

Spring 5-11-2019

Perceptions of the Conference System at a Technology-Focused High School

Victoria Phipps
vlp12a@acu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.acu.edu/metl>

Part of the [Educational Leadership Commons](#), and the [Secondary Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Phipps, Victoria, "Perceptions of the Conference System at a Technology-Focused High School" (2019). *Masters of Education in Teaching and Learning*. 18.
<https://digitalcommons.acu.edu/metl/18>

This Manuscript is brought to you for free and open access by the ACU Student Research, Theses, Projects, and Dissertations at Digital Commons @ ACU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Masters of Education in Teaching and Learning by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ ACU.

Perceptions of the Conference System at a Technology-Focused High School

Victoria Phipps

Abilene Christian University

PERSPECTIVES OF THE CONFERENCE SYSTEM

Abstract

John Jay High School used a form of the house system called the Conference System. The goal of the study was to understand the student and teacher perceptions of the Conference System. The study also tried to find if there was a difference in perceptions between students who were new to the Conference System and those who had been a part of the system for a few years. For this study, the author conducted student and teacher interviews and collected student responses to a survey. The author used the constant comparative method to find emerging themes from the student surveys and interviews. The author found that students and teachers overall had positive perceptions of the Conference System, but that their perceptions relied on the amount of time the student had been at the school and the relationships made with the teachers.

PERSPECTIVES OF THE CONFERENCE SYSTEM

Perceptions of the Conference System at a Technology-Focused High School

It was 7:55 a.m. If you were to walk down the halls of John Jay High, you would see that every door was covered in paper and decorated for the quickly approaching winter break. You would find freshmen clustered around a door gluing snowflakes to it. The faces of sophomores would peer down off the door, edited to look like elves stocking a sleigh. Seniors painting a starry sky on their door, and at my door a group of juniors were finishing writing teachers' names on the naughty and nice list as part of their door decoration. How did they decide who had been nice and who was getting coal? That decision came down to who was part of our conference and who we were competing against. Ten conference points hung in the balance.

The Conference System is John Jay High's (all names have been replaced with pseudonyms) version of a house system. Each student is a part of a conference, and they earn points for their conference during the school year. At the end of the year, the conference with the highest number of points wins a party.

Purpose

John Jay High uses a program they call the Conference System in which students are grouped into conferences by their advisory teacher. Each teacher represents a different college, and all colleges in the same conference work together to earn points. Students can earn points by having good attendance, good grades, and participating in spirit events such as dress up days or going to conference sponsored events. The conference with the most points at the end of the year earns a prize. The purpose of this study was to learn about the students' and teachers' perceptions of the Conference System.

While completing my year-long student teaching role at a STEM school in a midsize Texas town, I had the opportunity to observe this program. John Jay High is a public school that

PERSPECTIVES OF THE CONFERENCE SYSTEM

is a part of the Church Hill ISD, located in a West Texas town with a population of approximately 121,000. Church Hill ISD has four high schools. John Jay High has a student population of around 400. The study expands the research on learning communities that function similar to the housing system by looking at a public school in the United States. John Jay High is also a STEM school, and there is little research on the effectiveness of learning communities in STEM high schools. The following are the research questions for the study.

- What are the perceptions of the students and teachers at John Jay High about the Conference System?
- Is there a difference in the perspectives of freshmen and students who have been going to John Jay High for a few years?
- Does a new teacher have a different perspective on the Conference System than a teacher that has been at John Jay High for a few years?
- Has there been a change in the number of students who have perfect attendance or who have been on the A Honor Roll from the year 2015 to the year 2018?

Literature Review

The house system is a program that had it starts in England. Dierenfield (1975) gave a clear example of what the house system is in England. The house system started in medieval times where parents would send their children to live in privately owned houses closer to the school. The schools slowly acquired these houses and hired “house masters” to be charge of the houses. The system grew as boarding schools became more popular, and after World War II most of the public schools in England had adopted the house system even if they were not a boarding school. Dierenfield (1975) also listed several reasons for why the house system might struggle in the United States. One reason he stated was that schools here are not structured the

PERSPECTIVES OF THE CONFERENCE SYSTEM

same as English schools. Schools in England often had a separate building for each house where they would have meeting or have house only events. The house system works by separating the students into small learning communities. Oxley (2005) discussed what schools need to have in place to create successful small learning communities. She suggested that the school would need support from the whole staff in the school but also from the district as well. She also recommended that the learning communities include interdisciplinary teams and that the teachers have rigorous and relevant instruction to keep the students' attention. Green (2006) gave an example of how a school in the U.S. created their own house system. This system was custom made to fit the needs of a middle school in California. This school involved the students in almost all aspects of creating their version of the house system.

A positive aspect of the house system is its ability to change the community in schools. Brennan (2012) researched the community that was created when the house system was established at a Catholic school. He described how the house system increased the feeling of belonging in the students. Philip et. al (2013) discussed how teachers had to be careful not to try and erase the communities that the students are already a part of when attempting to create a school community. Green (2006) discussed how the new house system created a more relaxed community at the school between the students and the staff.

For house systems to work, they need support from the district and the surrounding community. Oxley (1990) blames the lack of support on the district and state level to the stifling of the success of the house system in some New York City schools. Oxley (2005) argued that district level support is crucial for learning communities like a house system to be successful. Song (2017) looked at teacher perspectives of learning communities. Song's (2017) research

PERSPECTIVES OF THE CONFERENCE SYSTEM

revealed that teachers felt the most important aspect of a learning community was support of the administration and the surrounding community.

Researchers have found that implementing a house system increases the enrollment rate, decreases the dropout rate, and increases the average GPA of the students at these schools (Oxley, 1990, Green, 2006, Nixon, 2010). Brouwer et. all (2018) researched how students self-segregated by GPA when in a learning community. They found that student leadership increased when the learning community was put into action. Green (2006) found that the suspension rate at his middle school decreased by 50% after the house system was implemented. Oxley's (1990) research discovered that students felt closer to their peers and their teachers when in a school that used a house system. She also discussed what type of house system would work best for the New York City schools she was studying. Nixon (2010) found that more students were applying for leadership positions after the house system was put in place and that GPAs had also increased.

