

Implementing Student-Led Conferences in Your School

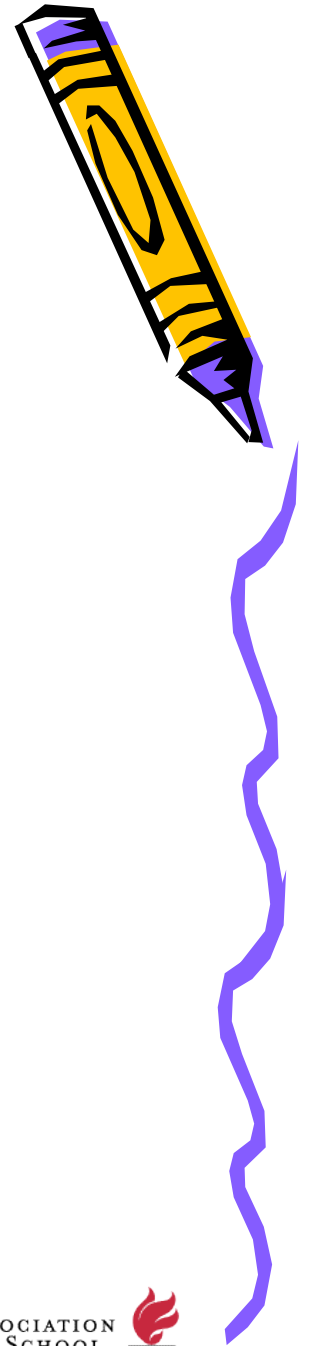
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"...this practice is the biggest breakthrough in communicating about student achievement in the last century. When students are well prepared over an extended period to tell the story of their own success (or lack thereof), they seem to experience a fundamental shift in their internal sense of responsibility for that success. The pride in accomplishment that students feel when they have positive story to tell and tell it well can be immensely motivational. The sense of personal responsibility that they feel when anticipating what it will be like to face the music of having to tell their story of poor achievement can also drive them to productive work."

Rich Stiggins, Phi Delta Kappan, November 1999.



Traditional vs. Student-Led

- Teacher Driven
- Short time frame - little time for conversations
- Arena style or large group setting
- Focus tends to be on social and emotional rather than academic
- Fragmented

- Student Driven
- Longer time - conversation based
- High Accountability
- Opportunities for goal setting
- Samples of work
- Authentic Assessment



Why?

- Increase in parent involvement
- All teachers involved in the conferences
- High Accountability
- Learning atmosphere



Why?



- Student Accountability
- Opportunity to see work in progress
- Motivates students
- See all the parents



10 Good Reasons to Implement Student-Led Conferencing in Your School

- Opens up communication between school and home
- Practices real life-skills - communication, organization, leadership, etc.
- Teaches self-evaluation, self-reflection skills
- Focuses on learning
- Goal setting process has buy-in by all involved



Con't: 10 Good Reasons to Implement Student-Led Conferencing in Your School

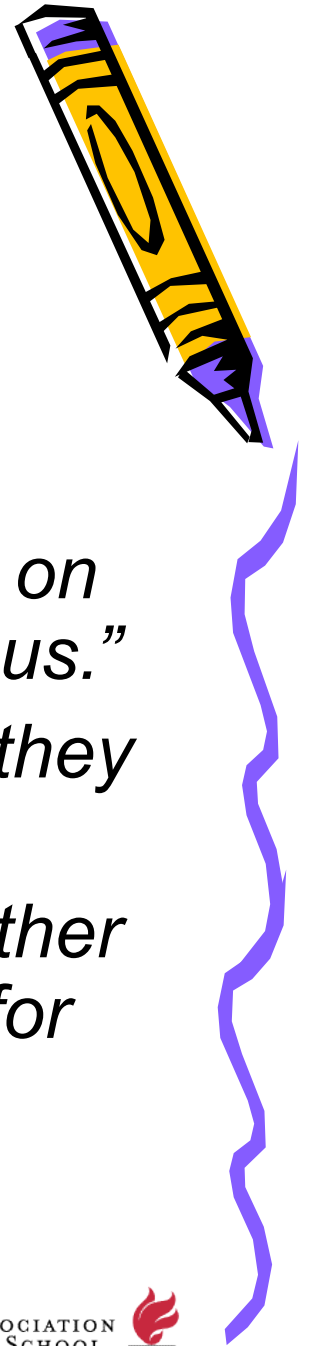
- Easier scheduling - easily accommodates late arrivals, walk-ins
- Provides quality time between parent and child
- Less stress on teacher during conference days
- Accommodates parents who do not speak English
- Students are the center of the conference



What Others Say:

Administrators

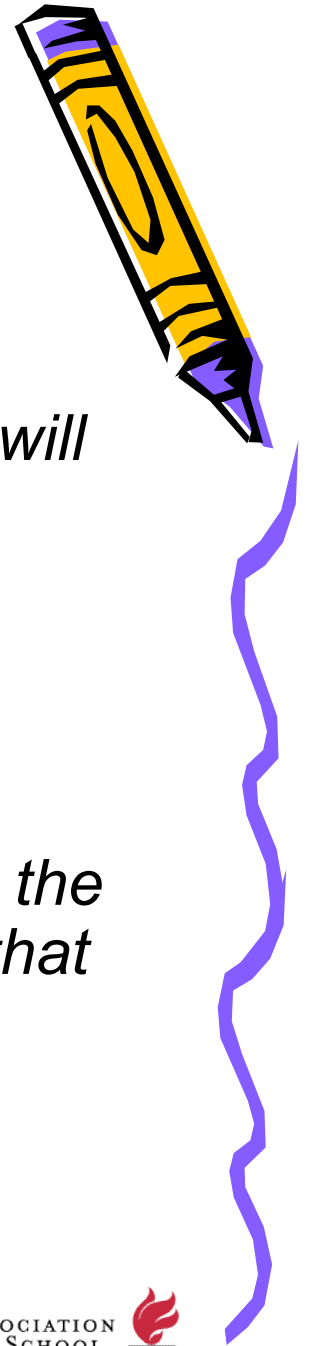
- *“Since implementing SLC, students have realized that their classroom behavior impacts their learning...visitors comment on how respectful students are on our campus.”*
- *“This is more real life than anything else they have had at school.”*
- *“I can’t imagine doing conferences any other way. SLC prevents academic surprises for parents.”*



What Others Say:

Teachers

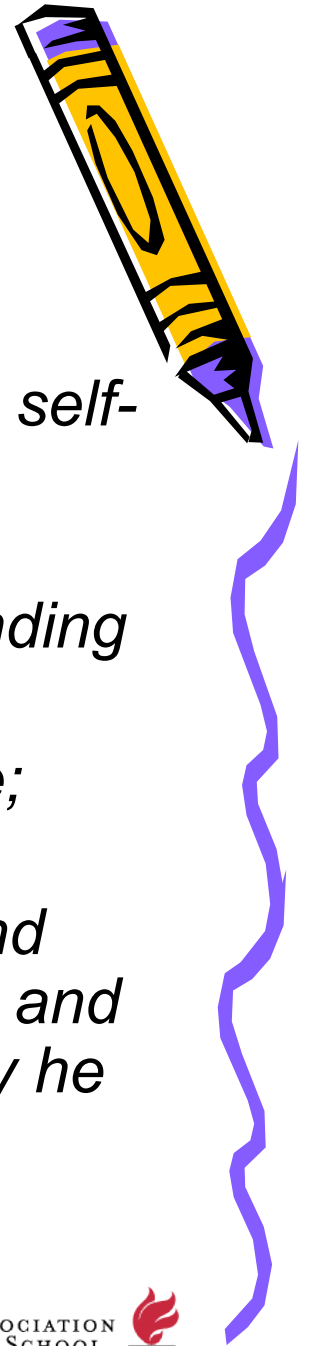
- *“I (now) look ahead to the types of assignments I will do this trimester and what I want to include in the portfolio.”*
- *“Arena style conferences didn’t provide privacy, didn’t meet the needs, and there was no student buy-in.”*
- *“When (students) need to present to their parents the missing assignments sheet, there is no place for that student to brush off the blame on someone else. Kids...now get their work in.”*



