

'Tis the Season of Conferences

Fall conferences are an opportunity to build partnerships with caregivers in support of student learning throughout the year. Whether your school hosts parent-teacher interviews, three-way conferences, student-led conferences, or goal-setting meetings, equip yourself with these practical strategies to help you feel ready for anything.



1. Begin with the student's perspective

Invite students to reflect on their learning so far. This can be a way to let families see that you care for and are getting to know their child. Consider asking students: What feels easier now than it did at the beginning of the year? What are you proud of? What is challenging? What would you like to improve? Younger students might draw or select examples of learning; older students might complete a short reflection or identify a goal. For student-led and three-way conferences, this creates a meaningful starting point. For traditional interviews, student reflections help teachers represent the student's voice.

2. Make space for the family's perspective

Prepare open-ended questions that invite family members to share what they are noticing at home. Helpful topics may include friendships, confidence, motivation, homework routines, co-curricular activities, navigating learning platforms or understanding expectations. Families often have insights that help explain what a teacher is seeing in class. During fall conferences, it's a good idea to plan for families to do the talking for about a third of your meeting time.



3. Select learning evidence that tells a story

Even when you communicate often, families always want to know how their child is doing. Flag one or two examples that illustrate a current strength and an area for growth. These might include a writing sample, a math task, an observation, a conversation, a project, or a photograph of learning in action. Choose evidence that helps explain what the student understands or can do, rather than simply displaying completed work. The goal isn't to prepare a comprehensive report on every student. This time of year serves as an important touch-point after setting routines and navigating new content and skills. Let families know that these conversations contribute to assessment for learning that helps to inform next steps for teaching and learning.

4. Make learning expectations visible

Families may be unfamiliar with current curriculum outcomes, proficiency language, assessment practices, or the learning systems used in a classroom. Be prepared to provide brief snapshots of what students are learning, what progress looks like, and how you gather evidence of learning. Referring to an example of student work will make the explanation concrete. Invite questions rather than assuming that families interpret grades, rubrics, or feedback in the same way teachers do. You may try asking “What questions do you have about what your child is learning or how we’re assessing progress?”

5. End with a shared understanding in writing

Before the conversation ends, summarize the student’s strengths, the priority for growth, and the next step. Clarify what the teacher will do, what the student will practise, and whether any communication or follow-up is needed. If a concern requires more time than the conference allows, arrange a separate conversation. Not every issue needs to be solved in one meeting. Try asking: “What is one thing we agree will help, and how will we check whether it is making a difference?”



Looking for More?

A Primer on Parent-Teacher Conferences for New Teachers 3 minute video Target audience: New Teachers Click for Resource	How to Successfully Institute Student-Led Conferences at Your School 3 minute article Target audience: Grade 7 - 12 teachers wanting students to attend and participate in conferences Click for Resource	Navigating Tricky Parent-Teacher Conferences When Time Is Short 2 minute article + links to templates Target audience: All teachers Click for Resource
Conference Planning Template Click for Resource	Tips to Stay on Time: • Share agenda at beginning with a breakdown of how the minutes will be used • Keep the time, or a shared clock, visible • Keep careful notes and transfer follow up dates to your calendar asap (meetings go quickly, and we humans can forget!)	

Above all, try to emphasize that the fall conference is a beginning, not a conclusion. The most valuable outcome is not a polished presentation of student achievement; it is a shared understanding of the learner and a practical plan for what happens next.