The study contributes to the existing research because I researched the house system used at a STEM high school in Texas. Oxley (1990) looked at a school in New York City. Green (2006) and Brennan (2012) both researched the house system at Catholic private schools. Song (2017) and Dierenfield (1975) discussed the house system used in countries outside of the United States. John Jay High, however, is a public STEM magnet high school in Texas. The previously mentioned research was done at either a Catholic school, a middle school, or a school located outside the U.S. There is no research on a house system that is being used at a public STEM school in Texas.

Methods

PERSPECTIVES OF THE CONFERENCE SYSTEM

This action research study included qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis. The following sections will detail how I picked my participants as well as how I collected and analyzed my data.

Participant Selection

This research was conducted at STEM high school. I asked seven classes of students to participate in the study. Two of the classes were sophomore level, three of the classes were senior level, one class was junior level, and one class was freshmen level. All of the classes except the freshmen class were taught by myself and my co-teacher. The freshmen were taught by another history teacher at John Jay High. There were 27 sophomores, 15 juniors, and 41 seniors in my classes. There were 12 freshmen who were in the advisory class. From those students, four freshmen, 21 sophomores, 11 juniors, and 33 seniors gave consent and filled out the survey. From those 69 students, 38 were girls. Five students had gone to John Jay for one year, 22 students had gone to John Jay for two years, 12 student had gone for three years, and 30 students had been going to John Jay for four years. I received consent and assent from the students using permission slips that they and their parents had to sign.

Sixty-nine students gave consent and were given a survey (see Appendix A). Since I did not teach freshmen, I had to ask another class to take the survey, and all of those students who gave consent also filled out the survey. Once I received all the surveys, I organized them based on the grade level of the student. From each grade level I picked the two students who had the most positive perceptions of the Conference System and two who had the lowest perceptions of the Conference System. I ended up with four students from each grade, 16 students in total. The students that participated in the interviews were given pseudonyms while the other students were labeled by grade level. I informed these students that they had been picked to be a part of the

PERSPECTIVES OF THE CONFERENCE SYSTEM

group interview (see Appendix B). I had two group interviews. One group was composed of the freshmen and senior students I had picked. The other group was composed of the sophomore and junior students. I also interviewed my co-teacher and the new teacher at John Jay High one on one. I interviewed the new math teacher who was the only new teacher on staff this year.

Data Collection

The students that returned their permission forms filled out a survey. The survey had Likert scale questions (Hubbard & Power, 2003) as well as two open-ended questions. These questions gave me information about students' perceptions of the Conference System. From the students who turned in their survey, I interviewed four students from each grade level. Two of the students from each grade had a positive view of the Conference System and the other two students had a negative view. I grouped the seniors and freshmen together and the sophomores and juniors together. I interviewed each group as a focus group. The interviews lasted around 30 minutes and were audio recorded and transcribed. I also interviewed my co-teacher and the new teacher at John Jay. Their interviews were one-on-one so that I could get a better view of their perceptions of the Conference System.

I gathered data from past years that explained how each conference earned their points. This information was on a spreadsheet that divided how the points were earned. The spreadsheet did not have any identifying information about the students. It only listed the different conferences and the number of points they earned.

Data Analysis

My data was analyzed using the constant comparative method, with initial coding followed by creating hierarchies of categories and supporting codes (Hubbard & Power, 2003). The themes that emerged from the coding of the data determined what additional data was

PERSPECTIVES OF THE CONFERENCE SYSTEM

collected. I used these themes to summarize my findings. These themes were used to develop 20 level 1 codes from the first 20% of my data. The rest of the data was coded with these themes and then I developed 5 level 2 codes. There is a codebook that lists and defines the different levels of codes as well as memos that reflect on the codes (see Appendix C) (Tracy, 2013). The quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics. I graphed the points earned in the past years to see if there were any trends regarding the number of points earned and how those points were earned. I looked at the trends regarding the points earned by having good attendance and the points earned by being on the A/B honor roll.

Findings

After reviewing my surveys and interviews, I found five main themes that emerged from the data. These themes were the Conference System, advisory, relationships, leadership, and finally perceptions. Each theme will be described by including answers from the surveys and interviews as well as data I was given access to about the conference points earned in the past years.

Conference System

“When I first heard about the Conference System, [I was] very confused, but I understand why it is in place, only because we have the kids that go back, [and this] is our way of bring comradery

to our campus.” A.J. - Teacher

Before we can discuss the perspectives of the students and teachers, we must first understand what the Conference System looks like at John Jay High School. Students and teachers both had different ways to describe how the Conference System works. Students often brought up the competitiveness of their peers and their students. They also discussed how they were informed of the Conference System. Students reported that they were given very little

PERSPECTIVES OF THE CONFERENCE SYSTEM

information about the Conference System. The seniors reported that they were not informed about the system until the first day of school. Freshmen reported that they were given information about the system during the Open House at John Jay before school started. They said they only had a few minutes with the teachers, and they did not really understand the concept until a few weeks had gone by. The teachers talked about how the Conference System helped the school organize the students to make field trips and dispersing information easier.

There are two key parts to the Conference System. The biggest part of the Conference System is the conference competition. These are events that students participate in to earn points for their conference. Most of these events are dress up days or events held outside of school where students have the option to participate. Every conference has a charity they support as one of their events. There are two big events each year. The first is the cardboard boat challenge. This is where a team from each conference compete against each other to build the cardboard boat that will stay afloat the longest. The second event, as one sophomore explained in her survey was her "...favorite thing about the Conference System are the competitions, like penny wars (Quote O18)". The students liked the competitions. Many students who had a positive perspective of the system reported that they liked that they were able to compete with their peers.

