



March 15, 2010

### **Re-Student Led Conferences**

Dear Parents/Caregivers,

We are presently preparing for Student Led Conferences (SLCs) to be held Tuesday, March 30 and Wednesday, March 31. We are looking forward to meeting with you all. Details of how to book these times are attached to this introductory letter.

SLCs, while new to Russell Street School, are not new to the education sector. Its introduction is part of several improvements we have made to this year's reporting cycle.

Why are we doing it? What can parents expect? When will parents be getting comparative data (linked to National Standards)? And, what role are parents expected to play?

The following outline gives some background and begins to answer some of the questions above:

#### *The Evidence to Support SLCs*

Auckland University Professor of Education and leading commentator on National Standards, John Hattie, outlines the value of such processes in his substantial research. His revised list of the most effective influences on student achievement (2009) identifies student self-reporting as the most significant indicator linked to raised student achievement.

SLCs help students become informed 'assessors' of their own and others' learning. As they prepare and conduct conferences about their learning, they are developing their knowledge and understanding of themselves as learners. They are also developing 'real life' skills in presentation, making the reporting process an authentic part of their learning.

Two other international researchers, Black & William, further comment, "the process of students reflecting on their learning, through effective questioning that promotes the articulation of student thinking, is integral to classroom assessment practices that enhance student learning"

And integral too, to the concept of SLCs, is the desire to involve parents in their children's education. Research shows parental encouragement and support for learning activities at home, and parental involvement in schools and classrooms, have a positive impact on children's learning. (Bastani, 1988; Epstein, 1983, 1987). SLCs have the potential to strengthen partnership in learning between the learner, teacher and parent. They can support parents to become informed partners in the learning process, and support them to become more able to understand how learning can be supported at home. This is an important aspect of the National Government's

education reforms.

*What is a Student Led Conference? What isn't it?*

At Russell Street School, an SLC is a conference run by students, for their parents, about their learning. During the fifteen-minute conference, students present learning in different curriculum areas, as shown primarily in their portfolio. Students discuss the process of learning, and the progress they have made, with reference to their goals and the criteria against which their work has been evaluated.

SLCs differ from traditional parent-teacher interviews in that they put the students at the heart of the reporting process. It is not like the old one-way interviews, where teachers do the majority of talking. In SLCs, teachers, depending on the age, confidence and capability of students, provide prompts and support for the student to explain their learning progress and next learning steps.

The SLC will not give comparative data. It will not provide you with information about how your child is getting on compared with national standards or similar. This information will be provided to you mid-year, and end-of year, in writing.

*What can we expect?*

Upon arrival you can expect your child to take responsibility for introducing you to the teacher, and for getting everyone settled. S/he will present and discuss progress in particular areas, using samples from his/her ePortfolio as the basis for discussion. S/he will explain goals (or what s/he was trying to get better at) and identify next learning steps. The teacher will use prompts to help draw responses out. Upon completion, you and your child are invited to view the ePortfolio at home for further sharing. This may be a good time for you to add your comments to their learning samples.

*My Role as a Parent*

Well, first and foremost we need you to be open-minded, seeing the potential in an SLC. We also need you to bring your child, or if you are unavailable, another significant adult in their life should. Your child will be practicing and will be looking forward to this, so we want to avoid any disappointment. During the SLC let your child take the lead and direct any questions or comments to him/her. You might like to ask questions such as: What support do you need to achieve one of your targets or goals? What has been your proudest achievement so far? What are you going to try to get better at next? How do you manage a difficult task? Please enter the room on the sound of the bell and assist our organisation by departing on time too. Thanks.

We are conscious that this is our first go at this -it's your child's first go, probably yours, and in many cases, the teacher's first go too. We welcome your direct constructive feedback to the teacher as we develop our capability in this area. Please note, formal school-wide feedback (on all aspects of the reporting cycle) will be sought at the end of the year following a full cycle.

Thank you for supporting this development.

Yours faithfully,

David Reardon  
Principal