

# Teacher uses e-mail to keep parents in touch

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## HIGHMEADOW

Protecting the planet and enhancing communication are two of the world's top issues as Y2K approaches. Yet for teacher Kathleen Casterline the solution is as easy as "you've got e-mail."

Casterline, who teaches second grade at Highmeadow Common Campus in the Farmington district, connects via electronic mail on a regular basis with the parents of nearly every student in her class.

Whether offering daily snippets and even photograph

images about what the youngsters did, or informing parents of an important homework lesson, Casterline is able to do that in a keyboard stroke or two.

"My dream would be to have a video clip of the day," Casterline said last week.

Thanks to this new technological world, no longer does she have to play telephone tag with busy parents who are difficult to track down the old fashioned way. And reliance on "snail mail" letters also is disappearing

"The old process of writing letters is too cumbersome," she said. "... Besides, it (e-mail correspondence) saves trees, you know?"

According to the teacher, it helps that education and the use of technology is a top priority within the Highmeadow attendance area. Highmeadow is a school-of-choice, with students chosen via lottery for available slots every year.

Twenty out of 25 students have e-mail at home, and some of the kids themselves have their own addresses. "That's how technological some of these families are."

Casterline emphasized, however, that she doesn't shy away from more-traditional ways of communicating. She still telephones parents and sends notes home with students.

But because time is so precious for many parents, the e-mail connection enables short-but-sweet communication on a regular basis.

"I give them messages about things we've been doing," Casterline said. "I send messages about homework, questions to ask (kids at home). Part of this, it's to create that dialogue between children and parents."

The messages and digital photos enable parents to quickly capture what their children are experiencing in school.

Following are examples of recent e-mails from Casterline to her "classlist": to send messages to all of the homes on that list, all she has to do is click onto the send button.

"Dear students and parents, ... I will be sending home a copy of your dinosaur report in this week's Thursday folder. You may



STAFF PHOTO BY BILL BRIDGES  
You got e-mail: Highmeadow Common Campus teacher Kathleen Casterline keeps in touch with parents using e-mail.

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**Kathleen Casterline**  
—Teacher

use this to prepare for your S.E.E.D. It is not necessary to copy it onto notecards. Thank you, Mrs. Casterline."

"Dear students, ... Tonight your homework is to tell your parents about what we are learning in math. Please explain to them why we call our math 'taking' and not 'borrowing.' Good luck, Mrs. Casterline."

To illustrate how fast parents can respond to such messages, student Natalie Lichtman's father, Gary, e-mailed the teacher about four hours after the letter item was sent.

"It's funny you sent this e-mail... Natalie stumped us last night with that one. Just goes to show you're 'never too old to learn something new.' Thanks for the 'new math lesson,' maybe that's why I never went into accounting, Gary."

Casterline said elementary school teachers often refer to subtraction as "borrowing," a term that isn't quite accurate. "It's never really borrowing, because you're never going to put it back."

Meanwhile, the teacher said e-mail chat is "a piece of cake," and is much more efficient than

the old way of communicating.

"I'd have to write or type a note out, print it out and put it in their backpacks," Casterline said. "There's a chance four or five (parents) would never see it, because it'd be in the backpack in a big wad."

Return messages are frequent, an indication that parents — and kids, too — don't mind the new way of exchanging information. From Feb. 2 until last week, there were 192 files; new ones are indicated by red mailbox flags.

"You can play phone tag forever," she said. "But this way, you can immediately communicate."

Every morning, she checks for new messages, and then dashes off notes during and after school. She always verbally tells her students when parents should expect a message pertaining to the full class, and she makes sure those few without e-mail receive hard copy of the message.

"It's really fun. Parents like it and kids like it."

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