Some students, however, reported that they did not enjoy the competition. This was for a variety of reasons, but the main one that kept reappearing in the surveys and interviews was that their conference was either not competitive to begin with or their conference teacher was not encouraging their students to go to the events. The teachers I interviewed even mentioned that students were not given an equal chance to be competitive later in the year. Another issue that kept students from being competitive was that the reward a conference earned from winning the competition that was given to the conference at the beginning of the next school year. This meant

PERSPECTIVES OF THE CONFERENCE SYSTEM

seniors who had won the competition were not able to attend the reward party and freshmen, who have not been given the chance to compete yet, were being asked to attend a party with upperclassmen they did not know.

A big topic that kept coming up in the interviews were the events and how conferences earned points. Figure 1 below show how the number and type of events have changed since 2015. Some students reported that they felt the events were boring and were not aimed at the majority of the students in the system. Students even reported that they wished the events differed from year to year so that they did not know what to expect or so that they could experience new things. Other students explained how they felt there would be more interaction between students and the different clubs at John Jay if students earned points for helping these clubs. Even though many students reported that they liked to competitive aspect of the Conference System, most students' responses were closer to Samuel's when he said, "Having point values assigned to activities has absolutely no effect on if I'm going to go to it." Students also complained that they felt that the number of points a teacher can earn for the conference was not fair when compared to the number of points students could earn for their conference. The students felt that the fact that teachers were able to change the standings by showing up and participating in an activity they were required to go to was unfair. "It's unfair because I know some of the conferences where the teachers will not participate because they believe that it's the students' responsibility. Then you have other conferences where it's only the teachers pretty much" (Louisa, 10th grade student). Students spoke about maybe having the teachers' attendance and participation be worth less points because they felt the teachers have to attend the events anyway. Samuel, an 11th grade student, summed up this idea nicely. "I think there's actually a weight with the points with the teachers so they will get more points than the

PERSPECTIVES OF THE CONFERENCE SYSTEM

students would towards the Conference System.” The students also felt that this would sometimes shift the attention away from students towards the teachers and what they wanted to do when it came time to pick the events.

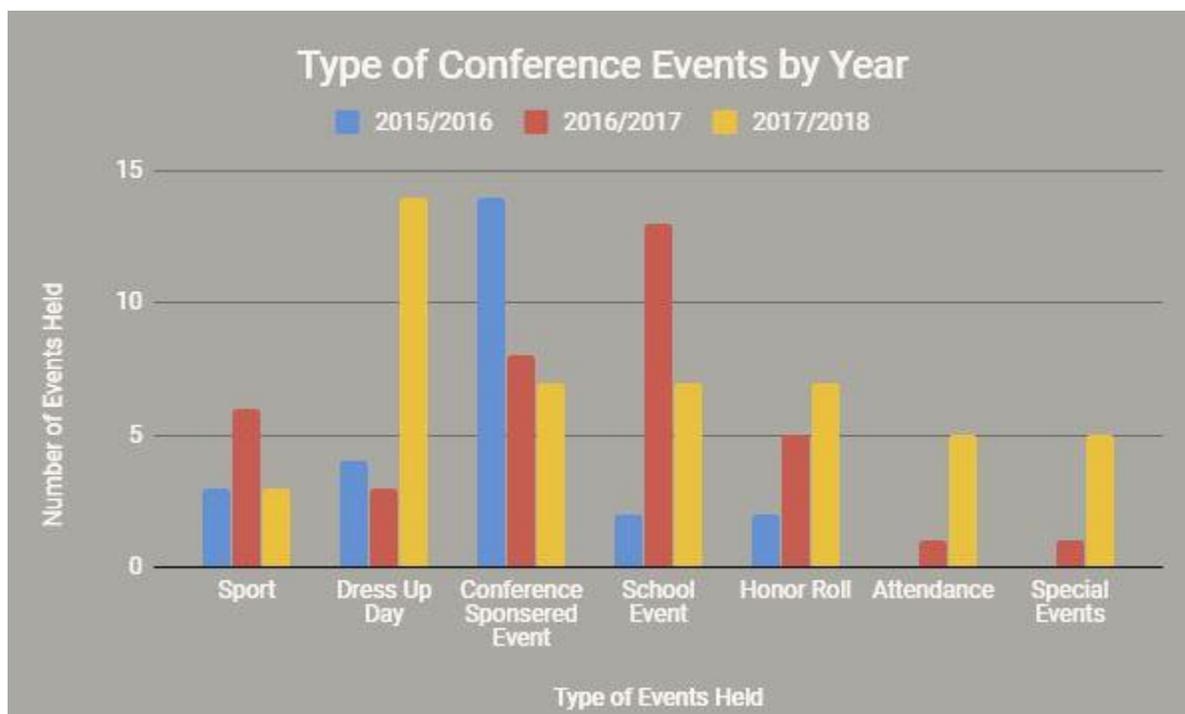


Figure 1. Type of conference event by year.

The second part of the Conference System is the advisory class. The advisory teacher for a student is the same teacher they report to for their conference events. Students have advisory on Fridays and conference meetings on Mondays. These meetings happen before or after lunch, depending on which lunch the student has. We will go into more depth about the advisory class below.

Advisory

“When I think of advisory I think of life skills and such, which is what we have been talking about. When we even do stuff. We just talk about life skills and stuff. And personal experiences.” - Silas – 12th Grade Student

PERSPECTIVES OF THE CONFERENCE SYSTEM

One common complaint about the system that students and teachers both brought up was how the advisory class took time away from lunch. At John Jay, students are able to have a full hour for lunch from Tuesday to Thursday. Seniors and juniors, with permission, are able to have lunch off campus. Students complained that they did not get the chance to eat and interact with their friends as often as they would like because of the shorter lunch periods on Mondays and Fridays.

Students also discussed the advisory periods. The students go to advisory on Mondays and Fridays either before or after lunch. On Mondays, there is a curriculum that the teachers describe as “It is so boring that the kids don't want to do it. I don't want to teach it because they are miserable too. (A.J.)”. Teachers felt that advisory still has some potential though. If given the chance to change something about the advisory system, both students and the teacher I interviewed that had been working at John Jay for a few years had similar ideas. They both said that they wished students had more input into what was taught. A. J. said in her interview, “...let the kids say ‘here is what I want to learn as a junior for senior year. This is what I think I need to know’ and do something over that.” This would give students more control over what they learned, and they would be more interested in the curriculum. Students, on the other hand, found the information they received from the advisory period as helpful and interesting. The students liked learning what they called “life skills”. These skills include safe driving techniques, what to do if you’re pulled over, and how credit cards work.

