Effectiveness of Student Led

Conferences to Increase Parent

Involvement and Communication

A Special Project

Presented to

Dr. Steve Morelan

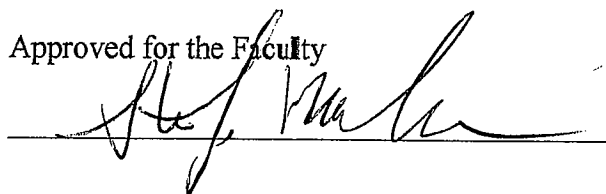Heritage University

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FACULTY APPROVAL

Effectiveness of Student Led Conferences to

Increase Parent Involvement and Communication

Approved for the Faculty

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i

ABSTRACT

This project explored the effectiveness of student led conferencing as a method of parent communication and involvement. Parent and teacher opinions were collected to determine if parents benefit from information presented at student led conferencing. Student led conferences were conducted at Tieton Intermediate School. Parent surveys and teacher questionnaires were completed, collected, and results were recorded. Opinions specifically addressed effective student explanation of academic progress, importance of student learning plan and goal setting, and impact of teacher participation. Parent and teacher opinions were favorable concerning parent communication and involvement. Student led conferencing provides increased parent communication and involvement, a primary factor leading to student academic success.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

<u>Background for the Project</u>

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) was signed by President Bush on January 8, 2002 and is a United States federal law that reauthorized federal programs to improve the performance of America's schools by closing the achievement gap, offering more flexibility, giving parents more options, and teaching students based on best practices. Under this act's accountability requirements, states must describe how they will close the achievement gap and make sure all students, including those who are disadvantaged, achieve academic proficiency. They must produce annual state and school district report cards that inform parents and communities about state and school progress. Schools that do not make progress must provide supplemental services, such as free tutoring or after-school assistance; take corrective actions; and, if still not making adequate yearly progress (AYP) after five years, make dramatic changes to the way the school is run (Accountability, 2003).

No Child Left Behind puts emphasis on determining which educational programs and practices have been proven effective through rigorous scientific research. Federal funding is targeted to support these programs and teaching methods that work to improve student learning and achievement (Four Pillars, 2004).

High-performing schools have a number of common characteristics. The professional and research literature has identified various characteristics of effective schools. Through a review of more than 20 studies, Washington school improvement

1

specialists and researchers have identified nine characteristics of high performing schools. Some of the studies were reviews of other research that had taken place over many years on the same topic, while others examined high performing schools at specific settings and locations with specific student demographics. This body of research represents findings from both Washington state and around the nation (Shannon & Bylsma, 2003).

The content of each study was analyzed to determine what characteristics were found most often among high performing schools. Performance was usually measured in terms of high or dramatically improving scores on standardized tests, often in spite of difficult circumstances such as high levels of poverty. In every case, there was no single factor that accounted for the success or improvement. High performing schools tend to have a combination of common characteristics. Some reports found as few as five characteristics, while others found many more.

An analysis of these characteristics by the Washington state, Office of the Superintendent of Public Schools (OSPI) narrowed these lists into nine areas. These schools have a clear and shared focus where everyone knows where they are going and why, and they understand their role in achieving the vision. Teachers and staff believe that all students can learn and set high standards and expectations for all students. Effective administrative school leadership is required which nurtures an instructional program and school culture conducive to learning and professional growth. High levels of collaboration and communication are established through strong teamwork among teachers, parents, and community. Curriculum, instruction, and assessments are aligned

with Washington essential academic learning requirements. Frequent monitoring of student learning identifies students who need help and more support and instructional time is provided. The school has a safe, civil, healthy, and intellectually stimulating environment. High levels of family and community involvement encourage a sense that all have a responsibility to educate students, not just the teachers and staff in schools (Shannon & Bylsma, 2003).

