NYSAIS Beginning Teacher Institute

Tips on E-mail and Parent Communication

1. Know your school's policy if one exists. If one does exist, it preempts every tip that follows. Some schools want faculty e-mails to parents approved by division or department heads, other schools suggest that e-mail from parents be returned by a telephone call.

2. E-mail is best used for informational, logistical, and/or factual messages. It does not convey tone, gesture, and emotional response very well, and therefore is not a strong medium for "issues," controversial matters, and extended debate. Good: "Mrs. Smith, please telephone me to schedule a meeting." Bad: "Mrs. Smith, I think Johnny cheated today in my class and once again we need to discuss his character."

3. All e-mails should be of the same standards as formal written communication (spelling, punctuation, grammar, capitalization).

4. Although e-mail can be a rapid method of communication, it does not need to be. Don't use it as an instant messenger with parents. Take advantage of the time delay it can provide; use "save as draft" and return later to proofread your message.

5. Pay attention to the details of e-mails you receive from parents. At what time of day was it composed? Who else received a copy? Is the recipient list appropriate?

6. Remember, any e-mail you send can be easily forwarded, with added commentary, to many people very rapidly. Readers who are not your intended audience are a keystroke and a list-serve away.