One major issue students mostly discussed was how the students in the advisory period were not expected to treat advisory like another class. The students complained of the teachers not paying attention to them, other students being loud, and their peers rolling on the floor

PERSPECTIVES OF THE CONFERENCE SYSTEM

without teacher intervention. Students felt that the advisory class should be consistent between the different classes. Some classes are quiet and calm while others are loud and chaotic.

Relationships

“I had a teacher in 5th grade who made me lose my trust in adults, just teachers in general, so coming to John Jay and taking part [in the Conference System], especially in the boat challenge, and getting to know my teachers and my peers and my advisory on just a better level, I have been able to gain some of my trust in teachers back which took four years to do. So that’s, I’m really appreciative of that part because I had a lot of issue because of it.” - Thomas – 9th Grade Student

A common thread in the interviews and surveys were how the Conference System helped strengthen or weaken relationships between the people at John Jay. When the teachers were engaged with their advisory class, the students had great relationships with them. Students would report talking to their advisory teacher more often than their other teachers, having their advisory teacher become the sponsor for a club the students started, and feeling more comfortable speaking to their advisory teachers if they needed help. One student wrote in their survey that “My favorite thing about the Conference System is having my favorite teacher as my advisory teacher, and being able to go to him with questions about life” (Quote O11). The relationships between the students and the teachers were one of the most shocking things I found in the surveys and the interviews. I knew that some of the students might have felt that they were more connected with their conference teachers, but I did not expect for students and teachers to feel so strongly for people they only saw twice a week. Students reported feeling that they could approach their conference teachers more easily than their other teachers. Many students reported that their conference teachers were the ones that helped them create a new club or that they spent

PERSPECTIVES OF THE CONFERENCE SYSTEM

time just hanging out in their teachers' room before school or during lunch. Grace, a junior student, said in her interview, "I'm in my advisory teacher's room everyday basically unless I have something first or second lunch. Even if I don't have anything for one lunch I'll be in there for eating food just to be in here for 2nd lunch just to be in here for whatever activity that I have." Student and teacher relationships appeared to be positively affected by the Conference System.

As you can see in Figure 2, students rated the question about the Conference System's effect on their relationship with their teachers as overall positive. When students took the survey, they were given Likert-Scale questions that they ranked their responses from one to four with one being they do not agree at all and four being they completely agree. Teachers also reported that most of the relationships they had with their conference students were positive. The teacher who had worked at John Jay for a few years said that she felt like a "momma bear" when it came to her students and that she felt she was able to help the students better because of the Conference System.

PERSPECTIVES OF THE CONFERENCE SYSTEM

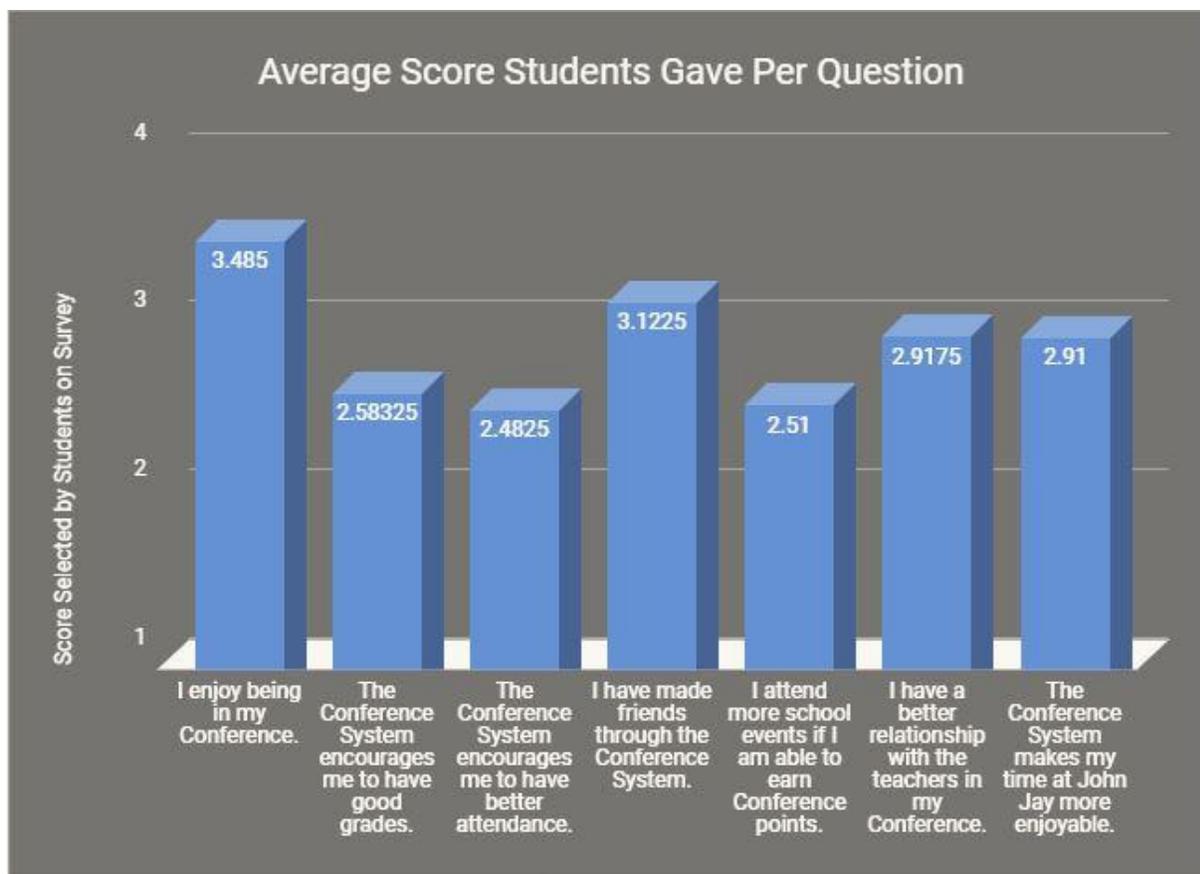


Figure 2. Average score students gave per question.