Statement of the Problem

Family and community involvement is a general term used to describe a wide array of activities, projects, and programs that bring parents, family members, and other community interests together to support student learning and schools or to bring family, community, and business into the schools. These connections traditionally have ranged from Parent Teacher Organizations (PTO) meetings, back-to-school open houses, parent-teacher conferences, fund raising and chaperoning school events to in-class volunteering, parent education programs, and business partnerships. Many research studies over the years have documented the importance of the relationship of family and school to student achievement. With the diverse nature of our communities, family involvement will need to include options that will be sensitive to family circumstances, provide choices, appreciate the family's culture and values, and emphasize the importance of family support for student achievement (Shannon & Bylsma, 2003). At Tieton Intermediate School (TIS), student led conferences, as an alternative to parent-teacher conferences, have been implemented. However, there is no documented evidence that this type of conferencing is effective communication of academic progress to the parent.

3

Purpose of the Project

Student led parent-teacher conferences encourage students to participate actively in the evaluation of their academic progress, which motivates students to think about and act on a personal plan to improve learning. Student led parent-teacher conferences also allow students to communicate directly with teachers, parents and other adults about their learning. Also, student led conferences generate higher parent attendance than traditional parent-teacher conferences (Borba & Olvera, 2001). Students enjoy the chance to bring parents into the building, and agree that the conference process is more meaningful when they lead the conference. Students are able to describe their goals for improving in class, share work they can take pride in, and share their school experiences more fully with parents. Teachers act as facilitators and support the student when needed. Student led conferences bring students, parents, and teachers, together to form lasting partnerships for the benefit of student learning (Culver & Cousino, 2000).

The purpose of this project was to determine if students as well as parents benefit through student led conferences. The project will examine the process and opinions of teachers and parents of students who conduct their conference at Tieton Intermediate School. A post-conference teacher questionnaire and a parent survey which shows parent attitudes about student led conferencing will be used to answer these questions.

Delimitations

Tieton Intermediate School is located in a rural farming community in Central Washington State. Many of the parents work in agricultural related jobs in the field or in apple packing warehouses. The ethnicity of the approximately 260 students is 59%

4

Hispanic, 38% White, and 3% other groups. Students on free or reduced-priced meals are 74%. About 37% are transitional bilingual or migrant. The student led conferences and survey will be conducted involving students age nine through twelve and in grades four, five, and six at Tieton Intermediate School (WA State Report Card, 2006).

Assumptions

The following assumptions are believed to be true for this project:

1. Students take more responsibility for setting personal learning goals to make better academic progress when they are accountable for presenting their own conference.

2. Parents are more involved in their child's educational experience when they attend the student led conference.

3. A high level of family and community involvement is characteristic of high-performing schools.

Research Question

Do opinions of parents and teachers show evidence that student led conferences at Tieton Intermediate School are an effective and successful method of communicating to parents about student reflection on their learning and student learning goals?

Significance of the Project

In this project, a parent survey and teacher questionnaire were used to measure the opinions of parents and teachers as to the effectiveness of student led conferencing. If the results are positive, then this project will show that student led conferences are an effective method of parent communication and involvement. If the results are negative,

then alternative and/or additional ways of parent communication might be considered. Research has shown that increased parent communication and involvement lead to higher student achievement. When students have greater academic success, then the school will show progress in student achievement and move to meet state standards and AYP as required by the federal "No Child Left Behind" act.

Procedure

For the purpose of this project, the following procedures were followed:

1. A review of selected literature and research materials.

2. Student led conferences were conducted at Tieton Intermediate School, grades four, five, and six.

3. A survey was given to each parent at the end of their student's conference.

4. Parents completed the survey measuring their opinion of effectiveness of the student led conference. All parents surveyed participated in the student led conference, but completing the survey was optional. The survey was offered in both English and Spanish during the fall conference in October of 2006.

5. Parent surveys were returned to the student's teacher and then collected by the researcher.

6. A teacher questionnaire was distributed to each TIS fourth, fifth, and sixth grade teacher.

7.   Teachers at TIS completed a questionnaire measuring their opinion of how effective students were in leading their conference and the importance of conference components.

8.   Teacher questionnaires were collected by the researcher.

Definition of Terms

Adequate yearly progress. A statewide school accountability system developed by Washington state and required by the No Child Left Behind legislation.

Ethnicity. These consist of the 5 major racial/ethnic groups: American Indian or Alaskan Native, Asian or Pacific Islander, Black, Hispanic, and White.

