conderman) Likewise at Tieton Intermediate School we sent home a questionnaire called the Maturity Assessment. Using the advise from Prairie, the survey was shortened and it was about the child’s educational habits and added questions about the student’s hobbies and interests. Also added was a place for parents to make
questions or comments. This survey was given to the parents, student, and teacher. All of the participants answered each question in their own judgment. Once all the surveys were completed the student graphed each person’s response on a chart. This chart showed the student were all differences in the judgment occurred.

The final area was the student goal plan. Following the outline of the Student Learning Plan (SLP) each student is required to make goals for every school year and these goals will follow them through their educational process. Before the students can write their goals, they must learn how. Students learn what needs to be included in a reachable goal and practice creating them as a class. Then they are required to create them on their own.

To intertwine the conference pieces, the student’s write a letter to their parents. This letter introduces the conferences to their parents. The parents find out what they will be hearing and learning about in their conferences. Another idea added from the Review of Literature was the student also gives their parent their comment card. (Countryman) If at any time the parent thinks of a comment or question during the conference, they can write it down and ask after the student is done presenting.

In October students put all of their work into portfolios and begin practicing for the real conferences in November. They practice with other students evaluating each other on how well they deliver their conferences. The students should practice as authentically as possible. If the conferences are done in Spanish they should practice in Spanish. This practice should prepare them and make them more comfortable for the actual conferences in November. This was a current practice used at Tieton, which was also supported by the Review of Literature (Paglin).
When planning conference night, the Derby Middle School model was not chosen because the researcher felt it may be a violation of the student’s privacy having multiple conferences at the same time. (Hayden) The Hart Middle School model was not possible because there weren’t enough classrooms to accommodate multiple conferences at the same time. (Culver) The conferences were held one at a time in our own classrooms. This system permitted thirty-minute conferences similar to those at Colegio Bolivar. (Denby) Using the idea of flexible conference times from Conway Middle School, the researcher offered morning times and two late in the evening conference times. The researcher could not offer the childcare options, but areas were set up in the classroom for smaller kids to play during the conference (Conway).

In February the conference process is repeated for spring conferences. The main difference in the procedure is the goal plan. The goals are not all recreated. During spring the goals are reevaluated. If the goals have been met they are changed or a whole goal is created. If they have not been reached it is analyzed to see why the goal has been met. Sub-goals may need to be created to encourage the student to reach their goal or the goal may be too great and needs revising. This information will be recorded on their Student Learning Plan.

Data Collection

To determine if the conferences are effective in increasing the student self-reflection and the communication between parents, teacher, and student, a survey will be distributed to parents of the students who participated in the conferences. The survey will be conducted in May after fall and spring conferences have been completed. Also,
other data collection strategies used were teacher observations of student work, interaction at the student led conferences, and parent attendance.

The survey asked the parents thirteen questions about their impressions at the student led conference. The questions will be ask the parent to rate each statement 1 to 5, 1 being they strongly disagree and 5 being they strongly agree with the statement. The statements included their feelings about the communication between the participants and the student’s reflection of their strengths, weaknesses, and goals. They survey also asked the parent the effectiveness of each of the focus areas of the conferences.

Limitations

The survey and student led conferences will only be conducted with students in a 6th grade class and their parents. The students and parents must be willing to participate and be active in the child’s education. Also, students who are not English speaking or who have a serious disability will not be participating in the conferences. Other arrangements have been made for them. Other arrangements are determined on a case-by-case basis through the Individualized Education Program or by the English as a Second Language teacher and general classroom teacher. Also, students may move to another district because of outside circumstances. Students may also move into the district throughout the school year. This information will be shared with other teachers and faculty in the district.
CHAPTER IV
THE PROJECT

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### Portfolio and Student Led Conference Timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week of:</th>
<th>Activity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>September 6th</td>
<td>Create expectations for student-conferences and student self reflection between students, parents, and teachers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 12th</td>
<td>Review what assignments could be included in the portfolio. Create an space for students to store assignments for their portfolio. Work should be placed in this folder through the year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 26th</td>
<td>Send or mail home a copy of the fall conference parent letter and Maturity Assessment. Review the Maturity Assessment with your students and have them complete their own copy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 3rd</td>
<td>Graph the Maturity Assessments for parent, student, and teacher. Discuss the purpose of the conferences and make clear expectations for the students, teachers, and parents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 10th</td>
<td>Begin the letters of introduction. Review the writing process and show a model of the letter. Begin writing reflections and choosing pieces of work as examples of the learning process.</td>
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<tr>
<td>October 17th</td>
<td>Finish writing reflections. Discuss what accomplishments are and what accomplishment a student may have achieved this year. Have the students write two accomplishments they have made this year and supply evidence. Begin reviewing what makes a good goal and have the students write goals for the school year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 24th</td>
<td>Review the check off sheet to ensure the students have all their work prepared. Have the students practice with their peers and an adult. If the student is doing the conference in Spanish, they should practice in Spanish.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 31st</td>
<td>Fall Conference Week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 6th</td>
<td>Send home or mail the spring conference parent letter.</td>
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<tr>
<td>February 13th</td>
<td>Begin the letter of introduction for the spring conference. Begin selecting pieces of work and writing reflections showing the learning process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 20th</td>
<td>Finish writing the reflections and selecting work. Analyze the fall goals and have the students create new goals or edit old goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 27th</td>
<td>Review the check off sheet to ensure the students have all their work prepared. Have the students practice with their peers and an adult. If the student is doing the conference in Spanish, they should practice in Spanish.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 3rd</td>
<td>Spring Conference Week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 5th</td>
<td>Review the work that is included in the portfolio. Have a teacher-student meeting to analyze goals for the next school year.</td>
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</table>
Dear Parents and Guardians,