Unfortunately, not all student-teacher relationships were positive. As stated before, something that seemed to plague John Jay was the lack of buy-in from some teachers. This appeared to have a negative effect on the students who had these teachers. Andrew, a 10th grade student, said in the interview, "...Because what they are not doing stuff with us we kinda have a negative relationship with her. We don't, we didn't, just about the majority of everybody in that advisory doesn't really like her." Students felt isolated from their conference teachers if they did not interact with the class. Some students felt that their teacher did not interact with them during advisory. These students also claimed they were handicapped when it came to events because their teacher did not encourage them to join the events. These students expressed that they wished their teacher would be active with the Conference System because they want to be

PERSPECTIVES OF THE CONFERENCE SYSTEM

competitive. Students felt that teacher interaction was an important part of being in a conference. The teachers were the leaders, so if the teachers were not interested in the events, the students were less likely to be interested.

Another relationship that developed due to the Conference System were the relationships between students. Many students reported that having the Conference System allowed them to create friendships within their grade level. Students were able to work alongside the same group for years, allowing them to get to know the people in their class. Some students even reported that the upper classmen would come and help the lower classmen organize for conference events. Students wished that they could have more interaction between the grade levels. They felt this would allow them to feel more comfortable in the school and would increase the overall sense of community. One of the teachers reported that they had, in the past, had meetings, between grade levels. Now, John Jay is too large, and it is almost impossible to find a place where all the students in one conference could meet, not to mention finding four large spaces at one time.

Leadership

“Let the students choose. The adults are old.” - Lucretia – 12th Grade Student

Student leadership was a topic that the students discussed often. Many times they wished they had more chances to pick the events and were given more chances to help run the advisory classes or run some of the events. The teachers are the ones who usually pick what events will be up for points. Students reported feeling that many of the events felt out of touch with the population of the school. For example, in the fall one of the events is a volleyball social. The students felt that the number of events that relied on physical ability was too high. John Jay is a STEM school, after all, and they do not have too many students who participate in sports. Instead, the students felt that more students would participate if the teachers asked them what

PERSPECTIVES OF THE CONFERENCE SYSTEM

they would like to do. They gave examples of maybe watching an anime show after school or having a board game tournament. The students also suggested giving points if students participated in one of the many clubs that the school hosted or if the students went and supported a group from John Jay at a competition, like the Robotics team. The students also wished that the events were held on days when more students could participate. John Jay has many students who are part of the band or choir at the other high schools. These students felt that they were at an unfair disadvantage because they could not go to many of the events that were held after school due to practice or competitions. Students also asked for teachers to give them more advance notice so that they could ask off of work.

The students also discussed how the Conference System helped them break out of their shell. The students discussed how the Conference System also taught them some important life skills such as safe driving tips and how to apply to colleges. Students felt that this helped them be more prepared for the real world. They also wished that the teachers would ask the students about what they wanted to learn and what they felt was the most important.

Students had many ideas of how to have more student leadership in the Conference System. Louisa, a sophomore student, discussed how there was already a bit of student leadership between her conference. She said, "We have somebody in my conference who comes to each of the rooms, she's a senior in our conference, and she talks to us, and she gives us support and motivation like, 'Hey guys we have to come up with a game plan' so instead of just each of the different conferences, conference classes doing their own thing we all kinda work together to make a game plan." Some seniors visit the lower classmen's advisories to create a plan for the different conference events. This could be seen during the build up to the Penny Wars, where the seniors would tell the other classes what conference to target on specific days.

PERSPECTIVES OF THE CONFERENCE SYSTEM

The students gave some ideas as how to increase interaction between the grade levels. Louisa again shared her ideas; “But if we had a meet up once a week with like freshmen and sophomores or something like that. Freshmen sophomores, juniors, seniors. Juniors kinda help the sophomores, seniors help the freshmen, and then we kind of alternate.” The students wanted to create something similar to a Big Brother, Big Sister program where the seniors and juniors would be paired up with a freshman and sophomore. The upperclassmen would help the lower classmen learn how the Conference System worked and encourage them to attend events, as well as help them with their classwork.

One interesting thing I came across was one particular advisory class. There is one sophomore advisory class that advertises itself as a democracy. The students elect who will lead the class, and the students have roles. The leader of the class is in charge of reading the agenda and informing the class what events are coming up. I wish I had known about this advisory class before my research so that I could observe the class and see if they had a better perspective than their peers in other classes.

Perceptions

“All in all I think it’s necessary.” - Richard – 12th Grade Student

The sections before this one all support the findings here. Students and teachers do not build their opinions of the Conference System on nothing. They are built on many factors which were mentioned here.

The perceptions of the Conference System differed between students and teachers. The overall perception of the students was positive, with an average score of 2.86 out of 4. As you can see in the Figure 3, the longer students were at John Jay, the more positive their perspective of the school was.

