

## Student-Led Conferences

*West Carrollton Middle School  
West Carrollton, Ohio*

**W**est Carrollton Middle School has given the traditional parent-teacher conference an interesting twist.

Some years ago, the school's administrators became concerned that a very important person was missing from these conferences: the student! Today, students at West Carrollton individually meet with their parents and teachers at the school, and actually lead their conferences, taking responsibility for their own accomplishments and progress.

Students present a portfolio that showcases their work and use measurement tools to chart their academic progress. Teachers are available on conference nights to meet with parents, answer questions, and help the parents and students work together to evaluate the students' progress. From the beginning of the year, students know they will participate in at least two conferences. This encourages them to do their best work for their conference portfolios.

Conferences are held after the first- and second-quarter report cards so students have the opportunity to improve by the end of the academic year. Some teams also opt to do a standard home conference after the third quarter.

Two weeks before the end of the quarter, teachers mail invitations to parents with sign-up sheets. To prepare for the conferences themselves, teachers help students evaluate their progress on check lists that use a 1-to-5 scale. These evaluation sheets also include the student's grade in the course and self-stated next-quarter goals. The children rehearse their own presentations with a classmate.

Since the school began these student-led conferences, participation of parents has grown from 30 to 78 percent. The conferences are worth a percentage of each grade in the core subjects: math, social studies, English, reading, and science.

Although it was initially a challenge to adopt the student-led conference system, West Carrollton, with careful planning, has been able to phase in the program. Each team of teachers started with a small, set number of conferences. As teams began to see the advantages, they shared ideas and worked out the best way to implement the new system. The teams stuck to an implementation calendar that helped ease teachers' apprehension about the program. In the end, the school allowed each team the flexibility to adapt the program to its needs.

Thanks to the student conferences program, middle school students at West Carrollton feel like they are in control of their education. The program reinforces the need for organization, decision-making, goal-setting, communication, and leadership skills. It also strengthens the relationship between the school and its families, creating more interest among students and parents and giving them more responsibility at school.

"This has been the perfect fit for us to get our parents actively involved within our building," said the principal.

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