the TEACHERS GUILD

Synthesis Snapshot

OPPORTUNITIES FOR DESIGN

Redesigning Parent-Teacher Conferences

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Overview

When parents and teachers work together, students tend to do better in school and enjoy their learning more. However, there are few moments for teachers and parents to truly connect. The parent-teacher conference is one of those rare opportunities. This is why The Teachers Guild and The RSA are working together to connect educators from different countries so they can learn from each other and be inspired to create more meaningful parent-teacher interactions.

Over two weeks, we collected stories and insights from educators around the world to help us answer this question: **How might we redesign parent-teacher conferences?** These insights were generated from educator-led interviews with students, parents and other colleagues, personal reflections, and follow-up surveys with a select group of participants. This Synthesis Snapshot offers four key themes we heard throughout these reflections, and presents opportunities for redesigning parent-teacher partnerships. The themes we heard are:

Key Themes:

PARENT-TEACHER NIGHT

1 *Beyond the 15 minutes of Fame*

How might we create more communication points between parents and teachers so progress updates are not too little, too late?

2 *Students at the Heart*

How might we make students the heart of conversations on their learning and development?

3 *From Awkward to Awesome*

How might we create space for parents and teachers to connect interpersonally, so relationships build depth and authenticity?

4 *Personalized Feedback*

How might we provide a robust and celebratory perspective of each student?

1 *Beyond the 15 minutes of Fame*

Beyond the 15 minutes of Fame

Most parent-teacher conferences run from 5 to 20 minutes. You can't fit everything you need in just 15 minutes. Teachers feel rushed and parents feel like they didn't get the depth they were seeking. But what if we made the 15 minute conversation irrelevant by opening up channels for communication so parents were brought along throughout their child's learning journey? How might we move beyond the "cram and slam" conversations to a model that brings everyone along?

How Might We

CREATE MORE COMMUNICATION POINTS BETWEEN PARENTS AND TEACHERS SO PROGRESS UPDATES ARE NOT TOO LITTLE, TOO LATE?

MOVE BEYOND THE 15 MINUTES SO THAT PARENTS ARE BROUGHT ALONG ON THEIR CHILD'S LEARNING JOURNEY?

MOVE BEYOND THE "CRAM AND SLAM" CONVERSATIONS TO A MODEL THAT BRINGS EVERYONE ALONG?

Beyond the 15 minutes of Fame

Many of our son's conferences were like sprints to just get everything covered! And we knew that there were other parents waiting right outside the door for their 15 minute time slot.

-Hatton Littman

Nothing is more frustrating than not finishing a much needed conversation because the allotted 20 minutes are up.

-Matthew Moyer

Parents complain that they don't get enough face to face time with teachers, and they want to hear individually from each teacher how their child is doing.

-Lauren Teather

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Students at the Heart

Students at the Heart

What we heard: Parent-teacher interaction is often missing a critical perspective: the student's. The Royal Society of Arts surveyed 70 UK PTA members, and asked them how involved their children were on average in conferences they've attended. From 1-7 scale, 1 being not at all, they gave an average score of 1.7. And we heard from teachers in our Discover phase that students constantly feel like they're being talked "about" rather than with, making them feel left out on a conversation that most concerns them. Many schools today are moving toward Student Led Conferences, a model that places students at the center of these discussions and turns them into advocates for their own learning. What other innovations might help to make parent-home connection more student-centered? HMW make students the heart of conversations on their learning and development?

How Might We

INVOLVE STUDENTS MORE IN THE PROCESS REFLECTING ON OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH WITH BOTH PARENTS AND TEACHERS?

MAKE STUDENTS THE HEART OF CONVERSATIONS ON THEIR LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT?

Students at the Heart

These always felt like my parents talking to my teachers about how well I was achieving their goals for me rather than stuff I cared about.

-Blair Rorani

I asked students how they felt about parent-teacher conferences. Overwhelmingly, the students responded that they mostly felt they were useless.

-Clint Heitz

Excluding students is like using the GPS trying to get to a destination without the driver present!