The purpose of this letter is to provide you with information about the Student Led Conferences that are scheduled for November.

**Purpose of Student Led Conferences**
The teaching staff at Tieton Intermediate School feels it is important for students to take an active role in their own education. Student Led Conferences are designed to provide an opportunity for students to share accomplishments and set goals for improved or continued success. Your child will be working with a teacher as the conferencing facilitator. The conferencing teacher meets with the students for several sessions to prepare them to lead their conference. The teacher also schedules and facilitates the conference. After the Fall Conference, the conferencing teacher will continue to meet with the students for the rest of the school year, monitoring the progress of student goals. Throughout this entire process, teachers will also be involved by helping with work sample selection, writing reflections, and providing information used to select, write, and monitor goals.

**Conference Dates**
Conference dates will be scheduled from November 1 - November 5, the same week as Marcus Whitman Cowiche. On conferencing days we will follow an early release schedule. The conferencing teacher will schedule individual conference times with you. Grade reports will be mailed to you at the end of each trimester and will also be located in your student’s conferencing portfolio.

**Conference Content**
During the 30 minute conference, students will be showing work samples, results from a “Maturity Assessment”, and most importantly, goals they have set for themselves to be more successful throughout the school year. A version of the “Maturity Assessment” will be completed by each student, teacher, and a parent or guardian. The comparison of perceptions of the assessments will be an important tool used in setting goals. You will receive an assessment form with this letter which you will need to complete. We ask you to give it careful thought as you complete it. The conferencing teacher needs it back no later the October 1st.

**Spring Conference Forum**
A Spring Conference is scheduled for the end of March. At this forum your student will meet with you again to discuss their progress toward the goals that they have set. This is an open forum in which up to four conferences may be in progress at the same time. Conference teachers will facilitate the forum. We are looking forward to productive conferences for both you and your child. **Please remember that parent-teacher conferences may occur at anytime throughout the school year with any or all of your child’s teachers.** If you have any questions pertaining to the conferences, please do not hesitate to call Tieton Intermediate School at 673-3141.
Estimados padres o guardianes,

El propósito de esta carta es para proveerles información sobre las Conferencias dirigidas por los estudiantes que serán programadas para noviembre.

**PROPOSITO de CONFERENCIAS POR ESTUDIANTES**
El cuerpo de maestros en la escuela Tieton Intermediate creen que es importante para los estudiantes que tengan una participación activa en su educación. Las conferencias dirigidas por estudiantes son diseñadas para proveer a los estudiantes una oportunidad de compartir sus éxitos y hacer metas para mejorar o continuar teniendo éxito. Su hijo/a estará trabajando junto con un maestro como el facilitador de la conferencia. El maestro de conferencias se reúne con los estudiantes en varias ocasiones para prepararlos para que dirijan su conferencia. El maestro también hace las citas y facilita las conferencias. Después de la conferencia de otoño, el maestro seguirá reuniéndose con el grupo de estudiantes por el resto del año escolar, vigilando el progreso de las metas de los estudiantes. Durante todo este proceso, los maestros estarán ayudando con la selección de ejemplos de trabajos, escribiendo reflexiones, y proveyendo información usada para seleccionar, escribir, y vigilar las metas.

**FECHAS de CONFERENCIAS**
Las fechas de conferencias serán programadas entre noviembre 1 y noviembre 5, la misma semana que Marcus Whitman Cowiche. En días de conferencias estaremos saliendo temprano. El maestro encargado de su conferencia programará una fecha individual con ustedes. Reportes de progreso serán mandados al final de cada trimestre y también estarán disponibles en el portafolio de conferencias de su hijo.

**CONTENIDO DE LAS CONFERENCIAS**
Durante los 30 minutos de conferencias, los estudiantes estarán mostrando ejemplos de sus trabajos, resultados de un Examen de Madurez, y todas las metas que ellos se han puesto para el futuro. Un ejemplo de este examen será hecho por cada estudiante, su maestro, y un padre o guardiano. La comparación de todos será una gran ayuda para hacer metas futuras. Usted recibirá una forma del examen con este tarjeta, la cual necesita llenar. Le pedimos que por favor la llene con cuidado. El maestro de conferencias la necesita antes del 1 de octubre.

