**Philosophy for Conferences**

The point of a conference is to connect a student to their learning at school. This may involve grades, completed/incomplete assignment descriptions, and assessment scores but the overall focus is on learning and how we can all support academic and social/emotion growth at School. Most parents come to conferences to get a deeper sense of who's spending time with their kids.

* Help bridge the supports your school uses to connect students to their learning. You should **share stories about what each student does in class.**  This might involve an artifact as evidence of learning (an essay, project, lab report or even a test), but sharing narratives of a student’s behavior as learners is essential. Invite parents to tell stories about their child's use of math, language, logic, or music at home.
* Conferences are an opportunity for two-way communication.  **Conferences support a place for parents to inform the teachers about their child**: How they like to learn. What they says about the class at home. How they enjoy spending free time. What they says about other students in the class. After a good conference, both the parent and teacher know more about how to continue the student connecting to their learning.
* **Ask parents how they want to stay in touch** about important things (notreporting a weekly running grade). Open that channel by sending a quick initial e-mail or calling. Even if you never use the mode of communication, it's there and provides a sense of connection.

*Conferences are an opportunity to connect students to their learning through staff navigating a positive and supportive conversation between parents and school.*

*Tim B. Smart, EdD*

**Guiding Principles of Conferences**

**Approach Parents with Positive Assumptions**

Parents are our friends. They want to partner with us. They want to see their child succeed more than anything else. Welcome every parent/guardian as our strongest ally in working with the student, their child.

**Bottom of Form**

**Be Solution Oriented**

Be specific when asking for change. Telling a parent, "He's distracted a lot," does not give enough details to what is observable in the classroom. What is the parent supposed to do with that piece of information? Whatever support you ask from a parent needs to be within their sphere of influence.

* A teacher could say: "I'm concerned because your son is often distracted during independent work in my class. Here's what I'm doing to try to help him . . .  . Do you see this behavior at home ever? Do you have any other ideas for things I could try? Can you think of anything you might be able to do?"

Always convey a growth mindset. All behaviors can change given the right conditions. If you want to see changes and have concerns about a student, be prepared to offer specific, actionable solutions.

**Take the Opportunity to Learn**

What could you ask parents that might help you better support our student? What would you like to know? If this is the first time you're sitting down with parents, it's a great opportunity to hear their perspective on their child's school experience so far, on what their child likes to do outside of school, on the questions, and concerns they have about their child. So what do you want to ask?

**Show That You Care**

For parents, conferences can be terrifying or wonderful. Don't underestimate the power of the positive, and lead with it. Be specific in the positive data you share. Possibly share an anecdote or show a piece of work. Make sure you truly feel this positivity. We can all sniff out empty praise. There is always, always something positive and praise-worthy about every single child. It's our job to find it and share that data with parents.