What Others Say:

Parents

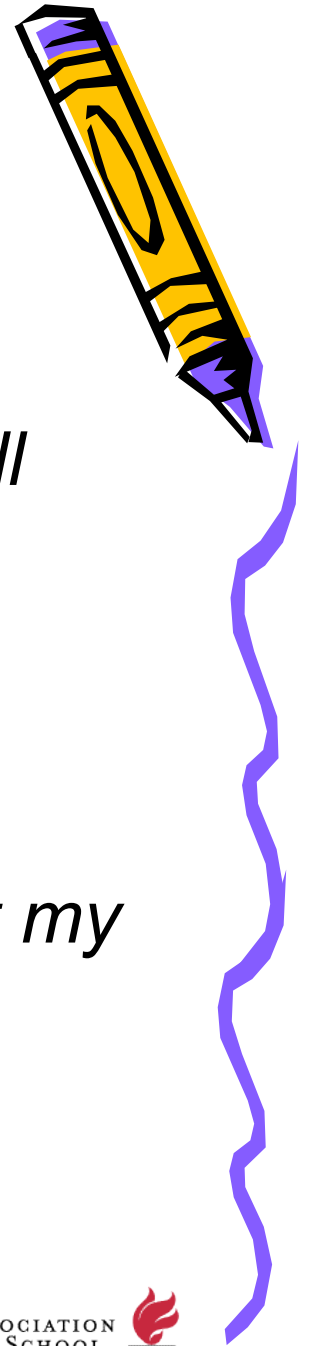
- *“My child is more reflective, more self confident, self-directed, owning her work.”*
- *“I am so impressed with the enthusiasm my son shows in regard to learning more and understanding schoolwork.”*
- *“I stay at conferences as long as they will let me; time is always too short.”*
- *“I want to thank you for everything the school and teachers have done. I’m really proud of my son and I was so impressed with his attitude and the way he conducted himself.”*



What Others Say:

Students

- *“I love it; it encourages me to be very well organized.”*
- *“It helps bring out the best in me.”*
- *“I like (creating the portfolio); I’m more in charge.”*
- *“Things at home are about the same, but my mom helps me more now.”*



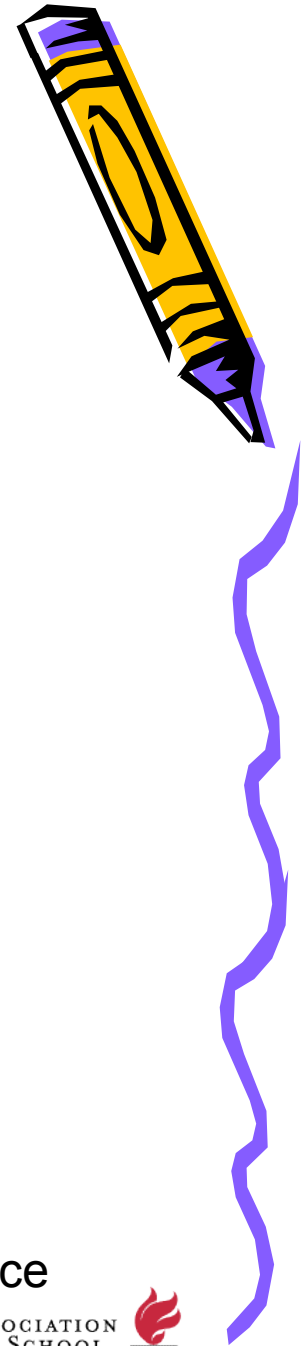
Organizing for the Conferences

- When to hold? Match time to purpose
 - Fall - goal setting for the year
 - Spring - culmination of year - future plans
- Decide on overall organizational plan
 - By individual teacher
 - By team
 - School-wide
 - How will Elective/PE teachers be involved?

Options

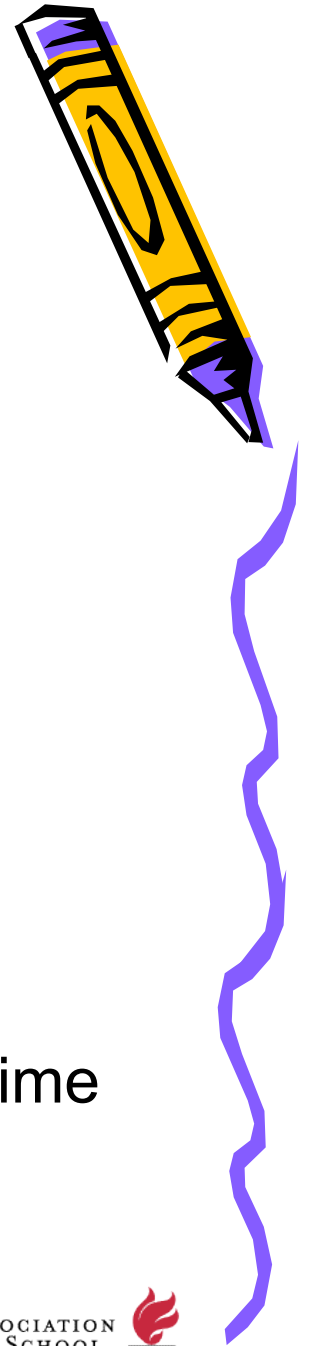
Conference Facilitators
Drop-ins

Set up for Demos
Send script to conference



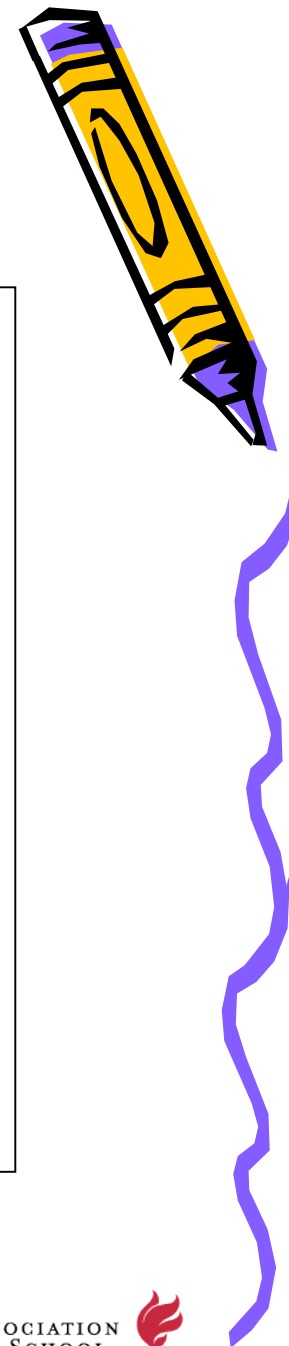
Organizing for the Conferences - con't

- How many to hold at a time?
 - Individual
 - 3 - 4
 - Large group
- Decide upon scheduling process
 - Create master schedule
 - Scheduling Siblings
 - Who schedules
 - How to handle absences, students unsure of time