PERSPECTIVES OF THE CONFERENCE SYSTEM

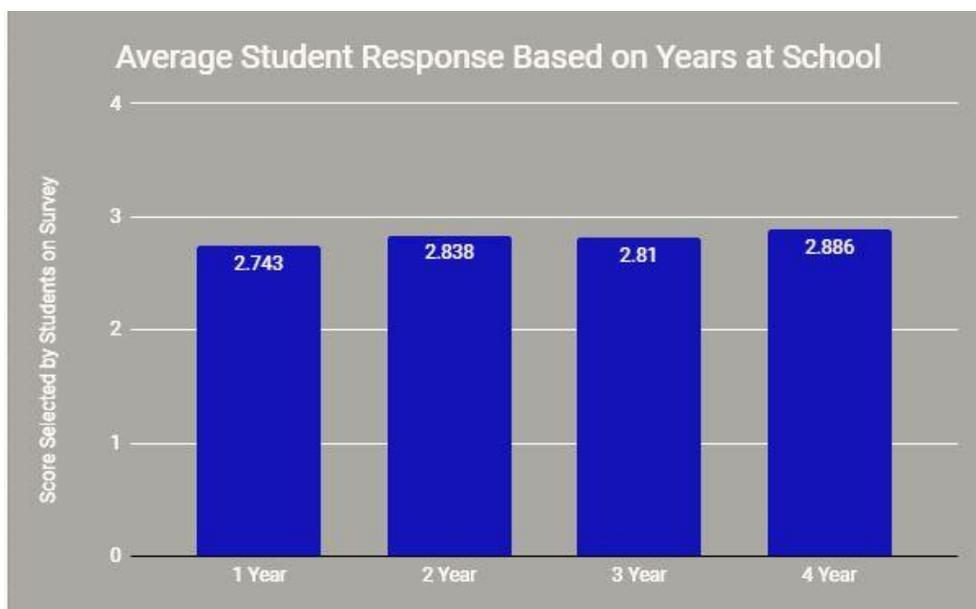


Figure 3. Average student response based on years at school.

Seniors had the most positive perspective of the Conference System out of all the grades. Students who had only been at John Jay for one year, which included freshmen, sophomores, and juniors, had the lowest average score. This shows that freshmen and students who are new to John Jay have a lower perception of the Conference System than students who had been going to John Jay for a few years.

The teachers had good opinions of the Conference System. They saw it as a good thing for the students. They felt that the students enjoyed the competitions, and it allowed the students to have some time to work on their homework during the week. The only difference between the new teacher and the teacher who had been working at John Jay for a few years was their deeper understanding of how the Conference System worked. They both shared opinions that it was an overall good thing for the students. They both mentioned that the Conference System encouraged students to be more competitive and that they were able to create deeper relationships with their students. They also discussed how teachers who were not bought into the Conference System were hurting the system and were making it hard for their students to be involved. The teacher

PERSPECTIVES OF THE CONFERENCE SYSTEM

that had been at John Jay for a few years spoke about teachers who were not participating as often as the other teachers. She spoke about how it is up to the teachers to push their students to participate and that if the teachers were not bought it, the students would also not be bought in. The new teacher spoke of other teachers who she felt were too competitive. She felt that these teachers made it hard for other teachers to participate and that they made the competition feel unfriendly.

Students reported that the Conference System did not encourage them to attend school more or to have better grades. Figure 4 below shows how the number of students on the A Honor Roll fluctuated through the year. If students were trying to have better grades to earn points, we would expect the number of students on the A Honor Roll would increase throughout the year. We can see from the chart that gaining points for the Conference System by being on the A Honor Roll does not encourage students to have better grades.

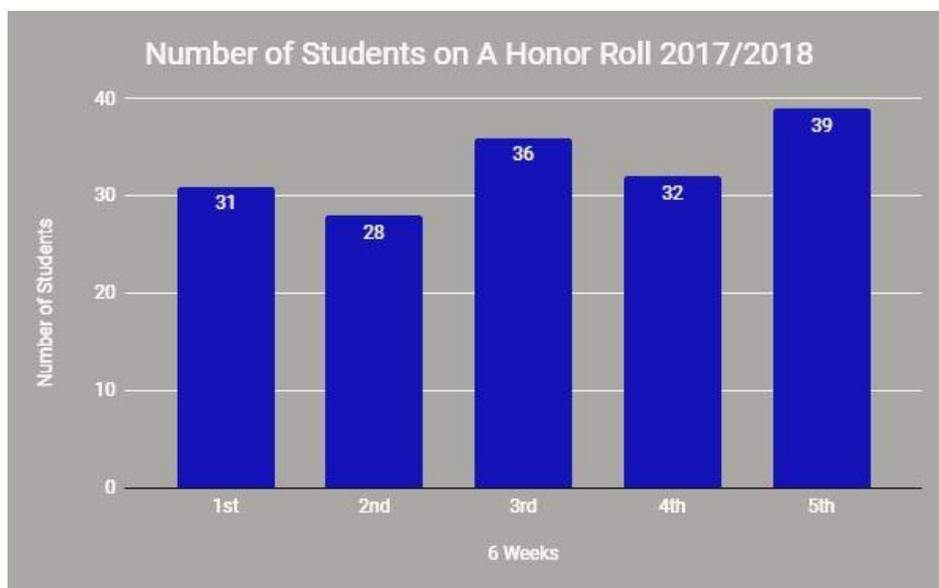


Figure 4. Number of students on the A honor roll by 6 weeks.

Students also felt that having points assigned to attendance had no effect on them. The teachers also felt that students were not encouraged to have better attendance because of points.

PERSPECTIVES OF THE CONFERENCE SYSTEM

Students had a similar opinion with attendance to school events. Figure 2 above shows most students felt that the Conference System did not have any effect on their attendance or grades. Out of all of the questions asked about the Conference System, the question about attendance was the lowest scored. This occurred across all grade levels. Some students did not know they were getting points for A/B Honor Roll and attendance. The new teacher also did not know that this was a way students were able to earn points. This was revealed during the interviews when I asked the students if they were influenced to have better grades by the Conference System. The students claimed that the teachers never informed them. The students who had been at John Jay for a few years claimed they did not know they could earn points for their grades until the end of their first year at the school. The new teacher explained that she was learning the rules of the Conference System and how students earn points as the school year progresses.

In the 2015 school year, John Jay had an attendance record of 95.2%. For the 2018 school year, John Jay had an attendance record of 95.8%. The implementation of the Conference System appears to have had no real effect on the attendance record of the students. The campus has recently implemented rewards for students who had perfect attendance every six weeks. At the end of each six weeks, one student who has perfect attendance is picked to have a full hour of lunch on Friday. The students report that this encourages them to have better attendance more than earning conference points.