Free or reduced-price meals. The percent of students eligible for free or reduce-priced meals which defines students from low income families.

Migrant. Students who have families moving from one region to another in search of work.

Parent-teacher conference. A meeting with the teacher and the parent to discuss a student's learning progress.

Portfolio. A collection of a student's work, reports, and goals.

Student led conference. A meeting led by a student with parents and teachers to discuss their learning progress.

Transitional bilingual. Early stage English language learners.

Washington State Assessment of Student Learning. A test designed by Washington teachers that reflects what students know and are able to do based on the state's Essential Academic Learning Requirements.

Acronyms

AYP. Adequate Yearly Progress

NCLB. No Child Left Behind

OSPI. Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction

PTO. Parent-Teacher Organization

TIS. Tieton Intermediate School

WASL. Washington Assessment of Student Learning

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF SELECTED LITERATURE

Introduction

Chapter 2 is a review of selected literature and includes the following topics:

purpose of the student led conference, student responsibilities, parent responsibilities,

teacher responsibilities, and the disadvantages and advantages of student led

conferencing.

Purpose of Student Led Conferencing

The No Child Left Behind legislation and Washington Assessment of Student

Learning (WASL) require teachers and students to meet higher standards. Student led

conferencing is one way of including parents in this high stakes environment. All three

become partners and are equal stakeholders (Dickinson, 2006).

The National Parent Teacher Association (PTA) has published standards and

suggestions to guide the development of parent/family involvement. These suggestions

include regular, two-way, and meaningful communication between home and school.

Also, they recommend that parenting skills are promoted and supported, and parents play

and integral role in assisting student's learning (Shannon & Bylsma, 2003).

Students need to have instructional exposure to test standards. They need to be

able to assess their own academic progress according to the standards and know where

they lie on the continuum toward achievement (Dickinson, 2006). By having student

reflect and assess how they are progressing, they will know how far they have come and

how far they have to go to meet the standards (Cromwell, 2005). At student led

conferences, students are more involved in setting personal learning goals and taking greater responsibility for their learning, and parents become more involved in their child's educational experiences (Dunne, 2001).

Student Involvement

One purpose of the student led conference is to provide the student with an opportunity to share with their parents what they have learned at school. Students have the chance to show work examples and explain their educational goals. Students are responsible for keeping their work and assignments organized. As they reflect on their work, they think about areas in which they need improvement and areas in which they excel. In addition, students need to prepare how they will share this information with parents. The student is the primary presenter at the conference (Conway, 2006).

Portfolios have become an increasingly popular way for students to provide information about their learning. The use of student portfolios is an authentic assessment of student learning, and provides an alternative to paper-and-pencil tests. Students are allowed to make decisions about their own learning and reflect on self-evaluation (Student, 2003).

The portfolio process genuinely involves students in their own learning. A student reflection page is included with each piece of student work, allowing the student to write reasons for selecting that piece. An explanation of why it was important and details about the student's performance are important parts of the student's reflection. In addition, students are able to describe their learning goals and are able to talk openly with

10

parents and teachers to discuss a plan for improvement if they need extra help (Culver &
Cousino, 2000).

Parent Involvement

In order to help parents make the transition from traditional to student led
conferencing, it is critical that they are given information well in advance. Parent
meetings, letters mailed home, and articles in the school newspaper may be used to
explain the reasons and rationale for making the change. Parents need to know what to
expect during the conference, and they need to be informed that the role of the teacher
will have changed and that the student is now the presenter of the information (Kinney,
2005). They should expect that the student will be sharing the performance standards and
his or her progress in meeting theses standards in each subject. The student will also
discuss their improvement goals for the upcoming grading period. When the student is
finished, the conference may be turned over to the parent and teacher for any further
questions. Parents should also know that the teacher is willing to meet with them at
another time if they have concerns or questions not addressed at the conference (Conway,
2006).

The parent is the audience. They attend the conference with their student. They
may take notes and ask questions for clarification about items they do not understand. If
a parent cannot attend at the scheduled time, they will need to call to make other
arrangements (Conway, 2006).

