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Bill Cirone op ed column

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Use the time wisely at parent-teacher conferences

Not long after the school year begins, the time comes for parents to meet with teachers and discuss their children's progress.

Parent-teacher conferences can be a very helpful means of communication, and they should be a two-way exchange of information about a child. Parents always want to know how their child is doing, what their strengths and weaknesses are, and how they can help, but teachers also want to know of any stresses in a child's life that could affect classroom performance and, of course, any special needs that a child might have.

To increase the effectiveness of these conferences, parents should consider taking some preliminary steps.

First, take time before the conference to think about your child's strengths, weaknesses, study habits, and classmates.

Ask your child: What do you like about the classroom? What would you like to change? Do you understand the work? Do you feel you're doing well?

There are also several questions a parent should consider asking the teacher during the conference:

- What are my child's best and weakest subjects?
- How can I help him improve?
- Is my child working up to his ability? If not, why do you think so, and how can I help?
- Is my child's schoolwork progressing as it should? If not, how can I help her catch up?
- If my child is ahead of other students, what will challenge or encourage her?
- How does my child get along with other students?
- Are there any special behavior or learning problems I need to know about?
- What kinds of tests will be given this year? What are the tests supposed to reveal?
- Is my child's homework turned in on time, in completed form, and does it meet your expectations?
- How much time should be spent on homework each night?

Parents and teachers have much in common. Neither wants a child to fail. Neither wants a child to be caught between the pressures of differing standards at home and at school. Both know that learning goes on at school and at home.

Together, parents and teachers can become a powerful force for positive change in the life of a child and connecting home and school. Parents and teachers working together helps students see the vitality in themselves, and it also models for our children how we are a community of learners.