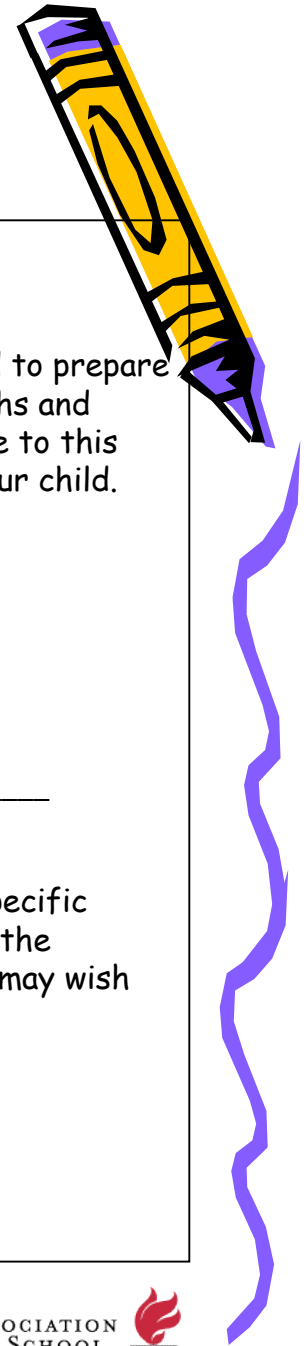


Sample Master Schedule

Student's Name	Parent's Name
7:30-8:00	
7:30-8:00	
7:30-8:00	
<i>(alternative: 8:00 – 8:30 Drop-in Time)</i>	
8:00-8:30	
8:00-8:30	
8:00-8:30	
8:30-9:00	
8:30-9:00	
8:30-9:00	



Sample Postcard to Notify Parents



TALENT MIDDLE SCHOOL

Dear parents/guardians:

It's time for our student-led conferences and your child has been working very hard to prepare for this event. He or she has selected work samples from all classes, analyzed his or her strengths and weaknesses as a learner, and set possible goals for the remainder of the school year. Please come to this conference prepared to listen, acknowledge his or her effort and growth, and ask questions of your child. You will also be asked to help complete the goals and develop a plan to achieve them.

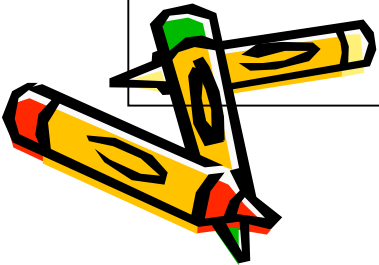
You and your child have been scheduled for a conference on:

_____ (date) _____ (time) _____ (room)

_____ (student name) _____ (conference facilitator)

If you need to reschedule, please call student services at 535-1552. If you wish to speak with specific teachers a drop-in time will be available during the half-hour prior to and the half-hour following the scheduled conference. For those of you scheduled near a mealtime or at the end of the day, you may wish to call the school to confirm the availability of the drop-in time. Thank you!

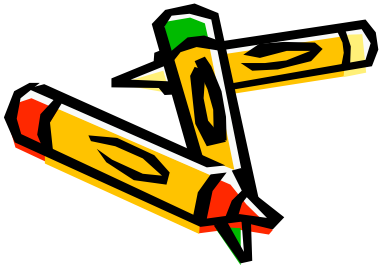
**Successful students are supported by involved parents.
Thank you for attending this conference.**



Preparing *Teachers* for the Conference

Tips for Success!

- Issues of equity - Who will be involved in facilitating the conferences ie: all certified staff, academic teams only, elective/pe staff, etc.
- Who will be the “point person” in charge of logistics?
- No surprises! Be organized
- Create countdown time line ahead of time
- Set common expectations for all involved
- Divide up tasks - who will do what?
- Decide what professional development is needed
- Understand difference in roles as teacher and as conference facilitator



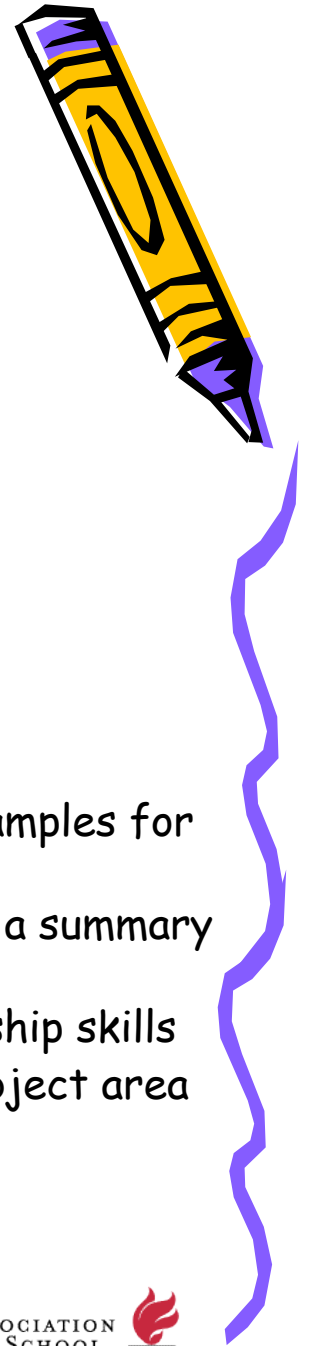
Conference Responsibilities As the *Teacher*

Early in the school year

- Design work that emphasizes
 - ✓ multiple skills and processes
 - ✓ addresses state/local curriculum standards
 - ✓ processes as well as quality of product
 - ✓ examples of "real work", not work contrived for show
- Teach and practice the skills required for self-reflection
- Collect work in portfolios or other long-term storage system

Within a few weeks of the conference

- Help your students sort through their classroom work and choose examples for the conference
- Ask students to review self-reflections of chosen work and complete a summary reflection of work to date
- Complete a cover sheet that will rate identified study and/or citizenship skills
 - Help students practice sharing their work from your subject area



Preparing *Teachers* for the Conference

- What to teach

Best Choices: (focus on skills/process)

Writing pieces

-Including all drafts

Science experiments

-Including hypothesis, lab notes and findings

Mathematics problem-solving

-Including process, solution and proof

Applied mathematics

-Designing house plans

Book reviews

-Including summary as well as review of author's style

Research projects

-Including notes and student created product

Physical Fitness summary

-Including pre and post skills and growth over time



$$\begin{array}{r} 5 \\ 5 \\ \hline 10 \end{array}$$



Preparing *Teachers* for the Conference

- *What to teach: con't*

Less Effective Work Samples:(focus on single skills)

- Spelling tests
- Answers to chapter questions
- Mathematics timed test
- Multiple choice tests

- **Create Portfolios**

- Collection of Student Work
- File folders to hanging crates to file cabinets

- **Selecting Work to Present**

- How many pieces of work per subject area?
- Who selects work?
 - Teacher Selected
 - Student Selected
 - Shared Decision



$$\begin{array}{r} + 5 \\ 5 \\ \hline 10 \end{array}$$



Preparing *Teachers* for the Conference

Design and teach self-reflections:

Self-Evaluation:

Assessing a performance against a standard in order to judge the quality of the performance.

Examples:

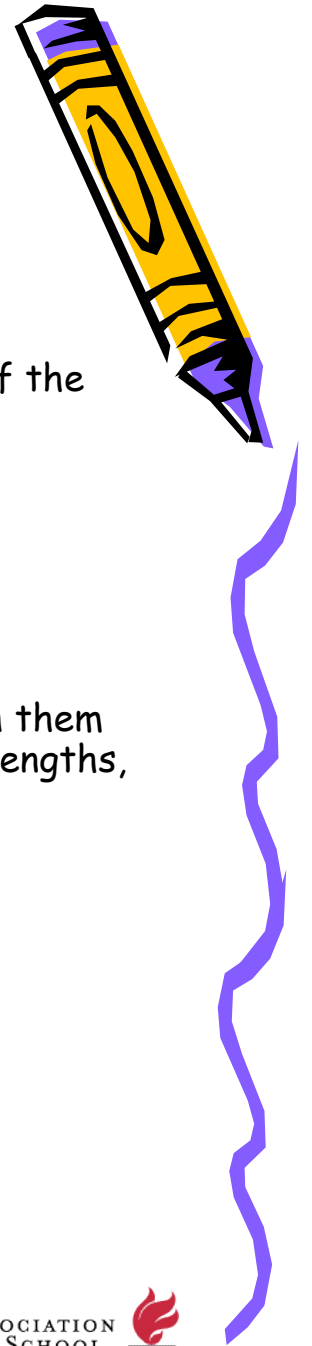
- Use of a state scoring guide
- Teacher's previously set criteria for assignment
- Other performance standards

Self-Reflection:

The focus is to help students understand the learning process and to teach them to assess themselves as a learner. It encourages honest recognition of strengths, areas to work on, and the setting of future goals.

