

# Let's Talk It Over

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The Lincoln School, Battle Creek, Michigan, found the conference method of reporting pupil progress to parents highly successful. Esther Rupright, consultant in reading and testing, who was principal of Lincoln School when this conference technique was instituted, outlines the procedures and values of parent-teacher conferences.

ANY REAL SUCCESS in helping a student achieve the maximum development of which he is capable comes through an understanding of the individual's growth pattern and of his personality and adjustment problems rather than through an attempt to view academic success or failure as an isolated area. The present controversy over the matter of school reports to parents is directly related to this awareness. If we are to view school achievement in light of the total adjustment pattern, then we most certainly must view pupil progress reports in this same light. Hence a challenge—that of bringing to parents an understanding of our philosophy and our goals and their part in the effectiveness of anything that we can hope to accomplish.

## Progress Has Been Gradual

Our experimentation in Battle Creek with parent-teacher conferences as a means of reporting school progress to parents has been in line with this thinking. We have moved slowly during the past three years in putting this practice into effect, being constantly aware of the fact that its success or failure would largely depend upon three factors:

☛ Teacher readiness—a sincere conviction that we wanted to explore the possibilities of this method

☛ Adequate teacher preparation and planning—the “how” of doing the job

☛ Parent readiness—a willingness to try to plan and to evaluate its results with us.

In the spring of 1947 we made our first attempts at having conferences with all parents at Lincoln School in Battle Creek. The writer was at that time principal of this building. Our faculty had engaged in many lengthy discussions relative to the conference method of reporting, and the teachers of the early elementary grades had agreed that they wanted to try the experiment in June at the final report period. Teachers in the later elementary grades did not feel ready to try the plans, and it was most definitely agreed that it was a project that could be successfully carried out only by those who felt ready to venture forth.

## Unanimous Approval

The results of this first conference period were so very gratifying to both parents and teachers that we decided to continue this method of reporting at Lincoln School on a full-year basis in all grades during 1947-48. A full-year plan, as we envisioned it, would consist of a conference with all parents in October, another in late January or early February, and a summary letter to all

parents in June—this letter to be accompanied by an assignment card for the ensuing year.

As the enthusiasm for the conference plan spread, other building groups in the city also decided to try this method of reporting. In all cases, plans for conferences were made only as the faculty felt a real desire and readiness to try the plan, and as parent groups in the area also indicated their interest and their readiness.

#### PROCEDURES AND VALUES

Basic planning on the part of faculty groups has centered around these problems:

1. Mechanics of scheduling conferences
2. Techniques of conferencing
3. Records of conferences
4. Values to be obtained from the conferences.

Actual planning in each of these areas depends upon many factors and would vary from group to group; however, general comments concerning each area might be listed briefly.

#### *Mechanics of scheduling conferences*

1. Two school days are used for the conferences. Children are not in school during these days when parent conferences are scheduled.
2. Schedules are arranged in such fashion that no parent is asked to make more than one trip to the school. The appointment time assigned to each parent is given in light of all known facts about that parent's activities. If possible, an appointment is made at a time when both parents can come to the school.
3. One evening period is arranged in order that working parents may have



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an evening appointment if that is more convenient.

4. Conferences are scheduled at half-hour intervals: twenty minutes planned for the conference, and ten minutes for the teacher to record pertinent information from the conference.

#### *Techniques of conferencing*

In considering specific plans for the conferences it seemed necessary to plan a general framework of procedures and techniques that could then be used in planning the individual conferences.

1. Insure privacy and absence of interruption during the conference. Student hosts and hostesses take care of parents' arrival at the building.
2. Plan an informal setting for the conference in an attractive corner of the room—away from the teacher's desk.
3. Establish rapport between parents and teacher. Start the conference on a positive note, stressing the strength of the child. The teacher's manner and attitude must convince the parent that she is sincerely interested in

the child and his welfare.

4. Encourage the parents to talk—have them to tell their story. This will usually lead into a discussion of the child's problems. Enlist the active interest of the parents and impress them with the idea that their cooperation is essential if the school is to do an effective job with their child. Develop a feeling that the problems and solutions are mutual. "What can *we* do about them?"

5. Initiate a discussion of problems of the child if the parents do not bring them into the discussion. This presentation should be honest—and tactfully made.

6. Briefly summarize the points covered during the conference, and mutually make plans for the child's progress; end the conference on a note of continuing cooperation.

#### *Records of the conference*

The planning sheet for the conference, with notes added by the teacher after the conference discussion, is filed in the child's cumulative record folder. A carbon of the summary letter sent to the parents at the close of the school year is also filed in this folder.

#### *Values of the conference*

There are many values that could be discussed, but space limits the list-

ing to a few major ones. These are:

1. An opportunity for the people most involved with the child to evaluate his progress and achievement, and to plan constructively for continued progress.

2. An opportunity to help parents realize the sincere interest that the school has in their child.

3. An opportunity to place emphasis on the total growth of the child in a way that is not possible in any written report.

4. An opportunity for teachers to grow in their understanding of a child through knowledge of his home situation and problems.

5. An opportunity to help parents better understand their own child.

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From the standpoint of good public relations, we feel that the conferences serve as a first step in bringing to the parents of *all* children:

☛ A realization of the actualities of the school program, and the part that their interest and support plays in the program.

☛ A feeling of "being at home" in their child's school.

A closer relationship between school personnel and community parents is established as they come to know each other as individuals who have a common interest and a common concern—*the child!*



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