

District E-Mail Guidelines and Etiquette

Introduction

E-mail should be a useful way for all to exchange ideas, share files, and keep in touch with work colleagues. Proper use of e-mail can help increase productivity and effectiveness. However, e-mail can also become problematic if misused or used unwisely.

Use of this Work Tool

First, please remember that the District's e-mail system is a work tool and should always be considered as such. Please refrain from personal communications on the e-mail system during working hours.

Please Think Twice before You Press "Send"

Responding when you are upset or angry is never a good idea. What you say in an e-mail cannot be taken back. Even under the most innocent circumstances, misinterpretations can happen very easily in neutral emails because there is a lack of nonverbal expression to cue the recipient about your motives and intentions. You can imagine how much misinterpretation can occur when you are expressing frustration and/or anger. When it appears that a dialogue has turned into a conflict, it is best to suggest an end to the swapping of e-mail and for you to talk or meet in person. If you receive a confrontational or angry e-mail, try to respond in a short and simple manner. If that does not appease the recipient then make contact with him or her outside the virtual realm.

You should avoid responding without considering how your answer can be interpreted. Things to consider before venting in e-mail:

- Would I say this to this person's face?
- Am I putting the recipient in an awkward position?
- How would I feel if I received this e-mail message?

Usually, by the time you consider these questions you will be calm enough to write your message with a different approach. Catching someone by surprise in an inflammatory message is a quick way to alienate your reader mainly because that person may react with anger or embarrassment.

E-Mail and District Policies

It is also important that you do not needlessly subject other staff to your conflicts with another employee. We are required to provide a work environment that is safe and vitriolic e-mails can contribute to defining a hostile workplace. Also, like all communications within this district, *any e-mails that you send on our system are subject to district policies regarding non-discrimination and harassment. A district employee may be disciplined for e-mails that violate those policies.*

District E-mail Guidelines and Etiquette- Continued

Some General Common-Sense Principles Regarding Using This District System

In addition to the principals cited above, please read the following guidelines and follow them to obtain the most out of your e-mail use:

1. Send the e-mail to the smallest number of staff that needs to see the message. There are very few occasions that require a message to every employee at a college and fewer still that demand an "All District e-mail". Take a good look at the properties and groups listed in the district address book. You can usually target the specific group(s) that should see your message. For instance, both campuses and the district office do not need to hear about an object lost at one campus.
2. Send a clear message. Poorly written e-mail can confuse recipients, create ill-will, and have damaging ripple effects when misleading or incomplete information is forwarded beyond the original recipient. Keep e-mail messages short and concise. Choose your words carefully to avoid being misunderstood. Never use profanity or harsh language and be sensitive to sounding too terse or sending unintended signals.
3. Include meaningful information in the e-mail subject line so that the recipient recognizes the context of your message.
4. Don't hog system resources. As a general rule, if a message does not require a specific action or response, you should delete it after it is read. If the message needs to be saved for more than a couple of weeks, it should be archived to a local hard drive or diskette (CD, whatever) or printed out and saved in an appropriate file. Please review your messages weekly and delete those that are not needed. Do not forget to delete or move to your personal files "Sent Messages" and "Deleted Items", as they also are stored on the district server.
5. Pick the right medium for your message. E-mail is great for sharing facts, distributing documents, giving project updates and getting answers to specific questions. E-mail is seldom a good medium for resolving disputes or tackling issues that require dialogue between parties. Resist from participating in angry debates via e-mail; pick up the telephone or meet with the other party.
6. If possible, avoid sending large files. If you compress photos and scanned documents, they will take up much less server space. Better yet, post large files on a web-site and notify others of the web address.
7. Lastly, remember that you should not use the district server for personal business advertising. If you want to rent a home or sell a car, please use a commercial site such as Craig's list or EBay.