

Tuesday, September 5, 2006

The start of a new school year is an appropriate time to make a confession: my favorite constituent mail comes from school children. The letters have that familiar, even comforting appearance: the methodical print, the Number Two Pencil, the slight hints of what they hear at the dinner table at home.

Every week, hundreds of letters and e-mails flow into my office. Some are personally written over many pages; some consist of a quick signature on a pre-printed postcard. There are heartfelt emails and spam emails. There are agreements, disagreements, questions and inquiries.

But I have come to believe that the letters from school children are among the most heartfelt...and direct.

For example, the letter from one elementary school student that included, "Also, thank you for inviting me to the White House. My mother said I can't go."

Or the letter I received last spring thanking me for a school visit: "My favorite part was that you spoke in complete sentences."

There was the young man who wrote to us inquiring about whether it was "legal to own a ferret in Suffolk County." I responded that it was legal, hoping that he would be a responsible ferret owner. Weeks later, he wrote again. He was thanking me because his parents had told him that it was illegal to own ferrets. But I cleared that up! As a result, he was the proud owner of Coco and Bandit. I suspect, however, that his parents weren't too happy with their Congressman.

This week, as children congregate in classrooms and we think collectively of their futures, I wanted to share a letter I received from nine year-old Chelsea Abreu. Her assignment at the Thomas J. Lehey School in Greenlawn was this:

"Begin a story with this sentence: 'My message is written. Now I will put it into a bottle and toss it into the raging sea.'"

Here is her message, forwarded to me by her teacher, Linda Mastriano-Letica. It is a lesson I hope we all learn.

Posted by: SI