**CONFERENCIAS DE PRIMAVERA**
Unas conferencias están planeadas para fines de Marzo. En esta ocasión su hijo/a le dirá que progreso ha hecho. En este tipo de conferencias abiertas pueda que se tenga hasta cuatro conferencias al mismo tiempo. Los maestros de conferencias estarán encargados. Esperamos tener conferencias productivas para usted y su hijo. Por favor recuerde que se pueden pedir conferencias con los maestros durante cualquier tiempo durante el año escolar si usted las pide. Si tiene preguntas sobre esto, por favor llame a la escuela al 673-3141.
Dear Parent or Guardian,

This year all grades at Tieton Intermediate School will be holding student led conferencing. Each student and teacher will be working together to evaluate the first trimester’s work, set goals, and prepare for the student led conferences.

Included with this letter is a “Maturity Assessment” form. Please give this form thoughtful consideration since the information from this assessment will be used by your child to look at individual work habits and student behaviors. Be sure to return it with your schedule choices from the bottom of this paper.

Listed below are the dates and times which are available for conferencing. Please make three choices which best suit your schedule. Whenever possible, try to pick general times (i.e. anytime on Tuesday or any day at 3:00). Conferences are scheduled first come, first served. You will be informed of your conference time within the next couple of weeks.

**DATES AND TIMES AVAILABLE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Times Available</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monday - October 31st</td>
<td>7:30 a.m., 12:00, 12:30, 1:00, 1:30, 2:00, 2:30, 3:00, 3:30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday – November 1st</td>
<td>7:30 a.m., 12:00, 12:30, 1:00, 1:30, 2:00, 2:30, 3:00, 3:30, 4:00, 5:00, 5:30, 6:00, 6:30, 7:00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wednesday – November 2nd</td>
<td>7:30 a.m., 12:00, 12:30, 1:00, 1:30, 2:00, 2:30, 3:00, 3:30, 4:00, 5:00, 5:30, 6:00, 6:30, 7:00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday – November 3rd</td>
<td>7:30 a.m., 12:00, 12:30, 1:00, 1:30, 2:00, 2:30, 3:00, 3:30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please complete the bottom of this paper and the “Maturity Assessment” form and have your child return them to their conferencing teacher by Monday October 4th. We look forward to the conference with you and your child.

______________________________ Cut here and return this bottom portion ________________________________

1st Choice __________________________________________________________

2nd Choice __________________________________________________________

3rd Choice __________________________________________________________

Parent Signature _____________________________________________________

Student’s name _______________________________________________________
Estimados Padres o Tutores,

Este año todos los grados en la escuela Tieton Intermediary tendrán conferencias dirigidas por los estudiantes. Cada estudiante y maestro estarán trabajando juntos para evaluar el trabajo del primer trimestre, hacer metas, y prepararse para las conferencias dirigidas por estudiantes.

Incluido con esta carta va un cuestionario de madurez (Maturity Assessment). Por favor consideren este cuestionario cuidadosamente puesto que la información será usada por su hijo/a para mirar a hábitos individuales de trabajo y comportamiento estudiantil. Asegúrense de regresararlo con el horario de su preferencia, para la conferencia, debajo de esta carta.

Abajo están las fechas y horarios disponibles para conferencias. Por favor selecciónen tres fechas que estén de acuerdo a su agenda. Cuando se posible selecciónen fechas generales (p.e. cualquier hor el martes o cualquier día a las 3:00). Las conferencias se programan según reviban las respuestas. Ustedes serán notificados de horario de su conferencia en un par de semanas.

**Fechas y Horas Disponibles**

- **Lunes - October 31st**
  7:30 a.m., 12:00, 12:30, 1:00, 1:30, 2:00, 2:30, 3:00, 3:30
- **Martes - November 1st**
  7:30 a.m., 12:00, 12:30, 1:00, 1:30, 2:00, 2:30, 3:00, 3:30, 4:00, 5:00, 5:30, 6:00, 6:30, 7:00
- **Miércoles - November 2nd**
  7:30 a.m., 12:00, 12:30, 1:00, 1:30, 2:00, 2:30, 3:00, 3:30, 4:00, 5:00, 5:30, 6:00, 6:30, 7:00
- **Jueves - November 3rd**
  7:30 a.m., 12:00, 12:30, 1:00, 1:30, 2:00, 2:30, 3:00, 3:30

Por favor llenen la parte de abajo y el cuestionario de madurez y regresenlo con su hijo/a a su maestro de conferencias para el Lunes, 4 de Octubre. Esperamos verlos a ustedes y a su hijo/a en las conferencias.