Examples:

- Responding to highly specific questions in writing
- Drawing a picture or webbing a process
- Making a graph of effort, satisfaction, interest and value
- Letters to teacher or self
- Evaluative essays
- Checklists or charts
- Class discussions, one-on-one conferencing
- Journal or learning log entries



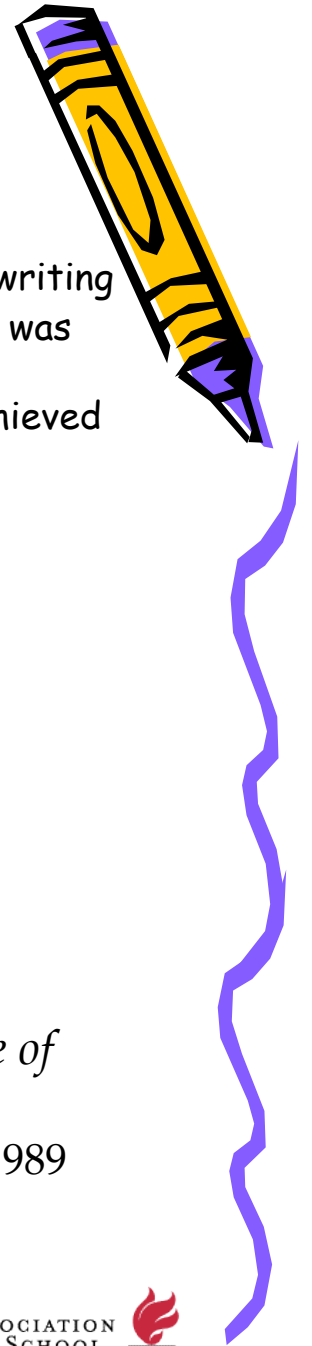
Preparing *Teachers* for the Conference

Types of reflections may include:

- focused and highly specific questions the students respond to in writing
- drawing a picture or webbing the process one went through, what was learned, and what needs to be done differently next time
- making a graph of the effort, satisfaction, interest, and value achieved from the project or assignment
- letters to self or teacher
- evaluative essays
- checklists or charts
- commercially-designed reflections forms
- teacher or student-designed reflection forms
- class discussions, one-on-one conferencing
- using journal entries and responding in learning logs
- Brainstorming

We must constantly remind ourselves that the ultimate purpose of evaluation is to enable students to evaluate themselves."

Art Costa, 1989



Preparing *Teachers* for the Conference

Sample Questions for Self-Reflections:

- o What makes this your best piece?
- o Why did you select this piece of work for your portfolio?
- o If you could work further on this piece, what would you do?
- o How is your work now different from your work at the beginning of the year?
- o What skills have you learned from doing this piece?
- o What did you find most challenging about this project?

Different Formats for Self-Reflections:

- o Draw a picture representation of the process you used to complete this work.
- o Ask other class members to comment on your performance. Summarize their ideas. Which will you implement and why?
- o Make a graph that shows the amount of effort, satisfaction, interest, and value you gained from doing this project.
- o Write a letter to yourself pretending you are the teacher and explain why you earned the grade you received.



Conference Responsibilities: As the *Conference Facilitator*

Before the conference

- Schedule conferences according to the school's agreed upon procedure
- Help student organize their work from all classes based on a table of contents
- Help students work through the goal setting procedure
- Teach the conference process/script to your students
- Allow time for students to practice, practice, practice
- Send out a reminder invitation just before the conference

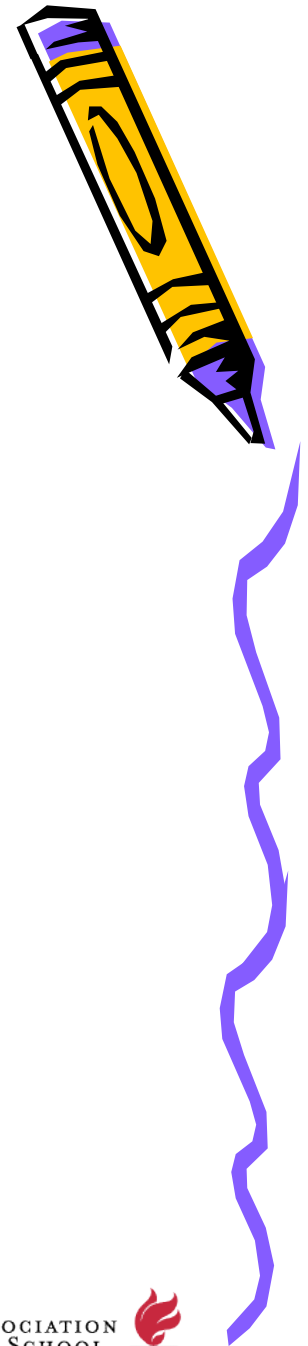


Preparing *Students* for the Conference

Organizing the Conference Portfolio

Sample Table of Contents:

Name: _____	Date: _____
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dear Parent Letter• Core (Reading, Writing, Social Studies) Cover Sheet <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mathematics Cover Sheet <hr/> <hr/>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Science or Health Cover Sheet <hr/> <hr/>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Elective Cover Sheet <hr/> <hr/>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• PE or 2nd Elective Cover Sheet <hr/> <hr/>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Report Card• Goals for Success• Parent Homework	



Preparing *Students* for the Conference

Writing a “Dear Parent” Letter

- tool to use as an “ice breaker”
- welcomes parents to the conference, tells the about the contents of the portfolio, and explains what they will be sharing with them during the conference.
- creative, expressive, and personalized

Sample Letter

Dear Mother and Father,

Thank you for coming to my student led conference. I have worked on many projects this trimester and have done my work with better organization.

My favorite piece of work is my coffee-stained book cover. I like it because I spent a lot of time and put a lot of hard work into it. My next favorite is band because I'm doing a good job on the French horn.

Again, I'm glad you came to my conference. I hope it lets you see all of the things I do in school (only the good things I hope).

At the end of this conference I have two goals written. It would be nice if you would write a third one with me.

