

Academic Conversations

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

Whangarei Boys' High School

School profile: Whangarei Boys' High School is a large, urban, single-sex school with a roll of over 1,200 students. The school has strong engagement with its community, 50% of whom are Māori. It is located close to Whangarei Girls' High School.

Parental attendance at traditional parent-teacher meetings: circa 17%.

Parental attendance at three-way PST conferences: 70% - 80% (sustained over 3 years).

Organisation:

- Held once a year, over two days, during which normal classes are suspended.
- Parents are given appointments, informed of the location, and sent a formal academic report on their child a week prior to the conference date.
- Conferences are held in private spaces - usually clean, warm classrooms – and typically last from 20 to 25 minutes.
- Conferences involve a student, a parent/caregiver, and a teacher in the role of academic mentor. In some cases both parents attend or a whānau member such as a grandparent or older sibling attends.
- Three-way conversation is supported by data, including student profile, academic goals, up-to-date assessment results (asTTle scores, NCEA credits, in-class assessments), and subject teachers' reports.
- Typically, each teacher facilitates 9 to 11 conferences on each of the two days.

What happens during the three-way PST conferences?

- Teachers know their students well, and are able to show that during the conference. They are positive and knowledgeable about individual student's strengths, interests and areas of need.
- Teachers are relaxed talking with the parents, make them feel welcome, invite questions, and discuss issues in an engaging and easy-to-understand manner.
- The focus of the conference is on academic progress, future options and career prospects, and goals – whether they be academic, leadership, co-curricular or personal. Next steps and goals for the student are clearly articulated.
- Senior students are encouraged to aim for NCEA endorsement, and looking at the quality of credits gained for this qualification forms part of the discussion. Progress in subjects is discussed by making links to a recent, formal academic report sent to parents prior to the conference.
- Pastoral concerns, if raised, are referred to the appropriate Dean or another leader responsible for pastoral care using a specially designed referral form.
- At the conclusion of the conference, every parent is given an information pack which includes the school's latest newsletter, an NCEA booklet and an evaluation form (which seeks their feedback about the PST conference).

What makes the PST conference approach successful?

Successful whānau engagement relies on careful logistical planning. The overall organisation of the days is a team effort, with senior prefects available to assist and guide parents to meeting locations, and middle leaders such as HODs and Deans available in a central location for parents to see if they need to at the conclusion of their conference. As the conferences are held in winter additional heating is arranged. The school provides a light lunch for teachers and a "sausage sizzle" for parents and students. Parents are encouraged to provide feedback before they leave, using a one-page evaluation form. A prize draw is used to encourage more parents to provide feedback.

This is a school which has a number of students in its boarding accommodation. Teachers make alternative arrangements to meet with the families of boarders, and other students, if they are unable to make it in person to the conference days. The school's leadership team works



closely with the neighbouring Whangarei Girls' High School to co-ordinate PST conferences so they take place on the same days in both schools, making it more convenient for the parents.