



CONFERENCING BEST PRACTICES

1. What is student conferencing?

Student conferences are short, structured, one-on-one meetings with student and teacher to set goals, reflect on progress, and foster relationships between the student and teacher. The goal of conferencing with students is to help students understand their academic and behavioral progress, take ownership of their learning, and understand how the work they are doing now affects their future.

2. Why is student conferencing important?

Conferences build students who are responsible, motivated, and invested in their education and able to lead their own learning by connecting habits and behaviors to outcomes. These meetings should result in deeper relationships between students and their teachers, greater academic progress and growth, and strong classroom culture. Most importantly, conferencing with students helps them feel successful and work towards a love of learning and also builds the academic reflection skills necessary in high school and college that lead to long-term success.

3. How often should student conferencing occur?

In schools where student conferences are most successful they are scheduled *at least once a month in each classroom*. Some teachers have found that older students benefit from conferencing twice a month. Conferences should be quick – about *three to five minutes in length*. This allows students to receive small, actionable pieces of feedback, have personal touchpoints with their teacher, and holds them accountable to their goals. Some teachers have found it beneficial to conference with students more frequently so that students stay invested in their work and see their progress regularly.

Scheduling student conferences within the time constraints of the school day can be difficult. Teachers can and should be creative when finding time to conference with their students. Some ideas of how to fit student conferences in include:

- **Two days a month**: The teacher will meet with the entire class on those two days. During this time, students can be completing an assessment, working on their online content, working independently, or completing a group assignment.
- **Beginning of each class**: Middle school teachers who teach multiple classes per day may choose to conference with one student at the beginning of each class. The teacher gets through the entire class by the end of the month and starts over the following month.
- **Each morning**: Some teachers choose to maximize their morning time when students are arriving to school. Teachers will conference with three to five students as they complete their morning work or eat breakfast. They can get through the entire class in five to seven days.
- **At lunch**: Teachers can also conference with students during lunch. Since this happens outside of the classroom, it does not interfere with academic time. Teachers can typically conference with three to five students during this time.
- **In the small moments**: Some teachers like to conference in the nooks and crannies of their day, like bathroom breaks, class changes, and dismissal. While these moments are hard to know how long it will take to get through a whole class, it helps show students that every minute at school matters.



4. What are the elements of a student conference?

While there is no specific structure that student conferences need to follow, all student conferences should include the following elements:

Student reflection	
<p>What is it? Students think about their work ethic, focus, and achievement over the past week or month and consider how these things affected their growth and progress. Students can reflect/answer questions before their conferences or the questions can be posed during the conference.</p> <p>Why is it important? In order for conferences to reap the most benefit, students should own the conference as much as possible. Having students reflect on their work and progress so far can facilitate this ownership.</p>	<p>Examples In preparing for their conferences, students complete a two to four question reflection guide. See examples here.</p> <p>At the beginning of the conference, the teacher asks the student two to four questions about how the student believes she is doing and what is leading to her achievement and growth.</p> <p><i>T: "So thinking about your work on the computer, how are you doing on Lexia?"</i> <i>S: "At the beginning of the school year, I was passing levels quickly, but now it's harder. I haven't passed a level in a long time."</i> <i>T: "Were there things you were doing at the beginning of the school year that you aren't doing now?"</i> <i>S: "Well, in the fall, I was taking more time to write down my vocabulary and take notes on my reading. Now I don't write as much. I think that's just because I know what I'm doing."</i></p>
Teacher feedback	
<p>What is it? Teachers should provide one to two small pieces of feedback (prepared ahead of time, or determined in the moment) for the student based on their observations,, the student's grades, or student data. The feedback should be something the student can work on independently, such as improving focus on the computer, or showing work when solving a problem. This feedback should also be grounded in improving the student's academic performance. In some cases, students may identify a teacher's intended feedback in their reflections. In this case, the teacher should affirm the student, and provide suggestions on how to implement or change the action.</p> <p>Why is it important? Feedback can help students identify areas of growth that they might not see on their own, and helps to hold them accountable to their work and behavior.</p>	<p>Example Give students feedback about their behavior while working, the quality of assignments they are completing, the duration of lessons, or other visible or trackable actions.</p> <p><i>T: "I've noticed that when you are working independently, you have been rushing to get your assignments completed. This week, you were only spending about three minutes reading the article before answering the questions."</i> <i>S: "I'm a quick reader. That's just how long it took me."</i> <i>T: "Interesting. It seems that you didn't do so well on the questions when you finished so quickly. A few weeks ago, you got all the questions right, but it took you twenty two minutes to read. You even marked the text!"</i> <i>S: "Oh, I didn't realize that."</i> <i>T: "Next week, do you think you can work on slowing down when you read and mark the text?"</i></p>



Progress towards goals

What is it?

Each student should have a weekly or monthly goal for math and reading. In conferences, the progress being made (or lack of progress) should be discussed. Teachers should ground goal conversations in data and assignments completed by students.

Why is it important?

Talking with students about how they are progressing towards their individual goals helps students see progress over time and assures they are growing appropriately. Goal conversations can help students remember the habits they should continue and think about new habits they should develop. These conversations also hold students accountable for their independent work, since they know their progress will be evaluated and discussed.

Example

If a student has a goal of passing four lessons per week, check in to see how the student did!

T: "Do you remember what your goal was? How many lessons did you need to pass in math?"

S: "I needed to pass four!"

T: "Right, so if we look on this report, it shows that you passed six. That's great!"

S: "I worked really hard to make sure I stayed focused and didn't look at Marvin's computer."

T: "That really paid off. Now, let's check your reading goal."

Setting new goals or adjusting existing goals

What is it?

As students progress through the school year and their personalized instructional paths, their work could become more difficult and/or more time consuming. Due to this fact, there will be times when weekly and monthly goals will need to be adjusted to meet what is reasonable for a student to accomplish.

Why is it important?

If a goal is set too high or is unattainable, students easily shut down and experience a loss of investment and engagement. On the other hand, if goals are too easy and are met week after week, students lose the driving force that keeps them motivated. Adjusting goals helps students feel success, while also holds them to a high bar.

Examples

When a student hasn't met their goal or exceeded it multiple weeks in a row, it's time to adjust or set a different goal.

T: "Wow, you passed a lot more lessons that we hoped! I think that means you're ready to try something a bit harder. Think you can pass 6 reading lessons next week?"

S: "That will be hard, but I think I can do it."

--OR--

S: "I'm really frustrated. I haven't met my goal yet this month. This is dumb."

T: "Well, maybe that means your goal just isn't right. Last week, you did pass four lessons, so what if we modify the articles you need to pass from six to five?"

S: "That seems a little bit better. I was able to do seven articles before, but since my lexile level went up, it's taking me a lot longer to read. It's not like I'm failing them!"

T: "You're right. I think five might be more manageable."