There are several benefits for parents who attend student led conferences. Parents
become more aware of what programs are available and the methods their student's

teacher uses. They are also able to observe the interaction between their student and the teacher. Most parents say they have learned much more about their student's educational experience than if they had only had the conference with the teacher. Parents are more willing to attend when their students are participating and insist that they come (Picciotto, 1999).

Teacher Involvement

Teachers have two main roles during the conference process. Most of the teacher's responsibilities occur before the student led conference takes place. In the pre-conference role a timeline for the conference must be created. The easiest way is to work backward from the conference date. The timeline is critical so that dates and deadlines are followed to facilitate successful student led conferences. Next, the teacher designs and presents lessons that focus on multiple skills and processes, teaching and practicing skills for reflection, and collecting student work for portfolios. Before the conference, the teacher helps students choose examples of their work for the conference, reviews self-reflections of chosen work, completes summary reflections of work, and assists the student in how the will be sharing their work and goals for improvement (Kinney, 2005).

As the conference facilitator, the teacher schedules the conferences, helps students to organize documents into a conference portfolio, assists students in setting goals, teaches conference process and script to the students, and schedules time for students to practice (Kinney, 2005). During the conference, teachers encourage students to stay focused on the conference checklist. They should be positive and supportive and emphasize what the student has accomplished to meet the educational standards. They

12

also share report and grade information and clarify parent's questions (Conway, 2006).

Advantages and Disadvantages

Student led conferences have many advantageous results for students, parents, and teachers. One major advantage is a strong connection between school and home which is considered to be the greatest single predictor of student success (Potter & Bulach, 2001).

Students take accountability for their learning and evaluate their own progress toward meeting standards. They gain greater commitment to school work and learning, building self-confidence and self-esteem. When the student becomes actively involved, student/parent communication is increased (Bonnett, 2001). Students practice the real life skills of organization, communication, and leadership (Kinney, 2005).

Parents learn more about their student's perspective on their learning and skills because of additional information. They have the opportunity to help set their student's learning goals, and to participate in their student's academic success (Bonnett, 2001). Parents and student can communicate in their first language and feel more comfortable attending the conference because their student is their guide, decreasing their anxiety to attend school functions (Dickinson, 2006).

Teachers participating in student led conferences will experience less stress because of the more relaxed atmosphere. This type of conference is less confrontational and more positive. More responsibility for student academic achievement is put on the parent and student. Also, parent participation is increased compared to traditional parent-teacher conferencing (Bonnett, 2001). The overall theme is "you, your child, and I are a

team working toward a common goal – quality education for your child" (Galus, 2003, p. 10).

Educators acknowledge that there can be disadvantages as well as advantages to student led conferencing. Parent attendance seems to be higher than traditional parent-teacher conferences, but students can be greatly disappointed when they have worked hard to prepare for the conference and a parent fails to show up (Cromwell, 2005).

Some parents have the complaint that they would prefer a conference with the student's teacher, and that student led conferences do not always allow that to happen. According to Dunne, 2001, these parents may be accommodated with several other conferencing options.

1. Parents may select either a traditional parent-teacher conference or a student led conference.

2. The student may leave following their portion of the conference and the teacher and parent conference privately.

3. An additional conference can be scheduled for the teacher and parent to meet.

<u>Summary</u>

The review of literature emphasizes the purpose of student led conferencing to be increased parent involvement in their student's educational experience. Each participant, student, parent, and teacher, has specific involvement in the conference. Students present at the conference and have an opportunity to share with their parents what they have learned, how well they have performed, and what they plan to do to improve their own

academic success. Parents are active participants as their student presents their

conference by listening and asking questions for clarification. Teachers are seen as

facilitators of student led conferencing. They plan all pre-conference preparations such

as scheduling and supporting students as they organize their portfolios. During the

conference, teachers are available to support students and answer parent questions. There

are both advantages, such as increased parent involvement and attendance, and

disadvantages, such as parent preference to traditional parent-teacher conferencing.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY AND TREATMENT OF DATA

Introduction

Chapter 3 was organized around the topics of descriptive research methodology

and the characteristics of the parents and teachers who participated. Description of the

project instruments, parent survey and teacher questionnaire, were also discussed.

Finally, a brief treatment of data collected was presented.

