

## **Assessing Projects: Demonstrating Understanding Student-Led Conferences**

### **Students Taking Ownership**

When students take responsibility for sharing their learning during conferences, the increased accountability moves the student from passive recipient of information shared between teacher and parent, to active participant in a three-way interaction. In student-led conferences, the teacher takes on a much less active role during the conference and acts solely as the facilitator of the discussion if needed.

Prior to the conference, students must be adequately prepared and provided with guidelines for the conference. It cannot be assumed that students will possess the self-confidence, organizational skills, and communication skills necessary to lead a successful conference. To help students gain confidence, set up role-play situations, provide students with forms, prompts, and the necessary time to collect, prepare, interpret and reflect on the information they will share with parents. Both teachers and peers should provide feedback to assist students in improving their presentations and collected information.

Student-led conferences provide an excellent opportunity for students to share the contents of portfolios and to explain why each piece was selected for inclusion. Students can point to specific work that reflects the grades they've received such as scoring guides from project work, test scores, homework assignments, pieces of writing showing the writing process, class participation and collaboration checklists, as well as the number and types of missing assignments. Students can also share learning goals, accomplishments, strengths, and areas needing improvement.

After the conference is complete, provide forms for parents to assess the effectiveness of the conference and ask students to reflect on the process. This feedback can prove to be invaluable in assessing how well students are progressing in taking ownership of their learning and how well the conference structure is working for parents.

Schools employing the student-led conference model note that parent attendance at conferences has increased (Hackmann, 1996) and assert that over 90% of parents and students prefer the student-led conference. Students report increased self-confidence and personal satisfaction with being directly involved in the conferences. Parents begin to recognize their children's ability to assume increasing levels of responsibility and appreciate the opportunity to strengthen the lines of communication with their children. Citing a more positive and relaxed conferencing atmosphere, teachers report a reduced conference preparation workload and diminished levels of teacher stress during conferences (Hackmann, 1996).