

# Student-Led Conferences

## *Presentation Audio Transcript*

**Slide 1:** Student-led conferences may not rise to the level of other personalized learning practices, but we have found that they are an especially powerful tool in providing all parties -- students, teachers, parents -- the information, support, and agency they need to succeed in a personalized system. Thus we are doing a deeper dive.

Traditionally, parent-teacher conferences are a meeting between adults about the performance of a child. Often the agenda is teacher-driven, as they are the holders of the information and evaluation about student learning and growth. Teachers talk, parents listen and ask questions. But even if they are asked to participate in the decision-making process, the conference is still set up as a teacher-driven process that limits student agency and voice.

Student-led conferences, on the other hand, allow students to take control, to drive the agenda, to advocate for themselves, to reflect and to take ownership of their education. No longer is education an act being done to them, but it is an action they are taking that prepares them for postsecondary success.

**Slide 2:** There is no one standard format for student-led conferences. However, there are three considerations schools and teachers should address when developing them:

- 1) Purpose of the student-led conference
- 2) Audience at the student-led conference, and
- 3) Expectations at the student-led conference.

**Slide 3:** In personalized education, when students have choice about specific content in which to engage, how to engage with the content and how to demonstrate skill, the purpose of student-led conferences will likely be for students to defend their learning against a standard set of proficiency statements required for advancement or graduation.

It might also serve as a celebration of learning or as goal setting, or both.



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In some cases, it might be a problem solving exercise where students share their successes but also a road block and participants in the conference offer suggestions. Regardless of the purpose, it should be clear to students why they are doing this and how it fits with your school's' vision and mission.

**Slide 4:** A second consideration is audience. Who will be attending the conference? Some schools, especially at the elementary level might only include teacher and parent, while at middle and secondary levels, other students, multiple teachers, parents, administrators and even community members might sit in on the conference. Choosing who will participate should be directly tied to a school's purpose for student-led conferences.

Teachers and schools should also consider timing and how often student-led conferences happen. One example might be a school district that has two conferences per year in grades 1-7 with teachers and parents with focuses on goal setting. In grade 8, they conference with a bigger audience of multiple teachers, some students and a community member as they connect their learning with the school's proficiency statements. At the end of grade 11, they conference with a round table of their peers, a guidance counselor, administrator and community member as they show which expectations they have met, and which ones they still have to meet before heading into senior year. There is no one right answer, but again timing should connect to the purpose of the conference.

**Slide 5:** Expectations are a final consideration. It is important for the success of the conference that all parties are clear about what questions the student should address, what artifacts the student should share, and how much time the conference will take.

Younger students might have specific questions to address, while older students might have more broad overarching questions. In sophisticated systems when students are leading their own conferences often, they might even be encouraged to create their entire agenda as long as it relates to the purpose of the conference.



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Being clear about what work students should share is also important. When students are presenting work in defense of proficiency, a pre-conference with a teacher might be helpful.

Timing is also a point of clarification for student-led conferences. How long will students have? If students are presenting a portfolio of work and talk about each piece individually, the conference could take a considerable amount of time. How can timing support students and the purpose of the conference? This is an important question to consider.

The resources and activities in this module will help you consider how to develop student-led conferences in your system. They are meant to strengthen and validate good practices already happening and to help jump start new practices. Start with the text-based discussion which focuses on purpose.

**Slide 6:** Thank you for watching. The resources and activities on this page will help you explore further aspects of student-led conferences. If you have any questions or want to share additional resources you think might help others, please contact the Center for Collaborative Education at [vtclg@ccebos.org](mailto:vtclg@ccebos.org).

