

## **Notes for teachers communicating with PARENTS about student led conferences:**

1. In the spirit of equity, shoot for 100% representation. Make it clear to all parents that you expect them to come because this is an important milestone in their child's life. Make sure parents understand that this is NOT a traditional conference in which the teacher tells parents how the student is performing.
2. Give parents plenty of notice from the very beginning of the school year when there will be student led conferences. Make sure it is clearly written in orientation/welcome packet, open house or curriculum night materials, in mass emails to families, etc. It has worked well to have a preferred student led conference form for parents to prioritize their most convenient days and times (see example on p. 1 in packet). Make returning the form mandatory, and keep track of who hasn't returned it. You may need to send home extra copies and/or call to get their input.
3. Let parents know that the student led conference requires that the student is present! Make sure they understand that the student will run the conference, and while the teacher will be present to support the child and be able to answer questions, this is the *student's* chance to show off his or her achievements and goals. It doesn't matter whether the math teacher, the physical education teacher or the art teacher hosts the child's conference. Make this clear to parents. Some may feel disappointed if it is not an academic teacher.
4. Parents need to know that if they have pressing concerns to discuss with the teachers, they may schedule a separate meeting another time; this is not the appropriate time for a parent/teacher meeting. (In these separate meetings, many of the teams at Mill Creek will only meet with a parent about concerns over student achievement if the student is present, in keeping with the philosophy of the student-led conference.)
5. Remember that some parents have unpleasant memories of their own middle school experience, or have negative feelings about how their child has done in school in the past. These experiences may make them hesitant to attend. They need a lot of encouragement and reassurance that this is good for their child's development.
6. Be prepared to host younger siblings with appropriate books, paper and crayons, etc., and have a place at the table or nearby where they may occupy themselves. Welcome families. Some cannot afford childcare for this sort of thing. Many parents won't be comfortable asking if siblings can attend. If they seem hesitant to attend, you may need to offer that siblings can quietly color or read during the conference.
7. Send home confirmation notes of the exact date, time (indicate AM or PM!) and location of the student led conference and with whom they will meet. Have kids staple or tape it into planners and then check to see that it was removed and given to parents.
8. Be ready to be flexible about changing times for families who end up having business trips or other events that come up. The preference form was likely to have been completed at the beginning of the year. Things change.
9. Understand that some divorced families may need for their child to perform the conference twice, once for each parent.
10. Design your student led conferences in an open area so that several teachers are working simultaneously with families. Parents who might become hostile may behave more appropriately in a public setting; there will be other teachers there to assist. It is wise to have two or more teachers (and an administrator casually in the area) in conferences with students whose parents are known to be hostile or aggressive.
11. Leave open spaces in your schedule in case you get behind. Place yourself where you can see the door and the clock.
12. If report cards are distributed at conferences, hand the report card to the student. He or she can view it first and then share it with parents. This gesture reinforces the notion that the student is the main player.

### **Notes for teachers preparing STUDENTS for their student-led conferences:**

1. Provide class time for students to prepare their presentations. Check that all students complete all parts.
2. For the portfolio, allow students to mark items they are proud of (or examples of the type of work they would like to improve) with strips of Post-It notes in binders or notebooks. Have them identify why they are proud of the item. Some items may be selected by teachers, such as a unit test or map.
3. Have kids show parents their planners and explain how they use them. They need to be able to make better use of the planner (and explain this to parents) if they are not achieving.
4. Color code the sheets for visual learners. Give each child a file folder in which to keep their conference materials, and provide a “cheat sheet” with the order of items (and the color) for them to copy into the front cover of the folder for comfort or security.  
Example:  
#1: opening note (lavender)  
#2: time map (yellow)  
#3: strengths and goals in each class (green)  
#4: show portfolio & planner  
#5: self evaluation (white)...
5. Have kids practice on each other (in “double time” or “triple time” to preserve privacy) once their portfolios are complete and all sheets are filled out. It will give them more confidence.
6. Remind kids that it takes a great deal of maturity to tell their parents that they have not done their personal best and that they have a plan to improve.
7. Remind kids that it is a sign of maturity when they thank their parents for reminding them to do their homework, or asking them to turn off the computer/TV instead of whining or lying about homework. Parents notice these mature signs, and they are looking for this type of evidence when it is time to decide whether to allow a student to take driver’s education, or to give other privileges that require a great deal of responsibility in the near future.
8. If you choose to include the learning style profile, be sure to teach kids that the more modalities we learn to use, the better learners we become. Have them list helpful hints that they can use for *all three* learning styles in order to become better learners.
9. If you choose to include the multiple intelligence profile, explain to students that if they have a high score in the musical intelligence or in the kinesthetic intelligence, but they are not taking a music, dance, or physical education class, then they are getting “shortchanged” in a way, given the fact that those intelligences are not earning credit on the report card. Our abilities are broader than what is credited on paper. Also, the multiple intelligence profile will change during one’s lifetime depending on personal interests and opportunities. We can strengthen any of our intelligences with effort.