



If I Find These School Supplies, I'll Write the Post Office

D'VAL WESTPHAL Of the Journal

What ever happened to a simple No. 2 pencil and a ream of lined notebook paper?

Sure, you may find them in the school-supply aisles of stores around town. But you'd be harder pressed to find them on the school-supply lists.

Because now, all too often, the glue has to be Elmer's. The scissors, Fiskars. And the plastic bags, Ziplock. Why?

Except for the perennial kid who eats the paste, who cares what brand it is? If it sticks the macaroni to the construction paper, isn't that enough?

Will a child really be ridiculed for having store-brand instead of Crayola crayons? Ostracized if the permanent marker isn't a Sharpie? Is germ warfare imminent if the wipes aren't Clorox or Lysol?

Rigo Chavez, a spokesman for Albuquerque Public Schools, says the district puts out generic grade-level supply lists a week before the tax-free shopping weekend, but specific lists are school- and even classroom-based. "A teacher can specify a specific brand," he says, "but they usually don't care. It's usually just a brand they're familiar with."

It would be nice if they made it clear the brand is optional. And it would be nice if the bigbox stores were familiar with the products, too. Try finding Black Warrior pencils or a Mead primary composition book. I double-dog dare you.

Chavez says he's also experienced this ultra-specific, name-brand school-supply phenomenon firsthand. His daughter, a seventh-grader, came home needing a certain brand of mosquito wipes.

He bought her the less expensive generic. He says so far, she doesn't appear scarred.

A recent column featured local postal officials touting improved customer service and on-time delivery numbers. Several readers say put that in the dead-letter file.

Paul Hendel e-mails his Monroe NE home "must be in the 3 percent overnight service that never makes it on time."

In fact, it must be considered cross-country or overseas. Overnight delivery is for letters going from one Albuquerque address to another. For Paul, "a first-class letter posted in ZIP code 87110 on Tuesday, July 23rd, arrived at our address in ZIP code 87110 on Monday, July 28th. A letter posted in New York City on July 23rd arrived on July 28th, and a letter posted in Australia on July 23rd also arrived on July 28th."

Up in Lamy, Thomas W. Brooks says "the other day at the Santa Fe post office on Pacheco Street there were 20-plus customers waiting in line for service from two clerks. Who knows how many other(s) were behind the mirror window watching the line struggle? Oops — the line is getting long ... take a break!

"Another example I saw a month ago. I often send out a dozen post cards around the USA a few times

a year. ... At the same time I always send a card to myself to see how long it takes to get back to me. The last batch of postcards were mailed on a Friday. Nothing came back on Saturday. Nothing came back on Monday. Finally, my postcard came back on Tuesday! And these postcards had a 27-cent stamp and are considered first class.”

From the it-started-outlike-a-good-plan department, another reader e-mails “I thought you should know that today at the Manzano branch post office on Haines they have four full-time clerks on staff. One is on vacation and three called in to be off today. They have one window open and are trying to get another window open to be staffed by someone who has not worked a window in — so I heard — a year. They have not been able to get him signed in for over an hour.

“Someone in the line also told me that at the Steve Schiff post office they had no window clerks this morning, just someone handling out mail. What is going on?”

Don Wencewicz called to report that after several breakins in his 87112 community mailbox he’s been fighting to get updated, more secure boxes for his Northeast Heights neighborhood. But even after filing police reports all he’s gotten from the post office is a visit from the lone guy with a hammer who tries to beat the boxes back into shape; an explanation that the boxes are broken into and mail is stolen all the time; and the suggestion to rent a P.O. box. Replacement delivery denied.

Finally M. Montoya writes — a real letter postmarked Aug. 8 from 87114 that arrived here at 87109 while I was on vacation — that delivery times are poor (five days for a postcard to cross the river, seven for a package to get to Belen), wait times are long (at least 20 minutes) and overworked and understaffed clerks know the real skinny on customer dissatisfaction (it’s high).

“You have been taken for a first-class, 42-cents worth, ride.”

At least I didn’t have to leave my ZIP code.

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