

Academic Conversations

How to organise and conduct a successful Parent-Student-Teacher conference day:

Aorere College

School Profile: Aorere College is a large, urban, co-educational school with a roll of over 1500 students. The school has strong engagement with its community, the majority of which is made up of Pasifika, Indigenous Māori or Indian families.

Parental Attendance at traditional parent-teacher meetings: circa 57%.

Parental attendance at three-way PST conversations: 80-90% (sustained over 3 years).

Organisation:

- Held twice a year, over two days each time, from midday through to the evening. Normal timetabled classes are cancelled on these afternoons.
- Initially the Deans arrange sibling appointments with parents who have more than one child at the school, for convenience. These take priority in the booking system, with form teachers contacting the remainder of parents to arrange suitable times.
- Conferences are facilitated by form teachers in half hour slots, with five to ten minutes preparation time between appointments. Form classes are arranged horizontally, with approximately 25-30 students in each.
- Students usually attend the conference with one or both parents or a guardian.
- Seats are arranged outside the classrooms for the comfort of those waiting for their appointment.
- Conferences are held in private, clean, warm and well-lit classrooms.
- Information packs are given to parents before their conference, or by the teacher if it is evident the family does not already have one. These packs include information on NCEA fees, the New Zealand

Qualifications Authority (NZQA) and academic counselling in the school.

What happens during the three-way PST conferences?

- Teachers are both positive and knowledgeable about their students' individual strengths, interests and areas of need.
- Teachers are relaxed talking with the parents and they make them feel welcome.
- Questions are answered and issues clarified in an engaging and easy-to-understand manner.
- Teachers use open-ended questions to encourage students and parents to participate in the conversation.
- Students are encouraged to establish next steps by discussing what needs to be prioritised, deadlines and homework.
- Conferences largely focus on students' general progress in their various subjects. Parents are given an academic report for their child at the time of the appointment, and teachers have this available through KAMAR (the school's student management system) on their laptop.
- Teachers give clear information on the student's current performance, as well as expected achievement. For those in years 11-13, details about credits attempted and gained, and at what level (Achieved, Merit or Excellence), form the basis of the conversation with parents.
- With year 9 and 10 students, data such as curriculum levels and asTTie assessment scores can be used to facilitate achievement focused conversations.
- Teachers offer constructive feed-forward on the student's performance and ways their results could be improved.
- Most teachers discuss possible career pathways with the student and their parents. They have a clear idea of what the student's current intentions regarding their aspirations beyond school are and can offer advice about future subject choices.

What makes the PST conference approach successful?

It is possible for some parents to communicate with their child's academic counsellor in the Samoan, Tongan or Hindi languages at this school, should they wish. In instances where teachers are aware parents may have limited use of spoken English they deliver material in a simple format or ask the student to act as a translator. The three-way conversations are highly valued by teachers, students and parents alike, as evidenced by a teacher who attended when she was unwell as they were regarded as being too important to miss.

Overall organisation of the PST days at this school is impressive. There is a vibrant and welcoming atmosphere in the school and the physical set-up is effective. Prefects are available to guide parents to classrooms. Teachers are well prepared, comfortable and confident in

facilitating the PST conference. Senior leaders are available to check teachers are okay and offer assistance where necessary. Tea, coffee, and a sausage sizzle are provided by the school for parents and staff and there is a well-constructed survey asking parents to evaluate the design, timing and content of the PST conference at the end of their interview.