

## **Conferences at McGraw Elementary School**

Our current practice at McGraw is to use conferences as one way of communicating among students, parents, and teachers. Conferences provide opportunities to share information, set goals, and celebrate student progress in learning. We use a variety of conference formats to meet diverse goals throughout the school year.

### Goal-setting Conferences

Goal-setting conferences are optional, and may be held periodically throughout the year depending on the preferences of the classroom teacher and the needs of students and parents. The emphasis of this type of conference is for the child to be involved in setting goals for individual learning. They may be informal or formal, and may involve either a teacher - student format or a format in which the student, parent, and child are all involved.

### Back to School Night

Back to School Nights are held each year at McGraw within the first month of school. They are mandatory for all classroom teachers. This form of conference is intended to provide an overview of the upcoming school year, not to review individual student progress or needs. Formats vary and may include individual classroom and/or grade-level presentations. The following topics are emphasized.

- Curriculum
- Grading
- Primary Years Program Elements
- Classroom Expectations
- Communications with Parents
- Schedules and Routines
- Tips for Student Success

### Teacher - Parent Conferences

Traditional teacher - parent conferences are scheduled in the fall and as necessary throughout the year. These conferences provide a setting for the teacher and parent to review a wide range of topics relevant to an individual student. Students may participate in the conferences at the option of the teacher and parent. These conferences address the following topics.

- Discussion of the student's academic, social, emotional, and physical status
- A formal review of current progress, strengths, and weaknesses
- An overview of academic subjects and current activities and directions
- Goal setting

### Teacher - Student Conferences

These conferences between the teacher and individual students are held throughout the year. They are initiated and directed by the teacher to guide students in their learning. Teacher - student conferences have the following characteristics.

- Often spontaneous

- Short and informal
- Provide one-on-one feedback
- Intended to give guidance on any issue or next steps for students in a particular area

### Celebrations and Exhibitions of Learning

A variety of celebrations or exhibitions are held at McGraw throughout the school year as culminating activities of units or inquiry or other subject areas. These events provide opportunities for students to show parents, other students, and the community their final projects or products and to reflect on their learning growth. They may involve a variety of formats such as open houses, fairs, demonstrations, formal presentations, and other creative ideas developed by students and their teachers. Settings also may vary from the classroom, media center, gymnasium, or other locations within the Fort Collins community.

### Student-led Conferences

Student-led conferences are formal conferences where children are involved in discussing their work and progress with their parents. They are of particular value because the students reflect on their performance, select topics or work examples for focus, and share the responsibility of informing their parents. Students, with the support and guidance of the teacher, select work to be discussed based on predetermined criteria. They rely heavily on the Student Portfolio, but may also include other work examples, centers within the classroom, or demonstrations conducted as part of the conference. Prior to the conference, students are carefully prepared and classroom time is set aside to allow students time to select and reflect on their work and practice their presentations. The format of student-led conferences depends on the age of the child.

To learn about best practices for student-led conferences, McGraw staff completed a books study and pilot program from 2003-2005. These experiences were successful and demonstrated that student-led conferences fit well with the Primary Years Program at McGraw in all grade levels. Beginning in spring 2005, student-led conferences have been implemented each spring by all classes within the PYP. Guidelines for student-led conferences are summarized in Figure 1.

Why have Student-led Conferences?	What is the format of the conferences?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They fit well with the PYP curriculum.</li> <li>• They help develop qualities from the Learner Profile and give a chance for the students to show their work to their parents.</li> <li>• They have been successfully used at McGraw and in other international and national systems.</li> <li>• Students take more responsibility for their own part in the learning process.</li> <li>• Students are involved in the selection of the work to show parents, and identify points of strength and areas for further work within their chosen work.</li> <li>• Student-led conferences give parents a clear insight into the kind of work their child is doing and an opportunity for them to discuss it with them.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student-led conferences are held in the spring.</li> <li>• Our conferences truly are led by our students.</li> <li>• Students use portfolios as a focus of their presentations.</li> <li>• Conference formats are varied among grade levels and classrooms. Individual teachers may set the format based upon the needs of their class.</li> <li>• Conferences may include centers or other projects beyond the work included in the portfolio.</li> </ul>

**What are the roles of the participants?**

Student	Parent	Teacher
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Select work for portfolios</li> <li>• Practice your presentation for your conference</li> <li>• Take responsibility for your conference</li> <li>• Be on time</li> <li>• Stick to talking about prepared work</li> <li>• Speak clearly</li> <li>• Reflect afterwards</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be on time for the conference</li> <li>• Be positive</li> <li>• Be concerned</li> <li>• Be interested</li> <li>• Ask questions</li> <li>• Listen</li> <li>• Be prepared to write a brief reflection about the conference</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain up to date knowledge about best practices for student-led conferences</li> <li>• Provide a structure or plan for the conference</li> <li>• Facilitate student preparation for the conference</li> <li>• Provide a list of questions for participants</li> <li>• Manage the time</li> <li>• Clarify when necessary</li> <li>• Reflect on the process</li> </ul>

**What is the Content of the Conference?**

Students throughout the school will have prepared work to review with their parents. Work selected for the conference will be comprehensive, covering the spectrum of student learning activities. This may include: strengths and areas for growth, PYP unit of inquiry work, written and oral language, reading, math, specials, Transdisciplinary Skills, and the PYP Attitudes and IB Learner Profile.

Figure 1. Guidelines for student-led conferences at McGraw. (Adapted from Figure 2 in *Primary Years Programme Assessment Handbook*, International Baccalaureate Organization, 2001)