Methodology

In this project, a descriptive research method was used to obtain information

concerning the current status of student led conferencing at Tieton Intermediate School as

an effective method of parent communication and involvement. Both a parent survey and

teacher questionnaire were used to gather data concerned with the effectiveness of

student led conferences.

Participants

Parents and teachers at Tieton Intermediate School were the participants in this

project. Parents who completed the survey attended conferences led by their fourth, fifth,

or sixth grade student. The approximately 260 students at Tieton Intermediate School

ranged in age from nine to twelve years old, and were comprised of 59% Hispanic, 38%

White, and 3% other ethnic groups. Seventy-four percent were on free or reduced-priced

meals. Transitional bilingual or migrant students made up 37% of enrollment.

There were four fourth-grade teachers, three fifth-grade teachers, and four sixth-

grade teachers who participated in the questionnaire. Their experience ranged from one

to twenty-five years of teaching experience in public schools.

Instruments

A parent survey and teacher questionnaire mainly emphasized measuring the effectiveness of the main components of the student led conference at TIS. The first area pertained to student's perception of their educational progress at school. The next area dealt with how well students explained their work with reflections. That was followed with the importance of WASL scores. The significance of student's learning plan and goals were also included. Last, the opinions about teacher participation and the number of conferences per school year were included.

Procedure

The first step of this project was to review research on the effectiveness of student led conferencing. After review of current literature, information was gained to objectively look at student led conferencing at TIS. Based on the literature, each main component of the conference was included in both the parent survey and teacher questionnaire. Two questions for each of the three major components, student work examples with reflections, student learning goals, and teacher participation, were developed. This allowed the researcher to collect data about the parent and teacher opinions on effectiveness of communication by the student as he or she led their conference.

The parent survey, in both English and Spanish, was distributed at the end of the student led conference to every parent. Parents were asked to complete the survey and have their student return it to their teacher the next day. Completion of the survey was

17

optional. Teachers were then instructed to return all parent surveys to the researcher. Fourth, fifth, and sixth grade teachers also expressed their opinions on a questionnaire and returned it to the researcher a few days following conference week. Information from surveys and questionnaires were then recorded and tabulated.

Treatment of Data

Data collected from the parent survey and teacher questionnaire was recorded for each item on a score of 1-4. A percentage for each group of responses scored was presented on tables for the parent survey and teacher questionnaire.

Summary

Chapter 3 reviewed methodology using descriptive research to measure the opinions of parents and teachers concerning student led conferences as an effective method of parent communication and involvement. Participants were parents and teachers of students at Tieton Intermediate School. These participants completed a survey or questionnaire which was collected and results recorded by the researcher.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

Introduction

Chapter 4 has been organized around several aspects of the project. The

description of the environment gives characteristics of the students involved in the project

and their parents and teachers. The first two questions on the parent survey and teacher

questionnaire address how effectively the students were in explaining their academic

progress. The second two questions ask parents and teacher opinions about how

important it was to listen and participate in the student's learning plan and goal setting.

Opinions about teacher participation and frequency of conferences during the school year

were included in the final two questions.

Description of the Environment

Tieton Intermediate School is one of four schools in the Highland School District

located in Central Washington State. The approximately 260, fourth, fifth, and sixth

grade students are made up of 59% Hispanic, 38% White, and 3% other groups. Students

on free or reduce-price meals are 74%, and about 37% are transitional bilingual or

migrant (WA State Report Card, 2006). Many of the parents are mono-lingual Spanish

and struggle to support their students with their education. Typically, 96 – 98% of

parents attend student led conferences at TIS. Parent participation in this project survey

was optional. One hundred, fifty-nine parents completed and returned the survey. All

eleven regular classroom teachers who host the conferences returned their questionnaire.

19

Research Question

Do opinions of parents and teachers show evidence that student led conferences at Tieton Intermediate School are an effective and successful method of communicating to parents about student reflection on their learning and student learning goals?

Results of the Project

The first two questions on both the parent survey and teacher questionnaire were designed to measure the parent and teacher opinions as to how effective students were in explaining their progress at school and their school work examples. As can be seen in Table 1, the majority of parents, ninety-five percent, felt that they were better informed about their child's progress as a result of the conference.