Overall, the survey scores from the students showed that they had a positive perspective of the Conference System. The majority of the students reported that they enjoyed being in the Conference System and that it made their time in school more enjoyable. There were only a handful of students who wrote about doing away with the system all together, but they were

PERSPECTIVES OF THE CONFERENCE SYSTEM

vastly outnumbered by the students who felt the Conference System was a positive thing for them to have in school.

Implications for Teachers

The purpose of this study was to find the students' and teachers' perceptions of the Conference System at John Jay High. I was also wanting to discover if the Conference System would encourage students to have better attendance and grades as well as see if there was a difference of perceptions between students and teachers who had been at John Jay for a few years and new students and teachers. Overall, I found that students and teachers who were new to the Conference System enjoyed the system, but they wished they were more informed of how the system works. The students also wished that they were more informed of the purpose of the system. Schools should make sure all participants of a house system understand how and why the system was put in place and how it works. Seniors seemed to have more buy in to the system because they had a better understanding of how it worked. Every teacher also needs to know how the points are earned so they could accurately guide their students to earn the most points. The new teacher explained that she did not know how exactly the students earned points, so she was not able to encourage the students to have better grades or better attendance.

Students made it clear multiple times that having points connected to attendance had no effect on them and the data supports this perception. The overall attendance rate for the high school from 2015 to 2017 did not change enough to show that having points assigned to attendance encouraged students to go to school. I do not think that giving students points for attendance is an effective way to increase attendance rates. If the school wants to keep this aspect of the Conference System, I would encourage them to increase the number of points earned for attendance so that it became a major way for the conferences to earn points. At the moment, the

PERSPECTIVES OF THE CONFERENCE SYSTEM

conferences earn the same amount of points for good attendance that they do for other conference events. Students also explained that the system did not encourage them to have good grades. If schools want to tie grades to a house system, I would encourage them to give points to students who do the best for major projects. Students could earn points for getting an A on their senior or end of semester project. This could possibly encourage students to collaborate with their peers to earn points. I would also make these projects worth more points than the normal events.

I would encourage schools that want to increase the positive relationships between students and teachers to look into implementing a house system. This research has shown that the relationships between students and teachers were improved upon by the Conference System. Students reported feeling more comfortable in their conference teachers' classroom. These relationships created new clubs, helped students feel more comfortable approaching their teachers, and improved the climate of the school. Teachers felt they were more able to help their students who were in their conference class because they knew them better. Students also reported that they created new friendships from the Conference System. This research should push schools who want to increase the positive relationships between students and teachers to look into implementing a similar house system.

Teachers should also be encouraged to buy into the house system if their school implements one. Teacher buy in was a huge topic that kept coming up in the surveys and interviews. The bottom line is that if a teacher has not bought into the program, they are hurting their conference and they are hurting their students. The teachers in the system must engage in the events and encourage their students to participate. When the teacher sits out of events or fails to inform their students of events, they send out a signal that they do not care for their students or

PERSPECTIVES OF THE CONFERENCE SYSTEM

team. A house system is a competitive system. All members must participate and must push their teams to do their best. I would encourage a school to have a system in place so that if students feel their teacher is not participating, they could request a change in conference. I would also encourage schools to have a way for teachers to discuss with other teachers ways to be more engaged. I would also encourage the teacher or administrator in charge of the program to approach the teachers who are not participating enough and discuss the importance of participating in the system and explain how they are hurting their students. This system is supposed to be a fun way for students to compete with each other and grow relationships. If a teacher is encouraging neither of these things, he or she is not doing what they are supposed to be doing for their students.

A few interesting things came up that I was not originally looking for. Students want to have more control in picking the conference events. I would encourage the school to allow students to come up with ideas for conference events. Students may attend the events more if the events were something that they had picked or voted on. Schools should also use the Conference System to encourage students to interact with the clubs in the school.

This study raises a few additional questions for further research. This study was done at a relatively small school where students have to apply to be admitted. Therefore, this school does not have many behavior issues. This study does not look at how a house system similar to the Conference System effects student behavior. I would also suggest a study that looks at what the perceptions of a house system would be at a bigger school. I wonder if the perceptions of the house system would change if the students and teachers were more informed about what they can do to earn points. Another interesting study would be one that looks more in depth as to why the sophomores had the most negative perception of the system and the seniors had to most positive

PERSPECTIVES OF THE CONFERENCE SYSTEM

perceptions. I did not have enough time to really look in depth as to why the students felt the way they did. Do the seniors have better conference teachers? Do the sophomores have teachers that are not as involved in the events? Are the students' perceptions affected by more than what this study looked into? The classes at John Jay are mostly inquiry based and student focused. Would students at a school that does not have a majority of inquiry and student based classes have a more positive or more negative perception of a house system?

Overall I found that the students and teachers had a positive perception of the Conference System, and I would encourage other schools to look into a similar housing system. There are a few problems with the system that the school will have to fix if they want to use the system to encourage students to have better attendance or grades, but the system does a good job at creating a safe and competitive environment. The system also does a good job at giving students and teachers the chance to create strong and meaningful relationships.

PERSPECTIVES OF THE CONFERENCE SYSTEM

References

- Brennan, M. C. (2012). Fostering community through the house system at Most Holy Trinity Catholic School. *Catholic Education: A Journal of Inquiry and Practice, 15*, 325–356.
- Brouwer, J., Flache, A., Jansen, E., Hofman, A., & Steglich, C. (2018). Emergent achievement segregation in freshmen learning community networks. *Higher Education, 76*, 483–500.
- Dierenfield, R. B. (1975). Personalizing education: The House System in England. *The Phi Delta Kappan, 56*, 605–607.
- Green, D. G. (2006). Welcome to the house system. *Educational Leadership, 63*, 64–67.
- Hobbins, J. O., Eisenbach, M., Ritchie, K. L., & Jacobs, S. (2018). Investigating the relationship between residence learning community participation and student academic outcomes in a Canadian Institution. *Canadian Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, 9*(2), 1–15.
- Hubbard, R. S., & Power, B. M. (2003). *The art of classroom inquiry: A handbook for teacher-researchers*. (Rev. ed). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Nixon, A., Launay-Fallasse, C., & Watts, N. (2010). There will never be a housing crisis at our Lady of Mercy High School. *Visionary Leadership, 41*(3), 24–27.
- Oxley, D. (1990). *Restructuring neighborhood high schools: The house plan solution*. New York, NY: Bank Street College of Education.
- Oxley, D. (2005). Small learning communities: Extending and improving practice. *Principal Leadership, 6*(3), 44–48.
- Philip, T., Way, W., Garcia, A., Schuler-Brown, S., & Navarro, O. (2013). When educators attempt to make “community” a part of classroom learning: The dangers of (mis)appropriating students’ communities into schools. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 29*, 1–11.

