

## Academic Conversations

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

#### Ruawai College

**School profile:** Ruawai College is a small, rural, Year 7-13 school located 30km south of Dargaville in Northland, with a roll of approximately 190 students. It is regarded as the hub of its immediate community – a small town of around 500 people. This is a good example of a small Starpath partner school achieving success in engaging its parents in the important decisions regarding their children's learning.

**Parental attendance at traditional parent-teacher meetings:** circa 50%

**Parental attendance at three-way PST conferences:** 100% (sustained over 3 years)

#### Organisation:

- Held twice a year, over a full day, during which normal classes are suspended.
- Conferences take place in the school hall, with 12 meeting stations set up for the 'learning advisors' around the periphery. A central table has careers information available and there are benches for those waiting for their appointment.
- Evaluation questionnaires, pens and a return box are placed at a table near the hall's exit.
- Appointments are scheduled for 30 minutes each.
- The majority of parents confirm their attendance and individual arrangements are made for those who cannot make it on the day.
- The Careers Advisor is available to meet with students and parents and on occasion is asked by teachers to join a PST conference.

## What happens during the three-way PST conferences?

- Teachers are well prepared with individual student folders to refer to during the conversation.
- Teachers talk through a range of topics with parents and students.
- Data from the student profile is used.
- Parents are able to ask pertinent questions and time is taken to respond to these.
- Teachers check that parents and students are satisfied with the discussion.

## What makes the PST conference approach successful?

The overall organisation of the PST days at this school is excellent. Documentation is at hand for teachers to use in the conferences and the physical set up works well. The geographic distance from the school for many students and their families creates unique challenges for parent/whānau engagement. Every effort is made to capture full attendance of the parents in this school community at the PST conferences and the school has enjoyed success with this over a sustained period of time.

Teachers are prepared with substantive information to discuss with parents and students. Sessions are conducted in a friendly, welcoming and organised manner and in a way that is engaging and informative. Parents are relaxed and informed about the purpose of the discussion. The principles of academic counselling and three-way conversations operate expertly and smoothly in this environment.