___________________________ Corten aquí y regresen la parte de abajo___________________________

Preferencia #1 ____________________________________________________________

Preferencia #2 ____________________________________________________________

Preferencia #3 ____________________________________________________________

Firma de padre o Tutor _____________________________________________________

Nombre del estudiante ______________________________________________________
Dear Parent or Guardian,

This spring all grades at Tieton Intermediate School will be holding student led conferencing. Each student and teacher will be working together to evaluate the second trimester’s work, set goals, and prepare for the student led conference.

Listed below are the dates and times which are available for conferencing. Please make three choices which best suit your schedule. Whenever possible, try to pick general times (i.e. anytime on Tuesday or any day at 3:00). Conferences are scheduled first come, first served. You will be informed of your conference time within the next couple of weeks.

**DATES AND TIMES AVAILABLE**

- **Monday – March 6th**
  - 7:30 a.m., 12:00, 12:30, 1:00, 1:30, 2:00, 2:30, 3:00, 3:30
- **Tuesday – March 7th**
  - 7:30 a.m., 12:00, 12:30, 1:00, 1:30, 2:00, 2:30, 3:00, 3:30, 4:00, 5:00, 5:30, 6:00, 6:30, 7:00
- **Wednesday – March 8th**
  - 7:30 a.m., 12:00, 12:30, 1:00, 1:30, 2:00, 2:30, 3:00, 3:30, 4:00, 5:00, 5:30, 6:00, 6:30, 7:00
- **Thursday – March 9th**
  - 7:30 a.m., 12:00, 12:30, 1:00, 1:30, 2:00, 2:30, 3:00, 3:30

Please complete the bottom of this paper and have your child return them to their conferencing teacher by Monday, February 6th. We look forward to the conference with you and your child.

_________________________ Cut here and return this bottom portion ____________________

1st Choice

2nd Choice

3rd Choice

Parent Signature ______________________

Student’s name ____________________________
Estimados Padres o Tutores,

Esta primavera los maestros de todos los grands tendrán conferencias ofrecidas por maestros y estudiantes. Cada estudiante y maestro estarán trabajando juntos para evaluar el trabajo del segundo trimester, hacer metas, y prepararse para las conferencias de los estudiantes.

Abajo están las fechas y horarios disponibles para conferencias. Por favor selecciónen tres fechas que estén de acuerdo a su agenda. Cuando se posible selecciónen fechas generales (p.e. cualquier hor el martes o cualquier día a las 3:00). Las conferencias se programan según reviban las respuestas. Ustedes serán notificados de horario de su conferencia en un par de semanas.

**Fechas y Horas Disponibles**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fecha</th>
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<td>Lunes - March 6º</td>
<td>7:30 a.m., 12:00, 12:30, 1:00, 2:00, 2:30, 3:00, 3:30</td>
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<tr>
<td>Martes - March 7º</td>
<td>7:30 a.m., 12:00, 12:30, 1:00, 1:30, 2:00, 2:30, 3:00, 3:30, 4:00, 5:00, 5:30, 6:00, 6:30, 7:00</td>
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<tr>
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<td>7:30 a.m., 12:00, 12:30, 1:00, 1:30, 2:00, 2:30, 3:00, 3:30, 4:00, 5:00, 5:30, 6:00, 6:30, 7:00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jueves - March 9º</td>
<td>7:30 a.m., 12:00, 12:30, 1:00, 1:30, 2:00, 2:30, 3:00, 3:30</td>
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Por favor llenen la parte de abajo y el cuestionario de madurez y regresenlo con su hijo/a a su maestro de conferencias para el Lunes, 6 de Febrero. Esperamos verlos a ustedes y a su hijo/a en las conferencias.

Por cortesía y regresen la parte de abajo

Preferencia #1 ____________________________________________

Preferencia #2 ____________________________________________

Preferencia #3 ____________________________________________

Firma de padre o Tutor ______________________________________

Nombre del estudiante ______________________________________
Dear Parents and Guardians,

The purpose of this letter is to confirm our conferencing appointment.

Student Name _______________________________________________________

Grade ____________ Date of Conference ________________________________

Time ____________ Location __________________________________________

If you have any questions about the conference, please do not hesitate to call me at 673-3141.

I look forward to meeting with you and your student at the conference.

Sincerely,

Mindy Fitterer
Queirdos Padres y Guardianes,

El propósito de esta carta es para confirmar nuestra cita para conferencias.

Nombre del Estudiante

Grado  Fecha de Conferencia

Hora  Lugar

Si tiene preguntas sobre la conferencia, por favor no dude en llamar al 673-3141.

Espero poder tener el gusto de platicar con usted en la conferencia.

Sinceramente,

Mindy Fitterer
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<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Monday</th>
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<td>5:00</td>
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<td>5:30</td>
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<tr>
<td>7:00</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Your conference is today at

______________________.

See you there!

Sincerely,
Miss Fitterer

Your conference is today at

______________________.

See you there!

Sincerely,
Miss Fitterer
Checklist for Student Led Conference Portfolio

Arrange your conference portfolio in the order listed below. Check each item to be sure it is in your notebook.

