

What are Student-Led Conferences? October 26, 2009

Next week, Nov. 2-6, MDS students, parents and teachers will be involved in Student-Led Conferences. This is our third year to conduct this process that involves the discussion of a student's ongoing academic progress **WITH** the student present in a safe, caring environment with parents and teachers. In the past, schools have had Parent-Teacher Conferences, where the adults talk about the student, usually **WITHOUT** the student, unless there were major issues (usually negative) to be handled. In the last twelve to fifteen years, however, schools (public and private) across the country have switched to Student-Led Conferences. Our Superintendent is interested in this process, and is looking at our success with it.

At Madonna del Sasso School, Student-Led Conferencing is having students conduct conferences with their parents and teachers to display their schoolwork (best work and work that needs improvement), as well as discuss their learning based on State and Diocesan standards. Students will also discuss their educational goals, and the strategies for meeting those goals. Parents will definitely have an opportunity during this process to ask questions of either the student or teacher. We have been working all quarter to prepare for these conferences. Teachers have put State and Diocesan standards into "kid-friendly language" so that the students know exactly what they are learning. Students have been doing self-assessments on their progress based on the standards that are being taught. They should be able to say what they have learned, such as "I can tell you how the climate can affect the kinds of plants grown in an area," and not, "We learned Science today." Even our youngest learners can state something specific about what they have learned.

There are many benefits of Student-Led Conferencing. It moves the student from a passive to an active participant in a three-way interaction among parent, teacher, and student. Students assume an "equal partner" status in discussions concerning their academic progress. They also develop their organizational and oral communication skills. When students are prepared to tell the story of their own success (or lack thereof), they seem to experience a shift in their internal sense of responsibility for that success.

Much research has been done about the effectiveness of Student-Led Conferences. All the results point to the fact that when students are actively involved in the discussion of their academic learning, as well as the assessment of their own learning, they are validated as learners, and are even more motivated to do well.

After all, it's about the student, isn't it?

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