Sincerely,

Tim



Preparing *Students* for the Conference

Dealing with Missing Work Samples

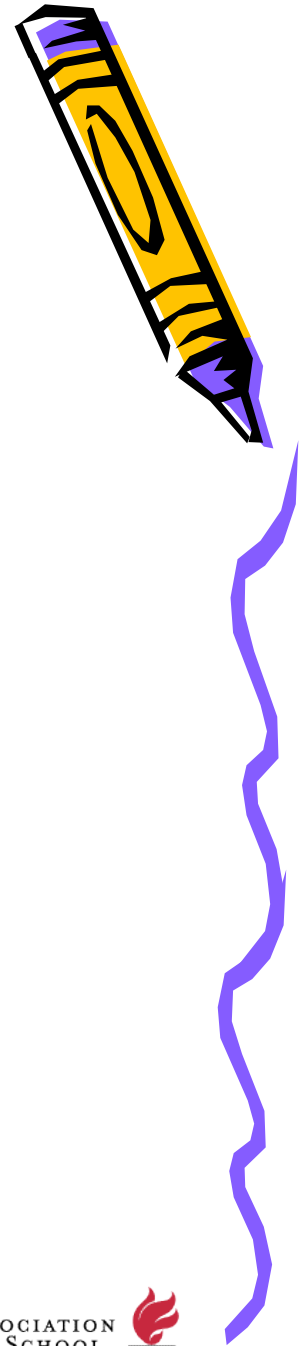


Student Name: _____ Teacher Name: _____

Assignment Title: _____ Subject: _____

Assignment Due Date: _____

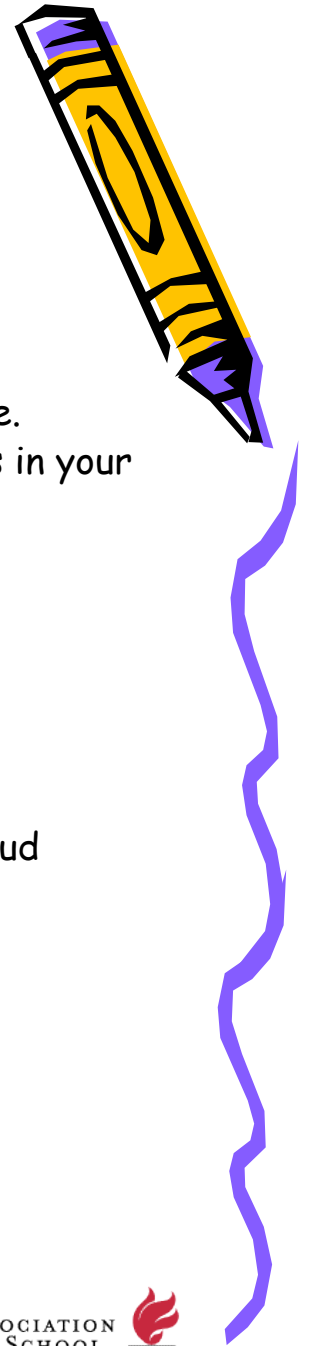
I was given the opportunity to do this work but either did not complete it or turn it in because:



Preparing *Students* for the Conference

Design/Teach the script

- **Examples of scripts -- Follow the order**
 - Introduce your parents or guardian to your case manager.
 - Explain you will be sharing your fall portfolio during the conference.
 - Briefly review the Table of Contents to give an overview of what is in your portfolio.
 - Read your "Dear Parent" letter.
 - Present your work.
 - For each piece share:
 - » What the assignment was
 - » What knowledge or skills you learned by doing it
 - » What process you went through to complete the piece
 - » Key portions of your self-reflection by reading them aloud
 - Share your report card with your parents.
 - Goal Setting
 - » Explain the goals you have set
 - » Write a goal with your parents
 - Parent homework letter
 - Closing
 - » Thank your parents for attending your conference.



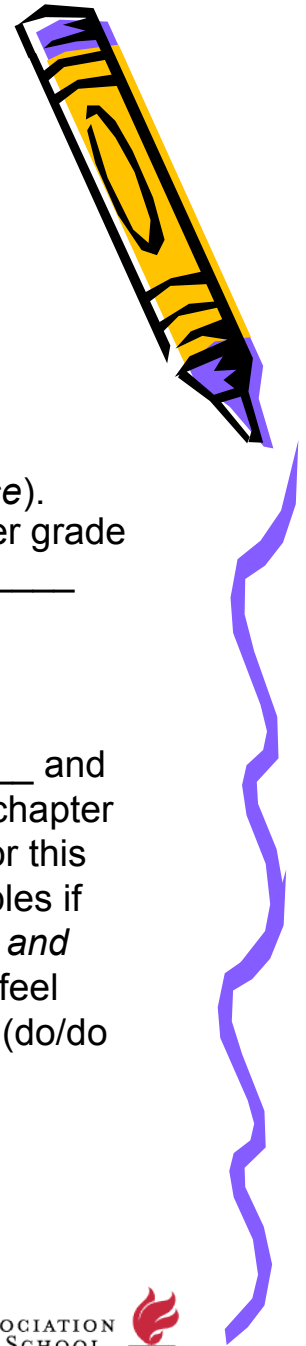
Preparing *Students* for the Conference

Design/Teach the script: con't

- **Examples of scripts -- Fill in the Blanks**

This is my folder for language arts. I (do/do not) have trouble with spelling because _____. This is my writing portfolio (*allow parents to browse*). According to my grade folder, I have ____ missing assignments. This is my computer grade sheet. According to the grade sheet, I have ____ missing assignments. My grade is ____ because _____.

Here are most of my tests and quizzes for math. My chapter one quiz grade was ____ and my test for that chapter was a(n) _____. (*show your parent(s) your quiz and test for chapter one.*) Currently, we are finishing up chapter two in our books. My two quiz grades for this chapter are ____ and _____. (*Show your parent(s) your quizzes*). Here are some samples of graphs I have made recently. (*Show your parent(s) your frequency table, bar graph, and circle graph*). This is how I completed them _____. This is why I feel these graphs demonstrate my understanding of chapter two materials _____. I (do/do not) feel I have done my best in math class because _____.



Preparing *Students* for the Conference

Goal Setting

- *Specific*
- *Realistic*
- *Student/Parent/Teacher Buy-in*
- *Revisited*

Goals for Success

Name _____ Date _____

My strengths are: _____

I need to work on: _____

First Goal

To achieve this goal, I will

A. _____

B. _____

Second Goal

To achieve this goal, I will

A. _____

B. _____

Third Goal

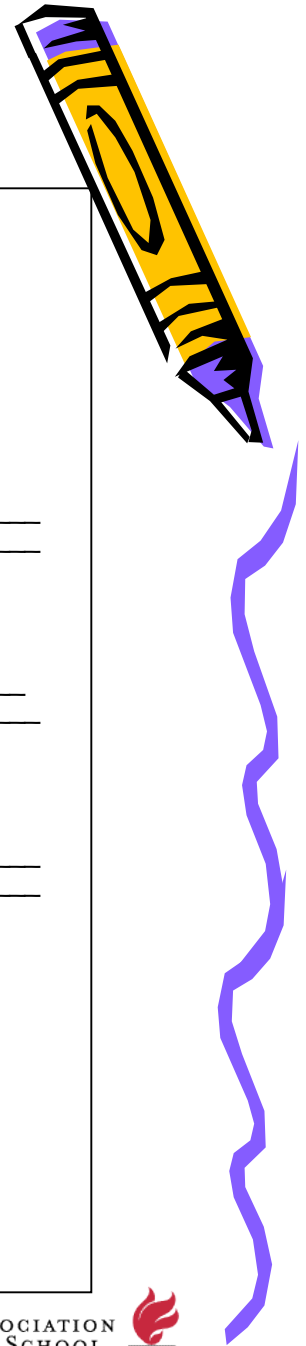
To achieve this goal, I will

A. _____

B. _____

People who can help me attain these goals are: _____

Distractions that may get in the way of accomplishing these goals are: _____



Preparing *Students* for the Conference

- The Final Step for Success!