- Conference script
- Parent letter
- Reading reflection
- Math reflection
- Social Studies reflection
- Science reflection
- Accomplishments
- Maturity Assessment and Graph
- Report Card
- Goals
Conference Script

1. Introduce your parent or guardian to your teacher
2. Read your parent letterer
3. Reflection
   - Reading
   - Math
   - Social Studies
   - Science
4. Accomplishments
5. Review maturity assessments and graph
6. Review Report Card
7. Present your goals
8. Ask your parent or guardian if they have any questions
9. Say thank you to your parent for coming to your conference
Letter of Introduction

Dear .................................,

Intro:

Body:
   Strengths:

   Weakness:

   Goals:

Closing:

Sincerely,

Your name
Dear Mom and Dad,

Thanks for coming to my conference. Today I will be showing you my progress in Math, Science, and Reading.

I will show you my progress in reading. I have improved on my assessment tests. I have put a lot of details and tried my best on every part of the test.

I need to improve on my math tests. I need to practice more because some stuff I find difficult.

Today I will look at my old goals and create new goals. These will help me at the junior high.

Sincerely,

Daisy
Dear Mommy,

Thank you for coming to conference. I will be telling you about my strengths, weaknesses, and my goals. Thanks again for coming.

My strengths are what I do well at. One of my strengths is my spelling tests because I am good at spelling. Another strength is my Daily Oral Language because I get my work done every day. My last strength is science because I get all my work done in that subject.

My weaknesses are what I can improve on. Math is a weakness because I struggle with it and it is hard for me. Another weakness is that I have a hard time getting my definitions in on time.

I have created goals to help me become a better student. Two goals are to improve in math and my handwriting. I also want to increase my AR points. I want to improve turning in my work when it is done and not leave it in my desk.

Thank you for coming to my conference. I hope you understand my grades better now.

Sincerely,
Gaby Vargas
NAME: ___________________________  Class: __________  Teacher: ___________________________

The assignment I chose was ________________________________________________________________

I chose this assignment because __________________________________________________________

In this assignment my strength was _________________________________________________________

because ______________________________________________________________________________.

Also, _________________ was a strength, because ________________________________________________________________________________.

My weakness was _________________________________________________________________

because ______________________________________________________________________________.

One way I can do better is _________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________________.

NAME: ___________________________  Class: __________  Teacher: ___________________________

The assignment I chose was ________________________________________________________________

I chose this assignment because __________________________________________________________

In this assignment my strength was _________________________________________________________

because ______________________________________________________________________________.

Also, _________________ was a strength, because ________________________________________________________________________________.

My weakness was _________________________________________________________________

because ______________________________________________________________________________.

One way I can do better is _________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________________.
Name: ____________________________

Subject: ____________________________

Date: ____________________________

I used to think ____________________________, but now I know ____________

__________________________________________________________________________

I know this because __________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________

Also, ___________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________

I would like to know more about __________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
MATURITY ASSESSMENT

Student’s Name: ____________________________
Date: ________________________________

Assessed by (circle one) Teacher  Student  Parent

For each behavior listed below, rate the student on a scale by circling the number that applies:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Seldom</td>
<td>Some of the time</td>
<td>More often than not</td>
<td>Most of the time</td>
<td>Always</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Student is prepared for class (supplies, books, assignments, etc.)

2. Student does all assignments and keeps track of their homework without reminders from you.

3. When given a job to do the student stays on task until it is completed without being distracted.

4. Student continually strives to improve the quality of their work.

5. You see evidence that the students takes his/her job seriously.

6. Student understands the connection between the work he/she does and the grade achieved.

7. Student listens carefully when another person is speaking.

8. Student participates meaningfully in class discussions.

9. Student cooperates with rules and expectations in school settings.

What activities does the student enjoy? 

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Do you have any questions or comments about the student?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
Por cada comportamiento abajo mencionado, de al estudiante lo que usted cree que es más correcto para él.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Nunca</td>
<td>Aveces</td>
<td>Algunas veces</td>
<td>Mas siguiendo que no</td>
<td>Las mayoría de las veces</td>
<td>Siempre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Su hijo personalmente se encarga de estar preparado para la escuela.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Su hijo/a planea adelante y se da suficiente tiempo para terminar todo.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Cuando tiene trabajo, su hijo/a trabaja hasta que termina sin ser distraído.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Su hijo/a siempre se esfuerza por mejorar la calidad de su trabajo.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Su hijo/a toma su trabajo de estudiante muy en serio.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Su hijo/a entiende la relación de que buen trabajo significa buena calificación.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Cuando alguien le habla, el/ella escucha atentamente.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Su hijo participa activamente en pláticas de la familia.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Qué actividades tu hijo/a gusta? ____________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________

Tiene preguntas o comentarios? ______________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________
# Maturity Assessment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I am prepared for class.</td>
<td>I do all assignments and keep track of my homework without reminders.</td>
<td>When given a job I stay on task until it is completed.</td>
<td>I continually strive to improve the quality of my work.</td>
<td>I see evidence that I take my job seriously.</td>
<td>I understand the connection between the work I do and the grade achieved.</td>
<td>I listen carefully when another person is speaking.</td>
<td>I participate meaningfully in class discussions.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

**Student = Blue**  **Parent = Green**  **Teacher = Red**
Fall Conference Goals

*Academic: READING*
*Académica: Lectura*

I achieve this I will ________________________________.