Table 1

Parent opinions about child's progress and explanation of school work

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I am better informed of my child's progress at school as a result of this conference.

Grade Level	Disagree 1	2	3	Agree 4
4th	0	0	4	70
5th	0	0	2	29
6th	0	0	2	52
Total	**0 – 0%**	**0 – 0%**	**8 – 5%**	**151 – 95%**

It was informative to hear my child explain their school work examples.

Grade Level	Disagree 1	2	3	Agree 4
4th	1	2	9	62
5th	0	1	1	29
6th	0	1	8	45
Total	**1 – 1%**	**4 – 2%**	**18 – 11%**	**136 – 86%**

Eighty-six percent of parents agreed that it was informative to hear their child explain examples of their school work. An additional eleven percent somewhat agreed on that question.

Table 2 shows that two teachers of eleven felt students did an excellent job of informing parents of their progress. The other nine somewhat agreed. Similar teacher results reflected their opinions about how well students explained their school work examples. Two teachers thought students did an excellent job and the other nine partially agreed.

Table 2

Teacher opinions about student's progress and explanation of school work

How clearly do you believe students informed parents of their progress at the student led conference?

Grade Level	Poorly 1	2	3	Excellently 4
4th	0	0	3	1
5th	0	0	3	0
6th	0	0	3	1
Total	0	0	9	2

How clearly did students explain their school work examples?

Grade Level	Poorly 1	2	3	Excellently 4
4th	0	0	3	1
5th	0	0	2	1
6th	0	0	4	0
Total	0	0	9	2

Questions three and four on both the survey and questionnaire related to student

assessment scores and the learning goals students formulated as a result of these scores.

At Tieton Intermediate School, parents and teachers both participate in assisting students

in goal setting before and during the conference. Both WASL scores from the previous

spring testing and current grade reports are included during this process. Areas where

improvement is needed are reviewed and goals to accomplish improvement, as well as

the ways to meet these goals, are discussed.

Table 3

Parent opinions about child's WASL scores and Student Learning Plan / GOALS

It was informative to see my child's WASL scores from last spring.

Grade Level	Disagree 1	2	3	Agree 4
4th	0	1	4	69
5th	1	2	0	28
6th	0	0	6	48
Total	1 – 1%	3 – 2%	10 – 6%	145 – 91%

It was informative to discuss my child's Student Learning Plan and GOALS for the next trimester.

Grade Level	Disagree 1	2	3	Agree 4
4th	0	2	5	67
5th	0	1	1	29
6th	0	1	3	50
Total	0 – 0%	4 – 2%	9 – 6%	146 – 92%

From Table 3 it is seen that ninety-seven percent of parents agreed that it was

informative, or at least somewhat informative, to see their child's WASL scores. Ninety-

eight percent of parents agreed, or somewhat agreed, that it was informative to discuss their child's Student Learning Plan and goals for the next trimester. These scores had also been mailed home to parents, in English only, a few weeks before conferencing.

Data from Table 4 shows that six TIS teachers had the opinion that WASL scores were important to provide information to parents, while three felt the scores were only somewhat important and two felt the scores were somewhat unimportant. Most teachers, eight of eleven, felt discussing student learning plans and setting goals were important and three felt it was somewhat important.

Table 4

Teacher opinions about student's WASL scores and Student Learning Plan / GOALS

How important was it to provide and explain WASL scores to parents?

Grade Level	Unimportant 1	2	3	Important 4
4th	0	0	0	4
5th	0	0	1	2
6th	0	2	2	0
Total	0	2	3	6

How important was it to discuss the Student Learning Plan and GOALS for the next trimester?

Grade Level	Unimportant 1	2	3	Important 4
4th	0	0	1	3
5th	0	0	0	3
6th	0	0	2	2
Total	0	0	3	8

The first of the final two questions addressed teacher participation. The second question asked whether or not two student led conferences were adequate for parents to be informed and involved in their child's learning progress.

Table 5

Parent opinions about teacher participation in the conference and number of conferences

It was informative to hear what my child's teacher said about his/her progress.