-Lache Williams

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From Awkward to Awesome

From Awkward to Awesome

What we heard: Back-to-school nights and parent-teacher conferences are often a source of dread for parents and teachers alike. For parents, it can be intimidating and uncomfortable to come to the classroom. For teachers, they can feel like parent nights are "gotcha" moments, where they will be revealed for something they could have done better. A part of that comes from the fact that the relationship between parents and teachers never has a chance to grow naturally. They only meet when the stakes feel high. What if we reimagined the partnership between teachers and parents so there were more opportunities for informal community building? What if we created space for authentic relationships to unfold so that there's a common ground before difficult or high-pressure conversations took place?

How Might We

CREATE SPACE FOR PARENTS AND TEACHERS TO CONNECT INTERPERSONALLY, SO RELATIONSHIPS BUILD DEPTH AND AUTHENTICITY?

CREATE FRIENDSHIP BETWEEN THE CLASSROOM AND THE HOME?

BUILD EMPATHY BETWEEN PARENTS AND TEACHERS SO EACH SIDE BETTER UNDERSTANDS THE OTHER'S NEEDS?

From Awkward to Awesome

[When] we weren't bound by the the format of the traditional parents' evening, .. they felt much less formal, which meant we could communicate in a more natural way.

-Melinda Bower

It's a pain point to sit down to with parents ... there's gotta be other ways to be in communication with these teachers, have that teacher-parent communication be easier.

-Jeff Mather

Dread - especially in the early years of my career. What if I was caught out, found out for not setting enough homework? Not remembering which kid we are talking about? So we hid behind the ritual of shaking hands, extreme politeness and not delving into too much detail.

-Rick Hall

4 Make It Personal

Make It Personal

What we heard: The discussion of student learning should be the most human-centered conversation, but too often it becomes about the process of learning, and not about the people doing the learning. Teachers get caught in the "here's how I calculated the grade"'. Parents get rough snapshots of progress or gaps. And the tools to communicate learning and progress lack depth. These leave parent-teacher interactions feeling shallow. Teachers discussed the need for better systems and tools to show learning, and offer concrete steps forward. How might we create better tools and models to add depth and personalization when talking about student learning? HMW we focus parent-teacher conversations on learning, and not just the process of schooling?

How Might We

PROVIDE A ROBUST AND CELEBRATORY PERSPECTIVE OF EACH STUDENT?

FOCUS PARENT-TEACHER CONVERSATIONS ON LEARNING, AND NOT JUST THE PROCESS OF SCHOOLING?

CREATE BETTER TOOLS AND MODELS TO ADD DEPTH AND PERSONALIZATION WHEN TALKING ABOUT STUDENT LEARNING?

Make It Personal

Often, the sheer number of students a teacher has prevents her from making anecdotal records of students. Parents are reassured when they know that teachers really know their students.

-Paolo Ven Paculan

Nobody deserves to be told that their child is unworthy. We are trusted with parents most precious asset all day.

-Summer Howarth

As a high school teacher we don't tend to have parent-teacher conferences unless there is concern.

-Tiffanie Harrison

Project Ideas

HERE ARE SOME PROJECT IDEAS THAT ALIGN TO EACH OF THE THEMES! WE HOPE THE COMMUNITY MIGHT BE INSPIRED TO PICK THESE UP AND BRING THEM TO LIFE THROUGH THE DESIGN PROCESS

Beyond The 15 Minutes of Fame

- Digital Learning Portfolios with Parent View Options
- Video Tours of Classrooms to be viewed Virtually/Online

Students at the Heart

- "Design review" like experiences on student learning and growth
- ReporTED-talks: Quarterly summaries of growth and learning, done and delivered by students

From Awkward to Awesome

- Parent Pop Ups: Informal Gatherings for Parents and Teachers to Connect
- Parent-Hosted Excursions: Getting Outside The Classroom with Parents and Students

Make It Personal

- Live Report Cards: Ongoing dialogue about growth between the home and school
- Learning Journals: Excerpts to Showcase growth and learning

Thank you!

Share and be inspired by ideas to redesign parent-teacher conferences at
www.teachersguild.org