

For Cyber Citizens

Do you finally have an interactive whiteboard in your classroom? Here are some resource and informational sites as you get started:



FROM THE WORK ZONE...

I have attended workshops throughout the United States and Nuts & Bolts is by far the best.

—Tammy Williams, 2011 attendee

www.nutsandboltsymposiums.com

Three Myths about Student-Led Conferences

Quite a number of middle-grades programs have moved to student-led conferences for at least one of the conference sessions offered each year. Nearly everyone finds such experiences beneficial for students, teachers, and parents. This is especially true in an era when parent portals already report grades and even comments. Parents and guardians are more likely to choose to attend a conference if their child is leading the session. Beware, however, of these myths about student-led conferences:

MYTH-A portfolio is just a scrapbook of a student's work.

Far from being a scrapbook, a portfolio is a carefully planned selection of a student's work. A good portfolio shows growth in the subject, effort at overcoming weaknesses, and special successes. Students should be guided in making their choices, but the final portfolio should be theirs.

MYTH-Students are on their own to make the student-led conference work.

Student-led conferences are learning experiences—like all other experiences that take place in a classroom. Students need guidelines for both portfolio development and the actual procedures in the conference. Time to rehearse is essential.

MYTH-Parents don't need to be involved until the conference.

Because student-led conferences are generally new to them, parents and guardians must also be offered opportunities to know in advance what the conference will entail. A letter outlining the goals and process of the conference should be sent in advance, and reminders should be offered at the beginning of the conference.

Parents and guardians are more likely to choose to attend a conference if their child is leading the session.

Parent surveys indicate that parents think student-led conferences are positive experiences, and they leave student-led conferences with a better knowledge of their child's performance and classroom activities. Avoid these myths to make sure your conferences are on the track to success.



JACK SAYS:

Set a goal to use more manipulatives, learning centers, and hands-on activities in your classroom.

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For more information or to get help with student-led conferences, contact Incentive Publications at 800-421-2830.





Educators Midyear Exam?

Midyear is a good time to take a few moments to see how you are doing. What has worked so far? What hasn't? What would it take to improve? Who could help you? All of these are urgent questions if you hope to succeed going forward.

Focus on those students who are still lagging behind. What strategies might work that you haven't tried? Have other teachers on your team had success with these students? What are they doing that you might do? Could someone on the support team have some ideas?

Where do you see weaknesses in your instructional approach? Too much lecture? Creativity falling off? Procedures not clearly established?

Get your team to use a team meeting to ask these questions. Share student work to get some answers. Encourage each other to keep trying—because the kids are worth it!

Midyear is a busy and somewhat bleak time, and work is piling up on your desk. By taking even an hour to assess how you are doing so far and setting one or two goals for the future, your spring will be a brighter one.



Ninth-Grade Academy

The *High Schools That Work* model lists ten research-based practices that enhance student success in ninth grade. Here are five* of them:

- *Teacher collaboration*
- *Actively engaged students*
- *Guidance*
- *Additional help*
- *Keeping score of progress*

Student-led conferences (see *Three Myths*, page 1) encompass all of these

practices! It is not difficult to initiate student-led conferences, but carrying out such an idea does require that ninth-grade teachers work together. In spite of early reluctance, students do become engaged in the process and become aware of ways to keep track of their own advancement. Through use of the student portfolio, both students and teachers are knowledgeable about where help is needed, and the guidance offered through the team and/or counselor aids students in setting goals and advocating for themselves.

*For the other five practices, see www.sreb.org, *High Schools That Work*.

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IP PRODUCT SPOTLIGHT

The Use It! Don't Lose It! Daily Practice Series

This Daily Practice series helps your students use their skills, so they won't lose them. There are five problems a day, every day for 36 weeks. The practice activities are set up in a spiraling scope and sequence so that students practice skills at regular intervals. Correlated to state and national standards, this ten-book series provides daily math and daily language practice for grades 5 through 9.

