



Portland Public Schools

Email Etiquette:

A Guideline for PPS Staff

June 2011

Produced by:

**Portland Public Schools
Information Technology Department**



Introduction

The purpose of this guideline is to ensure the proper use of e-mail by Portland Public Schools employees including suggestions for proper email etiquette. This guideline applies to any e-mail system the District has or may install in the future. It also applies to employee use of personal e-mail accounts via browsers, as directed below.

Employees have the responsibility to use e-mail in an efficient, effective, ethical and lawful manner. E-mail users must follow the same code of conduct expected in any other form of written or face-to-face business communication. The District may supplement or modify this Guideline for employees in certain roles. This Guideline for e-mail etiquette complements similar District policies for PPS Network and Internet use *Student and Staff Acceptable Use Guideline (AUP) 8.60.041-AD*. Please read and follow those policies as well.

Proper Uses of PPS email

- Communicating in a professional manner with other District staff about work-related matters.
- Communicating in a professional manner with parties outside the District for business purposes.
- Personal communications that are brief and do not interfere with work responsibilities.
- Users are allowed to access personal e-mail accounts on a limited basis, without disrupting business responsibilities. Access should be gained only by using the browser.

Email Etiquette and Best Practices

Content

- Do not create and/or exchange messages that can be interpreted as offensive, harassing, obscene, racist, sexist, ageist, pornographic or threatening, as defined by District Human Resource and/or Student Discipline policies. Doing so is grounds for disciplinary action.
- Using ALL CAPS in an email indicates yelling. Consider italics or bolding for emphasis instead.
- Do not circulate chain letters or commercial offers.
- Cover one subject per email.
- Make sure context and background are included.
- Tell the recipient when no reply is needed and spare colleagues one-word emails (eg. "Thanks") whenever possible.
- Keep it brief (eg. use bullet points or numbered lists to communicate complex information).
- Call out specific action requests.
- Offer a phone or meeting option if the topic is complex or may be emotional.
- Any time email correspondence goes back and forth three times, it is time for an in-person discussion or phone call.
- Before sending a message, determine if everyone really needs to be copied:
 - ✓ Do they really need to be cc'ed? If so, call out why they are cc'ed.
 - ✓ Does it really require a Distribution List? Or, would a shorter, custom list work?
 - ✓ Does everybody need to be on the Reply All? Or would a private response to the sender, or the sender and a few other people suffice?

NOTE: Some content gathered from Gartner and Stanford University resources

- Out of Office messages shall be used during employee absences and must have either alternative contact information (your phone number, for example) or an alternative person to contact in your absence.

Personal Email

- No District business shall be conducted with the personal email account.
- Personal communication shall not interfere with work responsibilities.
- Do not auto-forward business email to personal email accounts.

For more information about the use of personal email or other technologies, please review the District Personal Technology Guideline.

Legal Issues

- The email system is a District asset: there is no privacy. Email is further subject to public disclosure under public records law.
- Do not create and/or exchange information that is in violation of copyright or any other law. The District is not responsible for an employee's use of e-mail that breaks laws.
- Sending confidential information to unauthorized people is prohibited.
- Because email is increasingly being used in litigation, always keep in mind:
 - ✓ Every email you write is likely to be preserved by somebody somewhere.
 - ✓ Email can be misinterpreted in court cases: write clearly and unambiguously.
 - ✓ All messages should uphold the ethical values of the District.

Calendar

- Keep your calendar up-to-date! Be sure to block times on your calendar when you are not available. This includes vacation as well as times that you are routinely out of the office.
- Respond to meeting invitations promptly with an **Accept**, **Decline**, or **Tentative**. By making a choice, you keep the meeting organizer informed.
- If you must cancel or reschedule a meeting, please try to give attendees 24 hours' notice. Last minute changes or cancellations can create difficulties for all other attendees. .
- If you must resend a meeting or series of reoccurring meetings, it is good practice to add an explanation or comment as to the change to avoid confusion.
- If you are invited to a meeting, but feel a colleague should also attend, email the organizer of the meeting and ask to have that individual added. Don't forward or delegate the meeting invitation to the colleague without informing the meeting organizer. No one likes surprise guests.
- Only CC or BCC attendees in a meeting invitation if their presence is optional or you are using it as an FYI.