*Academic: WRITING*
*Académica: Escritura*

I achieve this I will ________________________________.

*Academic: MATH*
*Académica: Mathematicas*

I achieve this I will ________________________________.

*Self Management/Ministración Propio:*

I achieve this I will ________________________________.

*Personal Goal/ Meta personal:*

I achieve this I will ________________________________.

*Other/Otro:*

I achieve this I will ________________________________.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Presenter:</th>
<th>Evaluator:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Did they have all their materials</td>
<td>5 4 3 2 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Were they well prepared</td>
<td>5 4 3 2 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was in presented smoothly and clearly</td>
<td>5 4 3 2 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did they speak off of the reflections and not read what they had written</td>
<td>5 4 3 2 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall presentation</td>
<td>5 4 3 2 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Comments:**

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<th>Presenter:</th>
<th>Evaluator:</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>5 4 3 2 1</td>
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<td>5 4 3 2 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall presentation</td>
<td>5 4 3 2 1</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Comments:**

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<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Did they have all their materials</td>
<td>5 4 3 2 1</td>
<td></td>
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<td>5 4 3 2 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall presentation</td>
<td>5 4 3 2 1</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Comments:**
Dear Parents or Guardians,

Thank you for coming to your child’s conference. Our goal at Tieton Intermediate School is for students to take an active role in their own education. We believe that student-led conferences provide an opportunity for students to take responsibility for their education. Your feedback will help us make improvements to our conferencing process.

We would appreciate you taking a few minutes to rate each item below according to how valuable it is to you and your child as you work together to improve his/her academic performance. You may fill this out prior to learning or you may take it home and have your child bring it back to school the following morning.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Maturity Assessment and Graph</th>
<th>Very helpful</th>
<th>Helpful</th>
<th>Somewhat helpful</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Samples of Student Work</td>
<td>Very helpful</td>
<td>Helpful</td>
<td>Somewhat helpful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Progress and Grade Reports</td>
<td>Very helpful</td>
<td>Helpful</td>
<td>Somewhat helpful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student’s Goal Plan</td>
<td>Very helpful</td>
<td>Helpful</td>
<td>Somewhat helpful</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please share any other comments or questions you have.
Estimados Padres y Guardianes,

Gracias por venir a las conferencias de otoño para su hijo/a. Nuestra meta en la escuela de Tieton es de que los estudiantes tengan una parte activa en su educación. Nosotros creemos que las conferencias por estudiantes dan la oportunidad a los estudiantes de que tomen responsabilidad por su educación. Sus opiniones nos ayudarán a mejorar el proceso de conferencias.

Les pedimos que por favor se tomen unos cuantos minutos para marcar cada una de las categorías según sea de importancia para usted y su estudiante mientras trabajan juntos para mejorar su trabajo académico. Usted puede llenarlo antes de irse o puede llevarlo a casa a regresararlo con su hijo/a al siguiente día.

| Evaluación de Grafica de Madurez         | muy util | util | algo util |
| Muestras de trabajos del estudiante     | muy util | util | algo util |
| Evaluación Academica                    | muy util | util | algo util |
| Meta Personal del Estudiante            | muy util | util | algo util |

Por favor denos cualquier comentario que tenga o preguntas.
CHAPTER V
CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The purpose of this study was to create a student led conference where students take the lead role in their education by promoting self-reflection and goal setting. Also, the conferences should promote effective communication between parents, teachers, and students.

Conclusion

The results of the survey were very positive. Twenty-three of the twenty-five surveys were turned in, a 92% turn in rate. All of the questions averaged between a 4.348 and a 4.000, which meant the parents agreed the conferences were effective in the different focus areas. The average response of all the questions was a 4.262 out of 5.0.

The lower responses of the survey were questions 8 and 10, which averaged a 4.0. Low response questions like question 8, 10, and 11 seem to have a connection. These questions were asking about student self reflection and goal setting. In question 8 the parents were asked if they see their students reflecting on their work. Questions 10 and 11 are related to topics asking about students taking responsibility and the overall effectiveness of student self-reflection. In addition, questions 10 and 11 scored below the average response score at 4.179. These show that the areas of the lowest responses were student-reflection and responsibility.
On the other hand when parents were asked if they see and understand their child’s strengths and weaknesses their responses were higher averaging 4.391. Parents responded that they were able to see their child’s strengths and weaknesses, but they responded lower, 4.297, when asked if their child understands their strengths and weaknesses. Students have been able to explain their strengths and weaknesses, but cannot fully understand them.

