

Quick E-Mail, Quick Reply? BY MADELINE KOVARIK



In our technologically connected society, the touch of a finger or the click of a few keys sends an idea, question, or request to whomever we wish, wherever they are. What a wonderful convenience!

That depends, doesn't it?

Instant access to others via technology, such as e-mail, can be both an asset and hindrance. Parents, who previously had to think about contacting their child's teacher, now simply pick up their phones and text. This immediate access has created a need to create guidelines for parents regarding e-mail correspondence with teachers.

"Principals and teachers across the county say it is important for BlackBerry®-toting, Bluetooth®-device-wearing parents to hear the constraints on when teachers can answer messages and for teachers to tell parents how and when they are willing to communicate" (Keller 2008).

Setting expectations, as with classroom rules, is best done at the beginning of the school year and conveyed periodically as needed and through various means, such as open houses, parent conferences, and newsletters. To keep e-mail in the con-

venient, asset column of your "classroom ledger," it is wise to set expectations for you, your students, and their parents. The following suggestions can help you manage your instant communications.

1. **Clearly state the times e-mail is checked.** Determine when you will check messages, whether it is before school, after school, or during planning. Relay this information to parents, gently reminding them that instructing their children and keeping them safe is your primary responsibility. Be sure to give specific directions for messages regarding dismissal changes (e.g., John is not riding the bus today. Teresa Swift will pick him up.), according to school policy and your e-mail schedule.
2. **Designate a time-frame for responses.** Keep in mind that some parents may expect an immediate reply, even when they e-mailed on Friday evening. If e-mail is returned on school days only or just during school hours, clearly state this procedure.



KDP Connect



A PICTURE IS WORTH A THOUSAND WORDS.

A short video may be worth 10,000 words! It also may be worth recognition and viewing time in KDP Connect and a \$25 gift certificate for you.

Why not share your expertise and best practices with a teacher who is new to the classroom?

Create a short 7–9 minute video and upload it online between September 15 and October 30, 2011.

To see an example, upload your video, and find out more, visit us online at <http://kdpconnect.kdp.org>. Videos will be reviewed for clarity of strategy presented, quality of content, and formatting consistency.

3. **Ask parents to provide their e-mail address.** Teachers must be able to confirm that the individual corresponding via e-mail is actually the student’s parent or guardian. When making that request, explain that, at times, it may be necessary to communicate by phone in order to confirm a request. Again, it’s all about student safety.
4. **Request an identity in e-mail subject line.** Ask parents to identify themselves and place their student’s first name in the subject line of an e-mail. That action will allow you to quickly and easily distinguish important parent-student messages from school memos and those inevitable spam e-mails.
5. **Provide your school e-mail address.** Do not provide a home or personal e-mail address. If a parent requests another address, simply state that work communication is limited to your school e-mail address.
6. **Delineate e-mail purposes.** Be sure that parents realize that e-mail is not a

substitute for parent conferences. Explain that concerns of an emotional or highly confidential nature are better addressed in person and that any e-mails received about such issues will be responded to accordingly. A suggested reply in this situation is: “Thank you for your e-mail. Because of the sensitive (or confidential) nature of this concern, it needs to be discussed in person rather than an e-mail. I am available on _____ at ___o’clock. Is this a convenient date and time for you? Together we can work to create the best academic environment for your student.”

Communication with parents is critical, but must be managed. Stating your position and expectations regarding e-mail communications will eliminate future conflicts and disappointments.

References

Keller, B. 2008. Schools seek to channel parent involvement. *Education Week* 27(31): 1.



Dr. Kovarik is a longtime educator who has served at various levels, including elementary teacher and principal, as well as professor at Rollins College in Winter Park, FL. She thrives on relating relevant information to beginning teachers, mentoring them unofficially and officially.



MASTER YOUR FUTURE

with Champlain’s Online Master’s Program in Early Childhood Education with Specializations in Teaching and Administration.

- **PROJECT-BASED LEARNING APPROACH.** Apply graduate-level knowledge immediately into your early childhood education classroom or center.
- **ACCESSIBLE EDUCATION FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS.** Combining academic excellence with a low residency requirement.
- **HIGHLY ENGAGING CURRICULUM.** Connect with your local early childhood education community more deeply.
- **RESPECTED DEGREE.** Champlain College has been providing quality education since 1878.

To Request an Information Packet
CALL 1-866-282-7259



**CHAMPLAIN
COLLEGE**
Graduate Studies

EXPERIENCE LEARNING.
champlain.edu/med