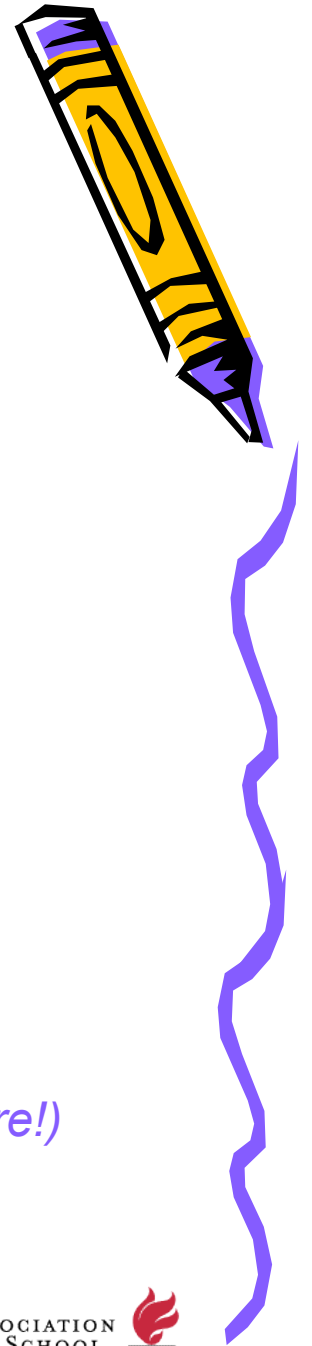
- Practice

- Practice

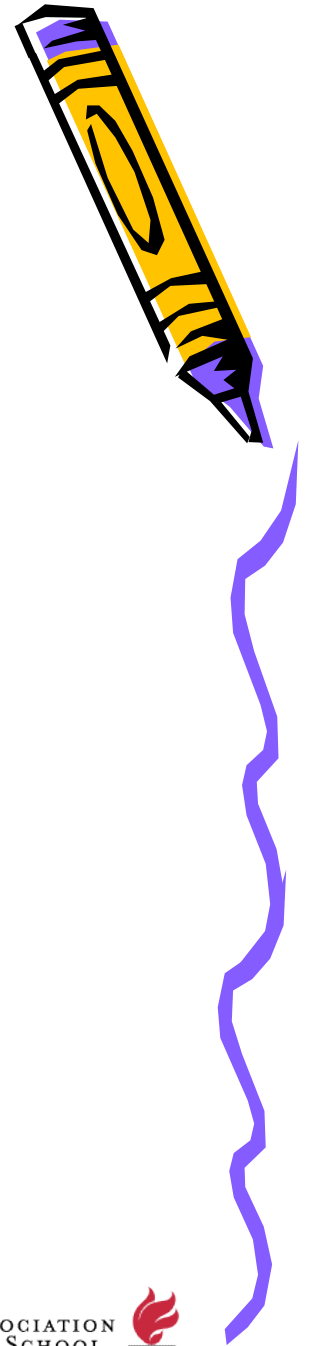
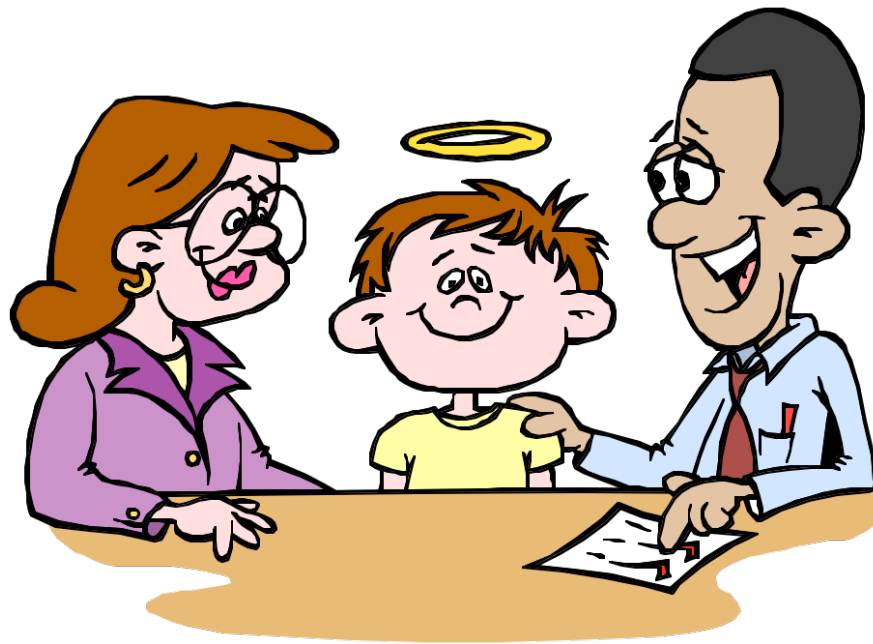
- Practice

- » Practice

(And practice some more!)



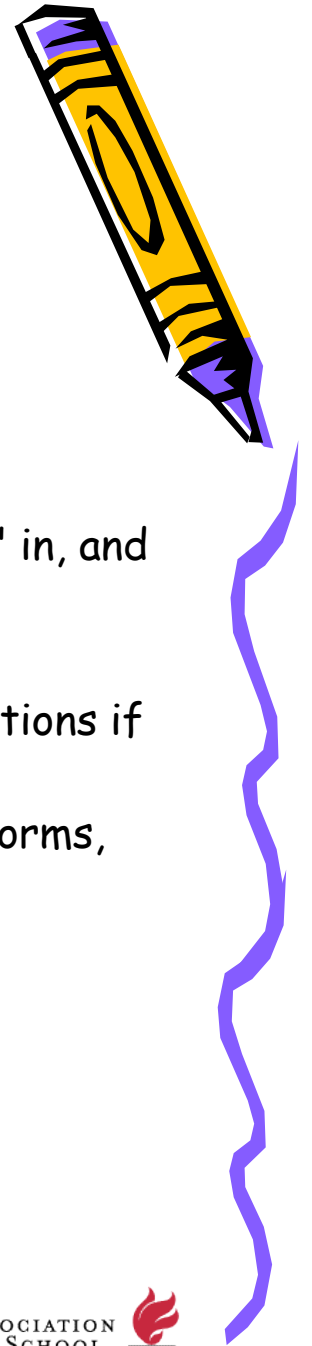
Conference Time



Conference Responsibilities: As the *Conference Facilitator*

Before and During the Conference

- Set up room with "stations" appropriate for conferencing
- Meet and greet parents
- Give quick overview of process, help student and parent(s) "settle" in, and move out of the area
- Monitor progress of conference from a distance.
- Return to conference around the goal setting piece. Offer suggestions if needed.
- Help close the conference, ask for questions, hand out feedback forms, notes, etc., encourage parents to use the drop in time
- *Sit back and enjoy the process!*



Parent Homework

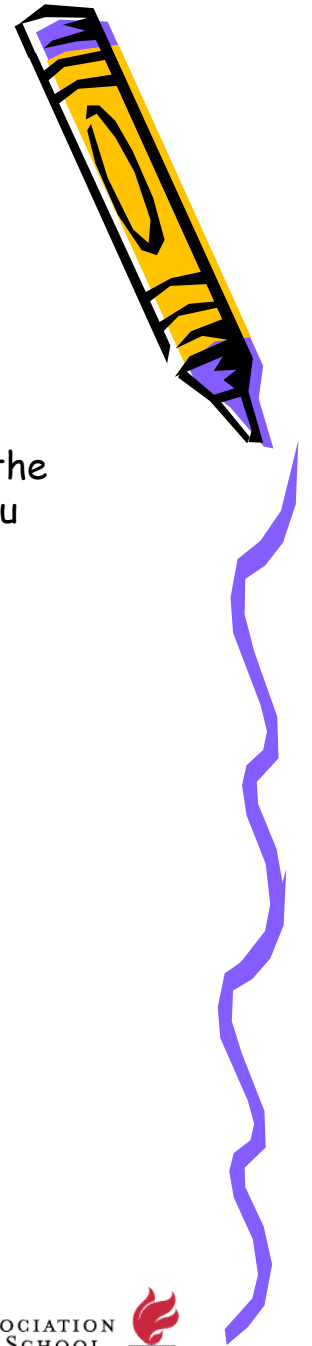
Dear Parent,

THANK YOU for participating in your child's conference...now you have some homework! Please write your child a positive personal note about the conference. Below are some areas you might think about including as you write:

What I noticed about your work was...
I was proud of you for...
Keep up the good work on...
I know you have difficulty sometimes but...
I'm glad you are making an extra effort in...
How can I help you...

