

Parent-Teacher Conferences

By Laurie Jabaay

Are parent-teacher conferences really necessary? Why do we have them? What do you expect from them? I tried to get a few ideas from fellow teachers and also from parents as I addressed these questions.

I thought I would first give you a little background about the way we do parent-teacher conferences at Hope Christian School in Redlands, California. The larger schools probably do things a bit differently. We have four classrooms and four teachers for grades K through 9. We have thirty-one students and only thirteen families enrolled in our school this year so we have several sets of siblings in the classrooms. For conferences a parent signs up for a fifteen-minute private conference for each child they have in school. That means more than one fifteen-minute session for a teacher if you have more than one student in that room. We have conferences in the fall and in the spring. The fall session usually has 100% participation. The spring has less participation, but a parent will usually have some verbal contact with the teacher to see if it is necessary to have a conference.

As teachers we felt the conferences were necessary because they were often the only one-on-one contact we

child's work in the classroom. A bad attitude makes it hard to work with a student. It can lead to an unhappy atmosphere for everyone in the room or on the playground. Problems will arise. Often a parent is aware of the same problem at home. Knowing a parent struggles with the same issue is helpful, and an exchange of ideas can help. Children with good attitudes can have a very positive influence on others. They can encourage others to work hard and create a pleasant atmosphere in which everyone can work. Parents need to hear of this good attitude also and be encouraged that their child is behaving as they ought while away from home.

As teachers we like to begin conferences with something that is positive about the student. Each student is placed under our care by the Lord and there is always a good reason for every student in our room. Sometimes we see the struggles with bad habits, bad attitudes, and academic problems, and we don't see the reason we need that child in our classroom. I find conferences an excellent opportunity as a teacher to sit down twice a year, think about students individually, think about how they fit in my classroom, and think about what they contribute to the classroom. As teachers we need to be reminded to look for their strengths and promote those strengths the best we can. Often I need that reminder. Taking the time to prepare for conferences can teach me something about myself and what I

had with the parents about their children. It is a good time to bring up any concerns and any words of praise. We all felt it was important to have some feedback from the parents as to how they felt things were going in the classroom. The teachers want to know: Have the parents noticed any problems? Have they noticed anything that seems to be working really well? Is their child improving? Is their child being challenged enough in the classroom? Sometimes things cannot be changed to suit each child because of other needs and personalities in the classroom, but as teachers we want to know about it. If we know about it, then we can think about it, pray about it, enforce what is going well, or try to make adjustments.

need to do to improve as a person and as a teacher. Hearing from the parents also gives me a time to reflect and think about my teaching. Do I need to make some changes? Is my classroom a place where students can learn to the best of their abilities?

Parents had many of the same thoughts as teachers about conferences. They too thought conferences were necessary for the one-on-one communication with the teacher. The parents wanted to hear how things were going in the classroom from the teacher's perspective. Often the child's perspective and the teacher's perspective are different and conferences were the place to discuss this difference. Parents also felt the big question was attitude and effort put into school work and not necessarily about the child's grades.

As teachers and as parents we pray that we may work together for the good of our children in the Lord. May conferences be an encouragement to us to remind our children to serve the Lord, to walk in His ways, and to do their best, both at home and at school. May we teach them to take heed to Ecclesiastes 9:10a "Whatever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might."



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