The highest response to any survey question was at 4.739, which asked the parents if they felt comfortable communicating at the conference. While they felt comfortable at their conference, the comfortableness of the students dropped to an average of 4.26. Any uneasiness of the conference is coming from the students.

The review of literature indicated the conferences would increase parent involvement in the conference process. There was a 95.8% attendance for fall conferences and 100% attendance during spring conferences. Parents attended their conferences and if they could not they wanted to reschedule during the conference week. Parents and students were excited for the conference time and demonstrated great interest.

Recommendations

The survey revealed two main faults, the effectiveness of self-reflection in their work and goals and the difference between the comfortableness of the parents and student. The survey results were high, but improvements in these two areas need to be made.
First, the research showed a low effectiveness in the area of student self-reflection. The parents were able to understand their child’s strengths and weaknesses, but they did not feel their child really understood them. When the children were showing their work they were reading from their written reflection. Most of their written reflection commentaries were created off of the template that had been created for them. Because of this, their written reflections came off stiff and as if they were reading what they were told to read, not what they had created themselves. Thus the reflections, in many cases did not appear to be organized. One particular student knew her strengths, but she read them directly off the piece of paper instead of saying what she knew about herself. Her self-reflection became her thoughts, but in my words. These results were similar with what Judith Ellsworth found while studying a school holding student led conferences. She felt the teachers were not giving the students enough room to do their own thinking. (Ellsworth) At Tieton the problem could be changed by not using the template as a must, but more of a guide or example. If the students used their own words this could enhance more self-reflection.

Another way students can show self reflection is in the goal setting process. At Tieton students were asked to create goals just like Donald Hackmann had stated in his article about promoting student responsibility. (1996) He required his kids to go a step farther and collect artifacts to prove they had achieved their goals. This requirement made his students think about their goals throughout the entire year. Adding this requirement could increase the self-reflection needing for the goal setting process.

Second, the largest difference in the survey results was the comfortableness of the parents verses the students. During the conference the students were reading directly off
of the template sheets for all areas including the reflections mentioned above. This relates to the amount of practice the students had. The review of literature emphasized the importance of student practice to make the students feel comfortable and be able to practice what will happen at the conference. Students during the practice were comfortable, but tensed up during the actual conference. They became uncomfortable and began relying too much on the written information rather than creating a conversation like atmosphere. Kathleen Wolfley required her students to watch a video of a past student led conference. (Paglin) We could not do this idea because we don’t have a tape of a conference. Next year, the conferences will provide this so students can view and practice.

Finally, each year the timeline of events must be changed to accommodate the year’s events. The staff must be instructed each year about when the items are expected of them. The review of literature confirmed, teachers need to be shown what is expected of them. (Kinny) The timeline must be recreated and distributed each year.

**Future Research**

The goals of student led conference are to increase communication and self-reflection. The survey showed positive results for the 2005-2006 school year and additional research should be updated annually. The question remains does increase the practice and using their own words improve self-reflection and ease the comfortableness of the students? These changes may be put in affect next year and parent responses could be compared to see if these changes cause an increase or decrease among students, parents, and teachers.
Conferences may increase the communication and self-reflection may improve schooling, but how much does this affect a student’s success in high school and college? What are the long-term effects of the conferences? Perhaps a long-term study could show a correlation between success in higher education and student self-reflection. A hypothesis for research could ask does student-self reflection increase success in higher levels of education? The study could follow these students through high school and if they attend post secondary education.
REFERENCES


http://www.idahomiddlelevel.org/studentled%20conf.htm


Cleland, J. (1999). We can charts: Building blocks fro student-led conferences. *The Reading Teacher, 52*(6), 588-595


http://www.naesp.org/ContentLoad.do?contentId=460&action=print


http://recordcard.ospi.k12.wa.us/

http://www.nwrel.org/nwedufall_96/article4.html


Dear Parents or Guardians,

During the 2005-2006 school year I have been doing work on my Master’s Degree through Central Washington University. I am currently writing a thesis on student led conferencing. The focus of my thesis has been the effectiveness of the student led conferences conducted at Tieton Intermediate School.

I have created a survey to help me evaluate the effectiveness of this years conferences. The purpose of the survey is to evaluate the communication between conference participants, and the self-reflection by the student. If you would like please take a moment to fill it out. I would appreciate any feedback to help make improvements to the conferencing process. These surveys are anonymous to me and outside readers. Your identity will not be disclosed in any way.

The information from these surveys will help create more effective conferencing at Tieton Intermediate School. If you have any questions you can contact me at [redacted] extension [redacted] or at home at [redacted]. If you would like to contact my advisor, Dr. James Pappas, he can be reached at 509-963-3075. You may also contact me if you would like to see the final report. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Mindy Fitterer

Please note: Phone numbers have been redacted due to privacy concerns
Estimados Padres o Guardianes,

Esta año yo trabajo mi Master’s Degree en Universidad de Central. Yo escribo mi tesis sobre las conferencias con estudiantes y padres. Mi sujeto es la efectividad de las conferencias a la escuela de Tieton.

