

The parent/teacher conference is the most direct means of communication between the home and the school. Handled skillfully, and conducted by both parties involved in the right spirit, these conferences can be profitable both to teacher and parent alike. Not always however do they come off right. Teachers who've had unhappy experiences in them may learn actually to dread conference nights. And, vice versa, parents who feel put down by the teacher or frustrated in their appeal for help may consider parent/teacher conferences to be at best a waste of time.

That's too bad. Communication, after all, is the key to good home-school relations. And good home-school relations can pay huge dividends in the classroom. Parents, in fact, can be the teacher's greatest allies. Likewise, teachers who see and work with the child in a setting quite different from that of the home can provide information useful to parents in their rearing of that child.

While parents have much to contribute to a good conference, it's probably true to say that the burden for its success falls primarily on the teacher. It was with that in mind that the Federation of Protestant Reformed School Societies decided to sponsor yet another activity this past year: a summer mini-course on "Interacting With Parents." (The emphasis here should be on "mini," since the "course" lasted for just an afternoon in August. But it was, for all that, a very worthwhile activity. And it was well attended by teachers not only from our four schools in the Grand Rapids area, but from South Holland, Illinois, and Doon, Iowa.) Since the topic concerned a function involving both teachers and parents, the Federation (through the Teacher Educational Development Committee) made provision both for teacher and parent involvement in the running of the course. Presentations were made by Messrs. Jim Decker and Eric Ophoff, both parents of children at Adams, and by Mr. Cal Kalsbeek and Miss Agatha Lubbers, instructors at Covenant. Jim Decker laid the groundwork by speaking about the skill of communication (in which, incidentally, he has by training and experience no little expertise). Eric Ophoff and Agatha Lubbers spoke to the "how" of conducting parent/teacher conferences; and, finally, Cal Kalsbeek encouraged the teachers and principals to avail themselves of a variety of means to maintain good communication between home and school.

Now, what does all this have to do with "Parents' Corner"? We have an article here by one of the participants of that mini-course. Mr. Eric Ophoff agreed to pen a few of his thoughts on

what parents hope to learn from parent/teacher conferences.

As something of an after-thought, we decided to throw in an article by a teacher too. I happened to think of an article written by Fred Hanko, ten years ago, on the back of one of Hope School's weekly notes to the parents. In it he wrote about conferences, and, interestingly, his remarks suggest that the teachers want much the same thing out of a conference as do, according to Eric Ophoff, the parents. So, parents, the teachers are going to borrow a little of your "corner" in this issue of Perspectives.

Parent-Teacher Conferences

What's in it for Parents?

Eric Ophoff

The purpose of parent-teacher conferences has to be to allow for communication between parents and teachers. Both parents are vitally interested in the well-being and performance of children in the classroom. Parents often come away from conferences with teachers with a renewed sense that teachers *are* concerned about the children. I've been to many conferences, and if there's one thing that never fails to impress me it's the fact that teachers *care*.

Without conferences, the only gauge that a parent has to measure the success of the student is the occasional report card. While that is certainly something of a measurement of academic progress, Christian parents are also concerned with a number of other

aspects of a child's development.

Parent-teacher conferences provide the parent with a good opportunity to inquire about areas such as the spirituality and the social development of a child. Parents can and should use the opportunity of conferences to inquire of the teacher regarding the child's attitude towards others, school in general, and his receptivity to the religious and spiritual slant given to the material presented.

I think it's good that conferences are held in the classroom where the student spends his school day. It gives the parent an opportunity physically to see and appreciate the world of a school-age child. I'm always impressed that the classroom is so small and

closed. For a child it's a big world in a big classroom at a big school. To a parent, it's a small room with a teacher and some little desks. Often times in the hustle of the work-a-day world it's easy to forget about the kids in school. For a parent to go physically to the classroom serves to remind him that his children are yet children being taught much the same as the parent was — but the parent doesn't think about it. The world of parents is a long way from the world of school children.

I've come to appreciate the teacher who is prepared for conferences. My goal in a conference with a teacher is to determine if my child is working at his capacity and if he is living a sanctified

life among his peer group. I usually find out the answers to these questions and there often is a sense of relief on my part to know that things are handled on the school front much the same way as on the home front.

Through parent-teacher conferences, I have developed a respect for the abilities of our Christian school teachers. I have a respect for their concern and dedication to the calling of instructing our covenant children. I believe our teachers have a sense of responsibility to that calling that exceeds the academic. Teachers care. One way to observe that is to go to parent-teacher conferences.

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Conference Time Again

Fred Hanko

... The lack of a close relationship between parents and teachers can have several unhappy results. Both parents and teachers are more hesitant to discuss problems with the other when they arise. The lack of knowledge and understanding of each other leads to doubts about what the other is trying to do. Parents begin to talk to each other about "the teachers," and teachers grumble about "the parents" and the result is a poorer relationship

and no progress in our mutual interest, the welfare of the children. If we knew each other better and could talk things over more frequently, I'm sure that many of our problems would disappear.

That's what conferences are all about. It's true, they're very limited in time and are often very formal and structured, but they are the best that we have now, and they do offer an excellent opportunity to help the children

whether your child is doing the best he can. I can give you my opinion. If he is not doing as well as he should, I can tell you what the problems are as I see them. Perhaps I can suggest some ways that he can try to overcome the problem. I can tell you something about his behavior in the group of children at school, I can tell you something about his behavior in the classroom and about the attitudes he shows there.

Looking at the things I want to know from you and the things I want to tell you, several things are clear: We are both interested in the same things. We can accomplish a great deal by sharing our information and our problems. The conferences help us both. By getting to know each other we can accomplish great things.

Your child may not always think so, but we teachers like your child. We want your child to grow in knowledge and understanding that a covenant child needs to live a life of service to God. You want the same thing. The conferences can help us work toward that goal.