Grade Level	Disagree 1	2	3	Agree 4
4th	0	0	5	69
5th	0	0	2	29
6th	0	0	1	53
Total	**0 – 0%**	**0 – 0%**	**8 – 5%**	**151 – 95%**

Two student-led conferences per year provide me with the information needed to understand my child's learning progress.

Grade Level	Disagree 1	2	3	Agree 4
4th	2	2	9	61
5th	0	3	3	25
6th	2	2	3	47
Total	**4 – 2%**	**7 – 4%**	**15 – 10%**	**133 – 84%**

As can be seen in Table 5, ninety-five percent of parents surveyed felt that it was informative to hear what their child's teacher said about the student's progress. The other five percent had the opinion that the teacher's input was somewhat informative.

Most parents, eighty-four percent, felt that two conferences were sufficient to provide them with information they needed to understand their child's progress. Ten percent also somewhat agreed. Six percent, eleven parents surveyed, either somewhat disagreed or disagreed. All parents are invited to contact their child's teacher at anytime they would like to request and schedule additional conference time.

In addition, the teacher questionnaire asked to describe how they managed teacher/participation at the conferences. Most teachers, ten of eleven, said they participated about fifty percent of the time, interjecting as needed depending on the

individual student. Sometimes teachers would not participate as much during the conference and add only a few comments at the end, again depending on the needs of the student. The final question revealed that all eleven teachers felt two student led conferences were adequate for most students to provide information to their parents about their learning progress during the school year.

Discussion

Student led conferencing can have many rewards as well as having some challenges when used as the primary conference method used to communicate with parents. This project was designed to examine the effectiveness of student led conferencing to provide meaningful communication to parents and involvement in their student's educational experience. Research has shown that communication between home and school is a primary factor leading to student academic success (Shannon & Bylsma, 2003).

Students, parents, and teachers are all important stakeholders in the student led conferencing process. Students are the primary presenters at the conference and take responsibility for evaluating their school work, assessments, and student learning plan for improvement (Culver & Cousino, 2000). Parents participate at the conference as active listeners and gain critical information to support their student's learning (Picciotto, 1999). Teachers facilitate the conference and begin months in advance with a timeline which schedules the components to be included in the conference (Kinney, 2005). They also encourage and support students during the conference and clarify information for parents (Conway, 2006).

Even though student led conferences take extra effort of all those concerned, this project seems to show that parent and teacher opinions are favorable concerning increased parent communication and involvement. When parents take on an integral role in participating in and promoting their student's learning, they become partners with the school in meeting state learning standards and the requirements of the "No Child Left Behind" legislation (Dickinson 2006).

Summary

Chapter 4 reviewed the description of the environment at Tieton Intermediate School. Location of the school, ethnicity of the students, and information about the parents and teachers participating was included. Results of the parent survey and teacher questionnaire were then discussed and shown on tables related to the effectiveness of student explanation of school work examples, student assessment and learning goals, and teacher participation during the conference.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

Chapter 5 will summarize the findings of this project and make recommendations based on the data reported from parent surveys and teacher questionnaires. This data shows parent and teacher conclusions about the effectiveness of student led conferencing as a method of parent communication and involvement.

Summary

The purpose of this project was to determine if student led conferencing provided an effective method of parent communication and involvement. Opinions of parents and teachers at Tieton Intermediate School were used to answer these questions. The assumption is made and shown by research that parents that are more involved in their child's education will encourage the student to make better academic progress.

All participants, students, parents and teachers, play important roles in the student led conference. It is an investment from which all may benefit.

Conclusions

A descriptive research method was used to obtain information concerning this project. Responses from both a parent survey and teacher questionnaire about student led conferencing at Tieton Intermediate School were considered in the project conclusion.

A majority of parents, ninety-five percent, agreed that they were better informed of their child's progress at school and school work examples. Teachers agreed. Ninety-seven percent of parents felt it was informative to see their child's WASL scores and

discuss the Student Learning Plan. Again, teachers mostly agreed. Parent surveys also

seemed to show that teacher participation and the number of conferences per school year,

two, were adequate. A primary factor in student academic success is strong

communication between school and home. Student led conferencing increases two-way

communication between the student and parent and the results of this project show

student led conferencing to be an effective alternative to traditional parent-teacher

conferencing.