PERSPECTIVES OF THE CONFERENCE SYSTEM

34, 174–183.

- Song, K.-O., & Choi, J. (2017). Structural analysis of factors that influence professional learning communities in Korean elementary schools. *International Electronic Journal of Elementary Education*, 10(1), 1–9.
- Tracy, S. J. (2013). *Qualitative research methods: Collecting evidence, crafting analysis, communicating impact*. Chichester, West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell.

PERSPECTIVES OF THE CONFERENCE SYSTEM

Appendix A**Example Survey**

This survey was given to Students through Google Forms.

Rate the following statements from 1-4 with 1 being you completely agree and 4 being you do not agree.

1. I enjoy being in my Conference.

1 2 3 4

2. The Conference System encourages me to have better grades.

1 2 3 4

3. The Conference System encourages me to have better attendance.

1 2 3 4

4. I have made friends through the Conference System.

1 2 3 4

5. I attend more school events if I can earn conference points.

1 2 3 4

6. I have a better relationship with the teachers in my conference.

1 2 3 4

7. The Conference System makes my time at John Jay High more enjoyable.

1 2 3 4

8. Please write below your favorite thing about the Conference System.

9. Please explain below your least favorite thing about the Conference System.

PERSPECTIVES OF THE CONFERENCE SYSTEM

Appendix B

Interview Protocols

Group Interview Protocol

1. Tell me your opinions of the Conference System.
2. What are some positives of the Conference System?
3. What are some negatives of the Conference System?
4. What would you do to make the system better?
5. Explain to me how to conference points work.
6. What did you think of the system when you first started going to John Jay High?
7. How has the system affected your relationships with other students?
8. How has the system affected your relationship with your teachers?
9. How often do you participate in conference events?
10. How could teachers promote conference events better?

Adult Interview Protocol

1. Tell me your opinion of the Conference System?
2. How has your opinion changed in the past year?
3. What changes would you make to the system if you could?
4. What are some positives of the system?
5. What are some negatives of the system?
6. How do you promote conference events?
7. Do you think the system encourages students to do better in school?
8. How has the system affected your relationship with your students?
9. How has the system affected your relationship with other teachers?
10. Explain how the Conference System works in your classroom.

PERSPECTIVES OF THE CONFERENCE SYSTEM

Appendix C

Codebook

Level 1 Codes:	Definition	Example
Advisory	Discussions of the Advisory system, class, rules, or curriculum	Advisory times, at least across my years, has allowed for a period every week for a teacher to give us advice in school, life, and beyond.
Conference Name	Someone brings up a Conference Name	Go Big 12
Community	Discussions about the Community at John Jay High	My favorite thing about the Conference System at my school is the sense of teamwork that conferences bring
Point System	Discussions about the Point system	Having points assigned to activities has absolutely no effect on if I'm going to go to it. It's just like , oh there's points?
Student Growth	Discussions about students creating new friends, breaking out of their shell, or learning new life skills because of Advisory/Conference System	I like how it encourages me to go out and do stuff and meet people and make friends.
Relationships Between Students	Discussions about how the Conference System affects relationships between students	Well for me coming into John Jay I didn't really know anybody. So I got to meet people from them.
Relationships Between Teachers	Discussions about how the Conference System affects relationships between teachers	Good because of the comradery between my advisor group.
Relationships Between Teachers and Students	Discussions about how the Conference System affects relationships between teachers and students	It's fun and Mr. --- is dope.
Competition	Discussions about the conference competition or how competitive students and teachers are	I like the boat challenge and how they work together with our student council
Time	Discussions about Advisory or conference events taking up time	The amount of time it takes up on Fridays

PERSPECTIVES OF THE CONFERENCE SYSTEM

Lunch	Discussions about advisory and lunch interactions	Honestly, I'd just like the full hour to eat and visit during lunch.
College	Discussions about college and the Conference System	My favorite thing about the Conference System is college preparation and life after high school.
Perceptions	Opinions of the students and teachers about the Conference System	I do not feel that the Conference System is especially helpful.
Conference Events	Discussion of conference events	I tried to go to the events, I can't always cause sometimes my mom doesn't want to drive.
Grades	Discussions about grades	I think because there is no grade for it they don't really care.
Attendance	Discussions about attendance	Personally, an event being a conference event does not influence my attendance in the slightest.
Student Buy-In	Discussions about student buy-in	Students participate more because students depend on the teachers.
Teacher Buy - In	Discussions about teacher buy-in	So we need like more teacher involvement in the teachers that don't really push it.
Leadership	Discussions about student leadership in the Conference System	Let the students choose. The adults are old.
Organization	How the school is organized by the Conference System	I think it's random for the most part but if you have an older sibling in a different conference they'll try to move you to it.
Level 2 Codes		
Conference System	Explanations about the Conference System, how it works, the point system, etc	I'll honest I don't just because I have so much stuff going on outside of school.
Perceptions	Opinions on the Conference System	I think it's a good way to get people involved in the community.
Lunch/Advisory	Discussions about lunch, advisory, and time	I do not like having to report to advisory every Monday, even

PERSPECTIVES OF THE CONFERENCE SYSTEM

		though I do understand why we do it and agree that we should.
Relationships	Relationships affected by the Conference System	My favorite thing is the fact that we stay with the same teachers and kids all four years.
Leadership	Student growth and leadership	My favorite thing about the Conference System is that I can learn important facts from my teachers, and I also get time to ask him/her questions about life or college