We hope this experience was as rewarding to you and your child as the process was to us! Thanks again for taking the extra effort!

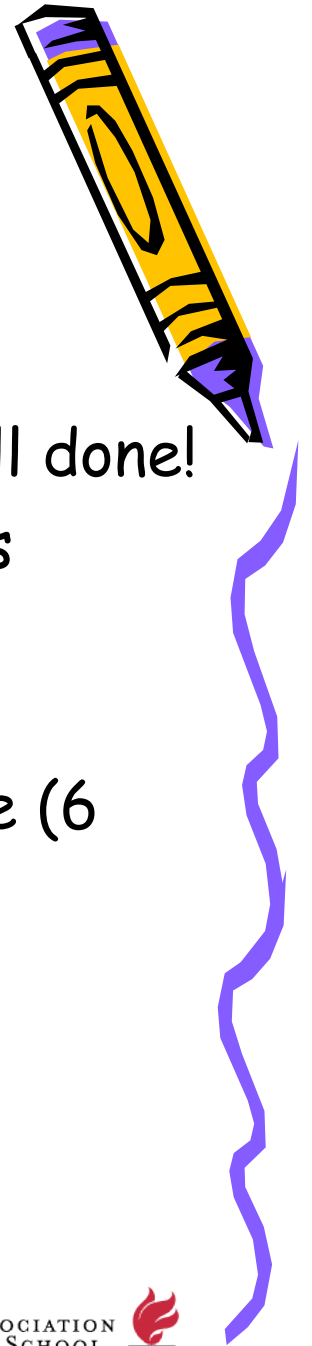
Sincerely,



Conference Responsibilities: As the *Conference Facilitator*

After the Conference

- ❖ Celebrate with the students for a job well done!
- ❖ Conduct a feedback session with students (written or discussion)
- ❖ Fill out staff evaluation form
- ❖ Revisit goals with students at a later date (6 weeks or so from conference)

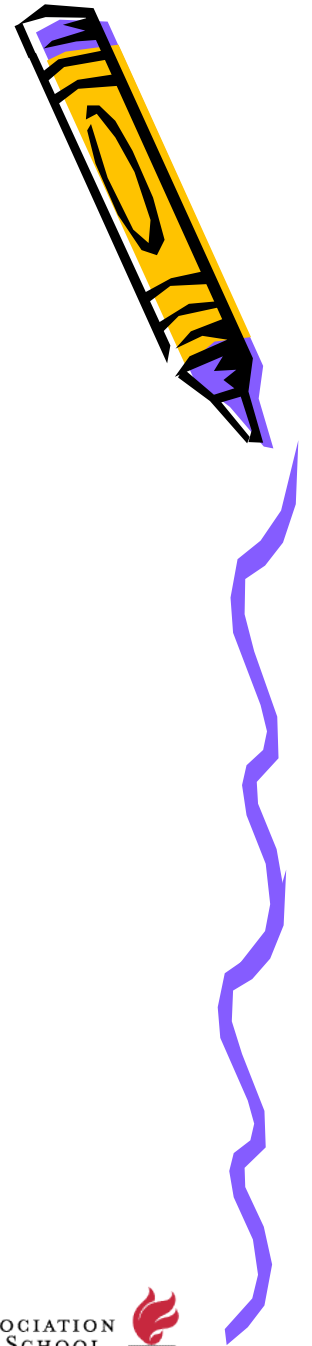


Sample Evaluation Forms:

Students

Post Conference Thoughts
(for writing or discussion)

- Things went smoothly during the conference because ...
- Things could have gone better if ...
- One thing I wish I would have shared with my parents, but forgot ...
- One thing I chose not to share, but should have ...
- The best thing about this experience was ...
- Anything else??



Sample Evaluation Forms:

Parents

Please rate on a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree.

My child was prepared for the conference.

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Agree

I now have a better understanding of how my child learns.

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Agree

I have a clear picture about what my child has been studying this trimester.

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Agree

I have a better understanding of my child's effort, study skills, and classroom behaviors.

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Agree

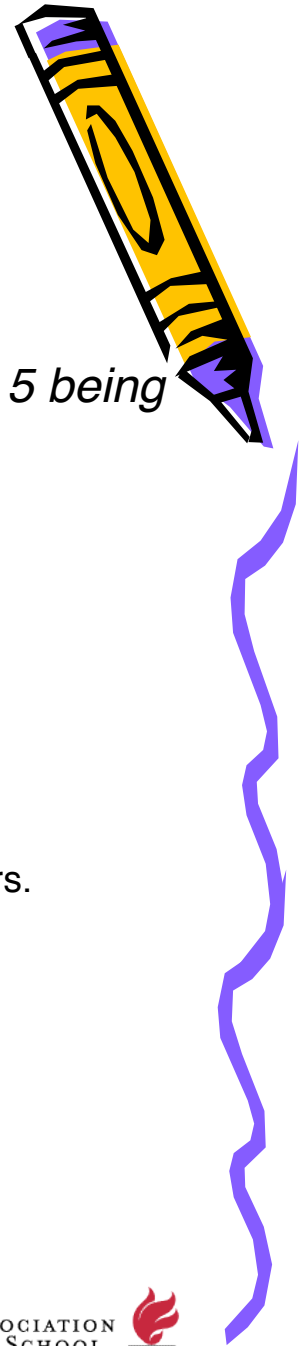
The student-led conference was valuable and informative.

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Agree

My child wrote goals that will help improve his/her performance.

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Agree

Any other comments?



Sample Evaluation Forms:

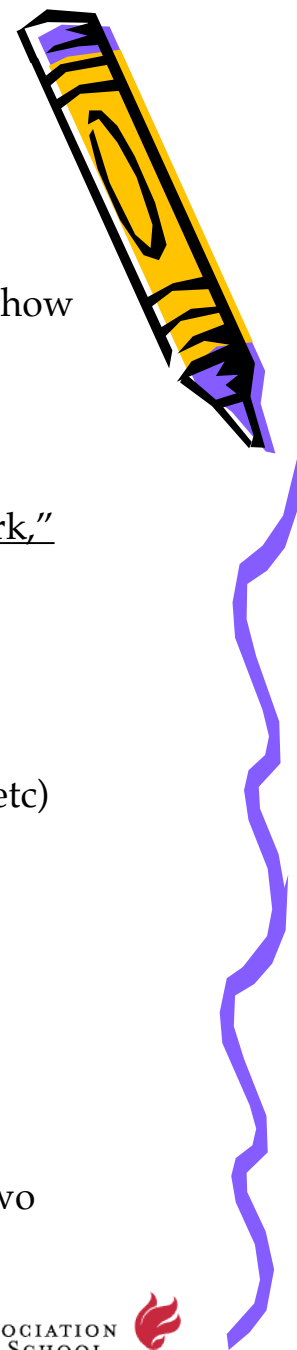
Staff

Using a scale of 1 (poor) 2 (ok) 3 (fine) 4 (good) 5 (very good) 6 (excellent), how would you rate the overall process and format.

1 2 3 4 5 6

Please indicate your thoughts on the following areas. If you indicate "needs work," please give details and suggestions for improvement.

