

Student-led conferences

Invite students to analyze and communicate their progress

Team-based practices are approaches that leverage multiple adults to create deeper and personalized learning opportunities for students.

Strategy: Students showcase their learning and growth for their families.

Frequency and duration: Two–four times per year.

Practice adapted from: [SPARK School at Kyrene de las Manitas](#)

- Core educator team: 1 teacher executive designer, 3 certified teachers, 1 teacher candidate, 1 instructional assistant
- Learners: 100–120 learners in Grades 4–6
- [Elements of the Next Education Workforce](#): Shared rosters, learner-centered instruction, intrapersonal skills

SPARK School at Kyrene de las Manitas has shifted from teacher-owned conferences to a student-led approach. This change supports the educator team’s goal of creating a student-centered learning environment where learners own their progress and goals. Read on to explore an adaptation of SPARK School’s student-led conferences.

▶ The educator team manages scheduling and family communication.

Educators determine which days and times conferences will take place, ensuring times accommodate working adults. Educators also determine how many families should be in the space at a time, knowing that it is important to be able to give every family sufficient attention. (SPARK School educators typically schedule several students’ conferences simultaneously and float between presentations.) Educators communicate the sign-up process to families well in advance and follow up with confirmations and reminders.

SPARK School uses a free online platform, [SignupGenius](#), to schedule student-led conferences. Online platforms often manage sending reminders to families and communicating cancellations, and they are typically easy to use. Emailed invitations and printed invitations are excellent alternatives to using an online platform. Consider families’ access to reliable internet in deciding your format.

▶ The educator team shares expectations with students.

The educator team shares with students:

1. The purpose of student-led conferences: Communicating and celebrating growth
2. The flow of a typical conference (e.g., greeting, student presentation of selected work, sharing goals, discussion)
3. What students should be prepared to share with their families (e.g., current grades, one assignment from each class, a learner profile)

Importantly, educators do not select the pieces of work students share; students select their own work based on criteria communicated by the educator team.

► Students make a plan and practice.

Students select the work they will showcase to their families and plan the context they will provide. Students practice presenting their work independently, then rehearse one-on-one with a peer.

At SPARK, since most student work is published digitally, students plan their showcases by inserting assignment links into a template they share with their families. For work that is not published digitally, a binder might be a good alternative for organizing student work.

► Students, families and educators celebrate student learning with student-led conferences.

Student-led conferences are typically joyful events. Educators and families enjoy watching as students take ownership of their learning and express pride in their progress. The educator team should take time during conferences to answer any questions families may have and to share about the growth they have seen in students.

Why teachers, students and families love this practice

With the move to student-led conferences, SPARK School educators experienced an increased sense of partnership with students and families. Educator team members found that, while this shift required more preparation on the front end, it was a much more rewarding process as a whole, as it aligned with the goal of empowering learners and being student-centered. Learners shared that in the past they often didn't attend conferences and wondered what the educator team planned to share with their families. Families shared that they appreciated witnessing first-hand the knowledge and skills students gained and had a better understanding of student goals and the progress toward them.

Considerations for implementing this practice

Share data with families in an ongoing manner: SPARK School educators ensure families know how their students are progressing well before they attend conferences. When benchmark data is collected and analyzed, the educator team sends reports home, contacts families to follow up and develops plans to address student needs.

Consider adjusting the conference schedule as the year goes on: It may require teams a few cycles of conferences to determine the right length of time for student-led conferences and how many students should present simultaneously. In addition to adjusting schedules based on findings from the previous conference cycles, educator teams might consider adjusting based on student and family familiarity with the practice itself. SPARK School educators have found that families tend to have fewer questions and students tend to require less support with their presentations as the year goes on. With this in mind, the team typically increases the number of students presenting simultaneously later in the year.

Generate a back-up plan: Changing work schedules, care for family members and last-minute transportation challenges are just a few of the reasons families may be unable to attend conferences held on school grounds at pre-established times. Consider how students might present their work to family members even if their family is unable to attend. Teams might consider video conferencing for a remote presentation or filming and sharing video of the student's presentation that can be shared with family at a date and time that works best for them.

Be patient with the process: Student-led conferences represent a change from traditional practices and, as with any change, students, families and the educator team may experience bumps along the way as they adopt this different approach. Be patient with the process and remember that the move to student-led conferences aligns with the goal of students having more ownership of their learning.