



THE GREENSBORO MONTESSORI SCHOOL

engage. learn. grow.

Dear GMS Parents,

In my career, I have learned to recognize the value of differentiating parent-teacher conferences from parent-teacher-student conferences. Both have great value, but ultimately we must recognize that one cannot always serve the purpose of the other.

After consulting with the faculty and many of you, we decided to change the format of Toddler, Primary and Lower Elementary conferences so that they no longer include students. For the older age levels, conferences with Upper Elementary will include students by parent request, and middle school conferences will remain unchanged (students are included unless parents prefer a private conference).

This decision is a response to stated concerns that parent conferences could be more effective if students were not included. On the other hand, a number of parents have expressed the value of students taking responsibility for their education and see the pinnacle point of that ownership represented in their conference being student-led. So, in the end, there are two differing perspectives.

You may be surprised to learn I agree with both perspectives!

Certainly, in a school that serves as wide an age-range as GMS, the older students, especially Middle School, are in a better position developmentally to participate in adult conversations about their own learning and their school performance. But in elementary and younger, I firmly believe that student participation in conferences frequently inhibits the adults in directly addressing sensitive issues regarding the child.

Therefore, I have encouraged our teachers to build better direct communication with parents by honoring the need for an exclusive parent-teacher dialogue. Just as we parents need to have private conversations with each other about our children, so too, teachers and parents need opportunities for these kinds of adult conversations. In some instances it is developmentally inappropriate for a young child to be privy to a sensitive conversation which could easily be misinterpreted by the child as shaming.

Another factor in the decision to change conference formats is that we teach children at an age when learning differences are readily identified. Conference times are times when parent and teacher observations need to be shared. Important and sometimes stressful conversations need to take place in a private and professional context between adults in order to support the child's learning. With children present in these discussions, communication can have damaging or ineffectual effects.

To balance this change in conference formats, which largely effects our Elementary families, I have encouraged the teachers to find ways to celebrate student participation and engagement through student-led open houses for parents that are separate from the regular parent-teacher conference days.

If you have any questions or comments to share about this new approach, please know that my door is open and I welcome an opportunity to speak with you more in depth. I have often shared that as a school leader I do not believe in "rules" but rather "guidelines." The latter allows for flexibility and responsiveness to individual circumstances. Therefore, I see no reason why your child could not participate in a conference if both you and the classroom staff agree that the outcome would be beneficial

Sincerely,

Paul Raymond, Head of School