<u>Recommendations</u>

The following recommendations are made based on the conclusions of this

project. When student led conferencing is used as a primary method of parent

communication and involvement, parents will become more influential in their student's

education.

Students at TIS have been leading their own conferences for more than eight

years. Teachers initially implemented student led conferencing as an alternative to

traditional parent-teacher conferencing where parent attendance was low. The first year,

students in grade five piloted the new conferencing method. In the following years, other

grade levels participated, seeing the success of the pilot program.

Preparing for the student led conference begins many weeks ahead of the

conference day. First, students collect examples of their academic work. They select the

best examples from each subject and write a reflection stating why they chose the piece

and how it was an example of meeting a learning requirement. The chosen examples are

then put into a portfolio along with a letter of introduction, which explains the conference

process, and reports for reading, math, and cumulative grades. Students rehearse the presentation of their portfolio with their teacher and other students, in their first language. Finally, they present and discuss their portfolio and learning progress with their parents at the conference.

Students preparing for and presenting their conference for the first time will need more guidance than students who have led their conferences previously. Teachers model how to write the reflection on student work and also assist in editing and revisions for these students. After preparing for conferences two or three times, most students know the routine and the conference becomes more authentic and individualized. At TIS, students in grades four through six lead their conferences two times each year at the end of the first and second trimesters.

Fourth graders are successful and have pride in presenting their learning experiences with their teacher's support. Students in the fifth grade are more independent in preparing for their conference and, with some teacher guidance, have a positive conference experience. By sixth grade, experienced students are confident in leading their own conference and sharing their learning.

Student led conferencing at TIS has proven to be an effective method of parent communication. Students have the opportunity to share their learning experiences and teachers also communicate with parents directly about the student's progress. Student led conferences result in positive school-to-home communication and support for student academic success.

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APPENDIX A

Parent Survey

Parents,

Thank you for attending your child's student-led conference and participating as he/she presented and shared what they are learning at Tieton Intermediate School.

In an effort to better involve you in your child's education and to meet your needs as a parent, we invite you to complete this survey. Your time and thought in completing this survey is appreciated.

Thank you!

Please circle the number that best shows your response to the statement.

1. I am better informed of my child's progress at school as a result of this conference.
   Disagree   Agree
      1   2   3   4

2. It was informative to hear my child explain their school work examples.
   Disagree   Agree
      1   2   3   4

3. It was informative to see my child's WASL scores from last spring.
   Disagree   Agree
      1   2   3   4

4. It was informative to discuss my child's Student Learning Plan and GOALS for the next trimester.
   Disagree   Agree
      1   2   3   4

5. It was informative to hear what my child's teacher said about his/her progress.
   Disagree   Agree
      1   2   3   4

6. Two student-led conferences per year provide me with the information needed to understand my child's learning progress.
   Disagree   Agree
      1   2   3   4

Other comments and/or suggestions for student/parent/teacher conferencing:

APPENDIX B

Teacher Questionnaire

Teachers,

In an effort to improve the student-led conferences at Tieton Intermediate School, please complete the following questionnaire. Your comments and suggestions are important in making the conferencing process at TIS even more valuable for students, parents, and teachers. Please complete the questionnaire this week and put it in my mailbox. Results of the parent and teacher surveys will be available once the project is completed.

Thank you so much for your time and for your participation with this project!

1. How clearly do you believe students informed parents of their progress at the student-led conference?

   1   2   .   3   4
   Poorly   Excellently

2. How clearly did students explain their school work examples?

   1   2   3   4
   Poorly   Excellently

3. How important was it to provide and explain WASL scores to parents?

   1   2   3   4
   Unimportant   Important

4. How important was it to discuss the Student Learning Plan and GOALS for the next trimester?

   1   2   3   4
   Unimportant   Important

5. Describe how you manage teacher/student participation at the conference. For example: student presents 10 minutes of the time and teacher presents 15 minutes, 50/50, only interject as needed, etc. How is this working?

6. How many student-led conferences do you feel are adequate, for most students, to provide information about the student's learning progress?

Please use the back of this questionnaire for additional ideas and suggestions for future student-led conferencing.

Name (Optional)_____