

Student/Teacher Conflicts

Ideal Process:

1. Student talks to instructor and works things out.
2. If student feels that the talk didn't work, he/she next contacts CC.
3. CC talks to both teacher and student, may choose to bring them both together, or find another way to resolve the issue.
4. If CC feels it's too hot, the Division Head is called in to mediate. DH talks to each person involved to get the different points of view.
5. Next level: if it escalates (VERY, VERY rare), it goes to Director of Instruction next.

NOTES:

- a. Only the teacher can change grades.
- b. There is a Student Handbook (send student to Student Services for a copy) that spells out for a student how to challenge a grade, etc.
- c. There are at least two points of view. The "truth" is probably a combination.
- d. Remember that students remember more of their own responsibility when you have information regarding their absences and missing assignments.
- e. Most people just want to be heard.
- f. Support your faculty.
- g. A teacher's syllabus is the best tool for dealing with consequences (i.e. to absences, late work, etc.). Encourage your faculty to spell the consequences out.
- h. Remember that you CANNOT talk to the student's parents without written and signed permission from the student. It's law.

Reality:

1. Student may talk to a teacher in a completely different area or go to Dr. Ramirez or only talk to an advisor.
2. Teacher involved may have no idea there's a problem until after YOU inform THEM.
3. Again, try to follow the procedures, but let your DHs know, so they can be there if things don't get resolved easily.
4. Some teacher mentoring may be needed. It's not always just a lazy, grumpy student (though, sometimes it is). Teachers who come from a background of "teachers are the great authority in the classroom" find that our students don't behave as expected. Our students like to challenge authority.

Here's good advice for dealing with students. Give this to your new teachers.

1. Pleasant, not derogatory, humor can defuse many situations between students and teachers.
2. If a student seems to want to challenge your authority, do not move into a defensive mode. This nearly always escalates a problem. Instead, treat the

student with respect, talk to him/her calmly, but also, don't back off from your rules. Just restate them, explain them, and if there is an appropriate alternative way for a student to meet a requirement, make that offer. For instance, I have asked a student who complained about some essay assignments to come back to me with a proposal in place of that assignment, explaining what I most needed to see proven in the assignment; he had to include due dates and number of pages to be written, etc. The student ended up writing some 50 pages in place of 3 essays that amounted to less than 15 pages, and it created a good relationship instead of a confrontational one.

3. Also tell them that if they feel they need to talk to your boss, suggest they contact your Curriculum Coordinator—give them the name and contact information. If the student is just a bully, the fact that you encourage him/her to talk to someone else (like you aren't at all bothered by the idea) usually stops them from that tactic right away. "My syllabus says I don't take late work, and I don't. Now that we've talked, if you still have some concerns about my class, feel free to talk to the CC of this area, Mrs. So and So."
4. If a student is disrupting class, disrespecting you or fellow students, schedule a time to talk (maybe right after class), and talk to that student privately. The bottom line in my syllabus is that a student can be dropped if he/she is making it difficult for other class members to learn. I tell them I expect them to act appropriately—and they do. You can drop a disruptive student. When doing so, please inform Student Services as well as your CC. If you want someone in the next class period (in case the student returns), we can put someone in the classroom with you.
5. Do not talk about a student's grade or any other issue in front of other classmates. If you want to inform students about missing work, etc. while the class is doing some quiet work, you can call students up to get written notes and suggest an appointment. Let the written notes serve to inform them, so that other students do not hear anything. This eliminates complaints that "she humiliated me in front of my classmates." See FERPA rules about student privacy.
6. If you are ever concerned about your safety with a student, inform your CC, DH, and/or Director of Instruction. Also, call police if necessary—carry their number or use 911. On occasion, a CC or DH has sat in a class where a student seemed threatening and that stopped the behavior. Ask for support.