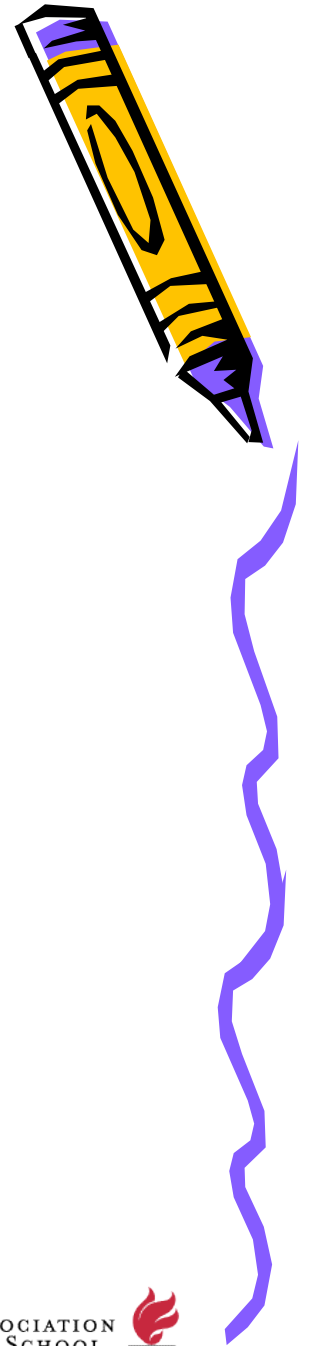
1. Your knowledge of process (knew expectations, dates, process, etc.)
 - ☐ no problems
 - ☐ needs work
2. Preparation of student work in the classroom (knew expectations, due dates, etc)
 - ☐ no problems
 - ☐ needs work
3. Scheduling process (office does families, case managers do postcards, etc)
 - ☐ no problems
 - ☐ needs work
4. Schedule used (times, drop-ins, evening schedule, schedule own breaks, etc)
 - ☐ no problems
 - ☐ needs work
5. Collection of work (use of paper folder, students collect work over two days, etc)
 - ☐ no problems
 - ☐ needs work



Sample Evaluation Forms (con't):

Staff

6. Table of Contents and "Dear Parent" Letter
 - ☐ no problems
 - ☐ needs work
7. Writing of goals
 - ☐ no problems
 - ☐ needs work
8. Process for practicing in case managers (amount of time, use of video, etc)
 - ☐ no problems
 - ☐ needs work
9. Notification of changes in conference schedule
 - ☐ no problems
 - ☐ needs work
10. Other: Please comment on any area not addressed above. Thanks!



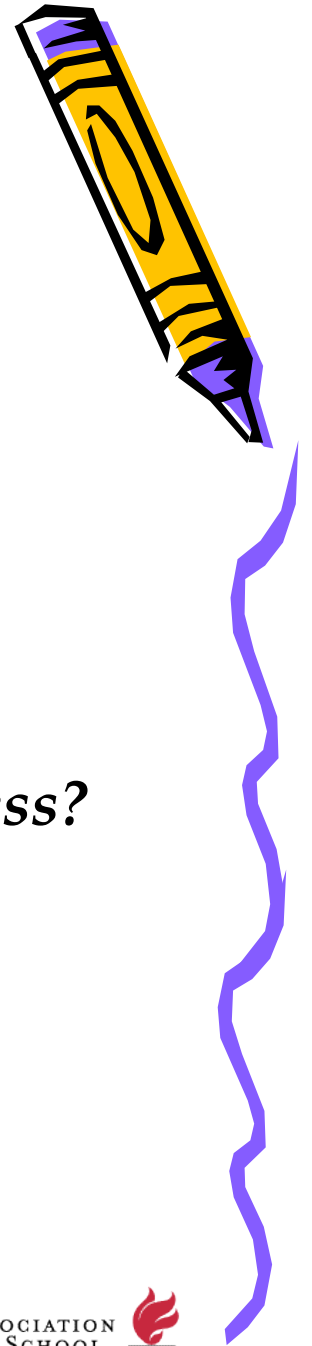
Frequently Asked Questions

What about disabled students?

- ▶ *Conference is self-esteem builder*
- ▶ *May need additional help in organizing, etc.*
- ▶ *May need facilitator support during conference*

Where do grades and report cards fit into this process?

- ▶ *Process de-emphasizes importance*
- ▶ *If desired, report card fits well near end, before goal setting*
- ▶ *Students responsible for explaining grades*



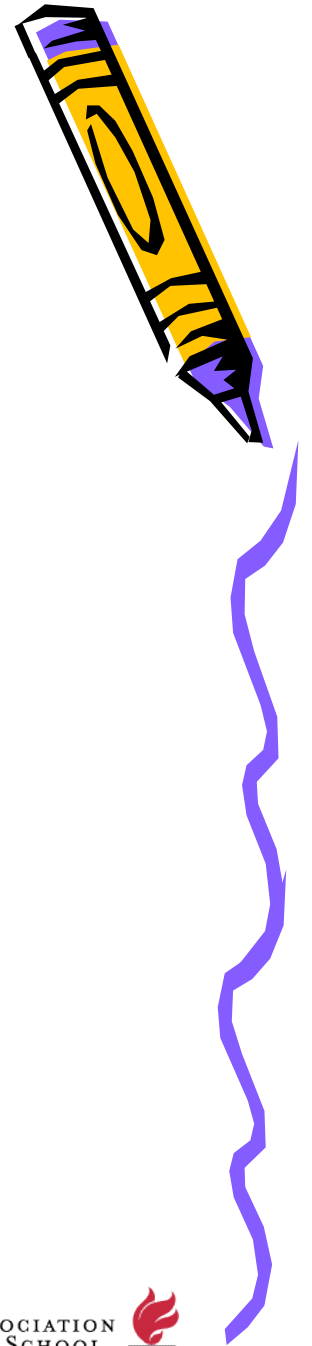
Frequently Asked Questions

What happens if parents don't come?

- ▶ *Reschedule if possible*
- ▶ *Student takes portfolio home to do conference*
- ▶ *Student gives conference to selected school personnel*

How does an ESL conference work?

- ▶ *SLCs increase attendance of non-English speaking families*
- ▶ *Students give conference in native language*
- ▶ *Student can serve as translator if necessary*



Frequently Asked Questions

My school or team is reluctant. How can they be brought on board?

- ▶ *Acknowledge change can be difficult*
- ▶ *Start with small group of interested staff members*
- ▶ *Conference call with others who use process.*

With so many demands of teachers already, where do I find time to prepare?

- ▶ *Organization is key*
- ▶ *Process becomes part of your curriculum*
- ▶ *Process teaches skills in organization, speaking, self-analysis*



Frequently Asked Questions

Some parents still want a teacher conference. What should we do?

- ▶ *Schedule in drop-in time after conferences*
- ▶ *Set up during team time or prep time*
- ▶ *Encourage telephone or e-mail communication*

My principal is not supportive, yet I want to try this. Any suggestions?

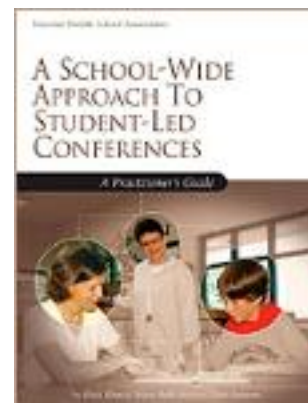
- ▶ *Find a colleague to team with*
- ▶ *Present a well-thought out plan to try as a pilot*
- ▶ *Demonstrate how conference will meet district/state curriculum goals*



Additional Resources

A School-wide Approach to Student-led Conferences: A Practitioner's Guide

By: Patti Kinney
Mary Beth Munroe
Pam Sessions



The What, Why, and How of Student-Led Conferences

By: Jack Berckemeyer
Patti Kinney



National Middle School Association

1-800-528-NMSA or www.nmsa.org