Yo hacia una evaluación de conferencias en esta año. El proposito del evaluacion es para evaluar el communication entre padres, estudiantes, y la maestra y del estudiante en su reflexion propia de su trabajo. Les pedimos que por favor se tomen unos cuantas minutos para marcar cada una de las categorías. Yo aprecio sus opiniones nos ayudaran a mejorar el proceso de conferencias. La evaluación son anonimoa para me y otro lectorras. No vamos a revelar su identidad.


Sinceramente,

Mindy Fitterer
# Student Led Conference Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The student led conference increased communication between my child and I about their education.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The student led conference increased communication between my child’s teacher and I about my child’s education.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I felt comfortable communicating with my child and teacher during the conference.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. My child felt comfortable communicating with the teacher and me during the conferences.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. The overall effectiveness of the communication during the student led conference.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Since I attended my child’s student led conference:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I understand my child’s strengths and weaknesses in his or her education.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. My child understands his or her strengths and weaknesses in his or her education.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. I see my child reflecting on his or her work.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. I understand my child’s goals in their education.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. My child understands his or her goals in his or her education.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. I see my child taking responsibility for his or her education.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. The overall effectiveness of student self-reflection of his or her work.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. The overall effectiveness of the student goal plan.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Encuesta De Conferencia De Los Estudiantes**

1. En la conferencia de los estudiantes la comunicación incrementó entre mi hijo/a y yo acerca de la educación.
   - 5: Firmemente de acuerdo
   - 4: De acuerdo
   - 3: Neutral
   - 2: Desacuerdo
   - 1: Firmemente desacuerdo

2. En la conferencia de los estudiantes la comunicación incrementó entre el maestro de mi hijo/a y yo acerca de la educación de el/ella.
   - 5: Firmemente de acuerdo
   - 4: De acuerdo
   - 3: Neutral
   - 2: Desacuerdo
   - 1: Firmemente desacuerdo

3. Yo me siento confortable comunciando con mi hijo/a y el maestro durante la conferencia.
   - 5: Firmemente de acuerdo
   - 4: De acuerdo
   - 3: Neutral
   - 2: Desacuerdo
   - 1: Firmemente desacuerdo

4. Mi hijo/a se siente confortable comunicándose con el maestro y yo durante las conferencias.
   - 5: Firmemente de acuerdo
   - 4: De acuerdo
   - 3: Neutral
   - 2: Desacuerdo
   - 1: Firmemente desacuerdo

5. En general cuál es la efectividad de la comunicación durante la conferencia.
   - 5: Firmemente de acuerdo
   - 4: De acuerdo
   - 3: Neutral
   - 2: Desacuerdo
   - 1: Firmemente desacuerdo

*Desde que yo asistí a la conferencia de mi hijo/a:

6. Yo entiendo las debilidades y fortalezas de mi hijo/a en su educación.
   - 5: Firmemente de acuerdo
   - 4: De acuerdo
   - 3: Neutral
   - 2: Desacuerdo
   - 1: Firmemente desacuerdo

7. Mi hijo/a entiende las debilidades y fortalezas en su educación.
   - 5: Firmemente de acuerdo
   - 4: De acuerdo
   - 3: Neutral
   - 2: Desacuerdo
   - 1: Firmemente desacuerdo

8. Yo miro la reflexión de mi hijo/a en su trabajo.
   - 5: Firmemente de acuerdo
   - 4: De acuerdo
   - 3: Neutral
   - 2: Desacuerdo
   - 1: Firmemente desacuerdo

9. Yo entiendo las metas de mi hijo/a en su educación.
   - 5: Firmemente de acuerdo
   - 4: De acuerdo
   - 3: Neutral
   - 2: Desacuerdo
   - 1: Firmemente desacuerdo

10. Mi hijo/a entiende sus metas en su educación.
    - 5: Firmemente de acuerdo
    - 4: De acuerdo
    - 3: Neutral
    - 2: Desacuerdo
    - 1: Firmemente desacuerdo

11. Yo miro que mi hijo/a toma responsabilidad en su educación.
    - 5: Firmemente de acuerdo
    - 4: De acuerdo
    - 3: Neutral
    - 2: Desacuerdo
    - 1: Firmemente desacuerdo

12. En general la efectividad del estudiante en su reflexión propia de su trabajo.
    - 5: Firmemente de acuerdo
    - 4: De acuerdo
    - 3: Neutral
    - 2: Desacuerdo
    - 1: Firmemente desacuerdo

13. En general la efectividad del planeamiento de sus metas.
    - 5: Firmemente de acuerdo
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Student Led Conference Survey Results
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