

This series of resources presents effective practices implemented by some of the 27 schools involved in the original High School Flexibility Enhancement Pilot Project (HSFEPP) as they explored ways to use flexibility to increase student engagement and achievement and to support quality teaching in their schools.

This series represents a sampling of the effective practices being implemented in redesign schools across the province.

## STUDENT-LED CONFERENCES

Students, parents and teachers from William E. Hay Composite High School in Stettler are taking advantage of student-led conferences by using the opportunity to understand the benefits of self-direction and the value of students having a more active role in their own learning.

### What are student-led conferences?

A student, parents, and teacher advisor meet to discuss the student's work and goals, with the student taking the lead in sharing his or her work. Together, the partners all share in the student's success.

In one student's words: "Teachers learn a lot about the student on a personal level. During student-led conferences, the conversation is about future educational and career plans, and they also discuss their current education at our high school: things such as what the student is good at, what they might need help with and what sort of things the parents, school and student can do together to help the student get through their high school years."

In one parent's words: "The parent listens, provides feedback, and asks any questions that may come up. It's kind of an 'interactive' parent/teacher interview where the student takes the lead most of the time." Another says: "Instead of the typical parent/teacher interview where the teacher describes the student's work ethic, this gave us the chance to think 'outside the box' and try new things."

In the first semester, the conferences are held for Grades 9 and 12. For Grade 9, the emphasis is on the parents meeting with the school and understanding the structure of the learning environment, as well as hearing their student talk about his or her goals. For Grade 12, the focus is on everyone being aware that the student is on track with his or her goals as the final year is concluded. In the second semester, Grades 10 and 11 have their student-led conferences.

For participating in the student-led conferences, each teacher at the school has one day in lieu, but the teacher has to spend this day in school. In the first year only two teachers took advantage of the time off, but in recent years, more are recognizing the benefits. They are finding it a great time to collaborate with department members.

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*Parent of student, William E. Hay High School*



# Why the school implemented student-led conferences

During the student-led conferences, teacher advisors have an in-depth opportunity to get to know students and to build relationships with them. This is better than the “traditional teacher-student relationship,” explains one student. “Having students and teachers develop good relationships is very important for a student’s success in high school, and I believe our school is a perfect example of how this is true.”

## How success is measured

Participating in the learning environment reaps rewards for all concerned. One student notes that, “You can tell it is working by how much more comfortable students are with their teachers now. Students no longer feel they are inferior to their teacher and are no longer scared of them, because of the Teacher Advisor program and student-led conferences. The key is truly building strong relationships.”

Another measure of success is the participation of parents. One parent describes it: “I believe one of the last parent/teacher interview nights only had single-digit participation from parents while the student-led conference had over 70 per cent participation. As a parent, I quite enjoy the chance to see my daughter ‘in action’ at the school and listen to her describe her educational goals and how she plans to achieve them.”

“[Student-led conferences] allow our students to have a say in their education and also the chance to really be involved in planning their own future.”

*Parent of student, William E. Hay High School*

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*Student, William E. Hay High School*

## What we learned

A student in the school enthuses about the effectiveness of the student-led conferences, saying, “I think it is very effective just the way it is. I would not know what would happen if we had to go back to the old ways of how high schools used to be. This is what I know of my high school, and I think it is great. Other students from other schools tell me that we have a great school when I tell them about some of the programs that we have.”

Parents are eager to see the student-led conferences continue too. One parent says, “It allows our students to have a say in their education and also the chance to really be involved in planning their own future.” Planning for the future is another way of saying just how valuable the high school experience is.

Another parent comments that, “I have attended four student-led conferences over the years and find that they are effective in their current state. One thing our school did to make the conferences accessible to more parents was to schedule them over a week versus having them all take place on one night. This allowed for more parents to participate.”

It was also found that parents can become emotional at these meetings, if they are hearing their child’s goals for the first time. The Teacher Advisors have been given professional development sessions that develop their skills at facilitation of them. Clearly, flexibility takes many forms, and in terms of tweaking the practice for student-led conferences, a little flexibility can go a long way.

For more on Student-Led Conferences, contact:

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