

# Memorandum



**To:** All Employees of the Vineland School District

**From:** Dr. Matthew W. Ross, Superintendent

**Date:** September 19, 2013

**Subject:** *Policies and Procedures Bulletin- Email Etiquette*

The Vineland School District recognizes that although nothing replaces face-to-face communication, email has become a valuable communication tool in our society and an equally valuable communication tool for our professional use. Like all forms of communication, email is most effective when it utilizes the "3 C's" of communication - Clarity, Conciseness, and Courtesy. To ensure email is clear, concise, and courteous, effective immediately all employees will adhere to the following email standards and protocols.

**Remember that email is public.** Keep in mind that employee email is the property of the District, including the use of personal email accounts on company computers and as such, designated District employees may review any email message sent or received by any employee. Because your email may be forwarded to others, even to individuals outside of the District, and because your email may be subject to a Public Records Request, consider how your message may be interpreted. Don't say anything in an email that you would not want to be made public or forwarded to others. If confidentiality and privacy are important, it may be advisable and more appropriate to use other communication vehicles, because you may never know who will read the content. In addition, be particularly careful when referencing a student in an email. Any information about a student should be treated with the same level of confidentiality as any other form of communication. You should refrain from emailing student medical or personal information or making editorial comments about a student.

**Be polite and professional at all times.** Email cannot replace personal contact. There is a tendency to be less formal or careful when sending email, which can sometimes provoke feelings of frustration, or even anger. Remember that direct person-to-person contact is best for handling sensitive, difficult, complex, or emotional issues. It is easy to be abrupt when in a hurry, but remember that it is always professional to be courteous and respectful. Use neutral language and leave negative emotions out of your message. Remember that what you write cannot be taken back. Misinterpretations can happen very easily due to the lack of 'nonverbal' cues. Catching someone by surprise in an emotional message is a quick way to alienate your reader and compromise your communication goal. If it appears that an email dialogue has turned into a conflict, suggest an end to the exchange of messages, and that issues be resolved by telephone or in person. Try to keep in mind that writing styles may cause some messages to come across as

abrupt or even antagonistic, when that is not the intention of the sender. The type of email message you send is a reflection of your character.

- Be soft on people and hard on issues...there is a difference.
- Keep editorial comments to yourself.
- Don't use email to let off steam or inflame a conversation.
- Keep harassment and discrimination policies in mind.
- Humor and sarcasm can backfire.
- Don't type in all CAPITALS as this is considered to be SHOUTING. This is one of the rudest things you can do.
- Don't over-use punctuation marks such as exclamation marks ("!"). They can make an email hard to read.
- Don't reply to an email message when you are mad or upset, as you may feel bad about it later.
- Be careful with font style, size, and color. What looks good or creative on your screen may be difficult to read on another screen.

**Establish a clear 'subject' line and intent.** The subject line tells the reader what your email is about, and helps them determine whether to read further. This is especially helpful if the receiver is not the main recipient, but is copied on the email. Use captions to emphasize the need for immediate attention, such as "Time Sensitive," "Action Required," or "High Priority." If you require a response, make it very clear to the reader that a response is required. However, some responses may be of a sensitive nature and the receiver may wish to respond in person or by phone.

**'Front-load' your message.** Present the central idea of your email in the first few lines. Your recipient may read only these thoroughly - then browse through the rest. If you need a response or prompt action, state that information with a timeline at the beginning of the email.

**Keep it short.** Respect your reader's time. In general, email should be the length of your computer screen before scrolling. State your message in the fewest sentences possible, and give details in an attachment. Too much information in one message is a burden on recipients. Bear in mind that screens are harder to read than words on paper.

**Edit and proofread your email.** Use standard capitalization, spelling, punctuation, and grammar. Workplace emails are formal and represent your professional demeanor. Don't rush writing your email messages.

**Consider how an attachment can help communicate.** Sending an attachment is a normal practice when you are submitting a document for review or exchanging information. Be sure to title the document in a way that is easy for the recipient to find once it is downloaded. Be sure not to send excessively large attachments unless you are sure that your recipient's Internet connection and email client can handle them.

**Sending email to a group.** It is important to balance informing those who need to know with sending information to too many people. Unless directed otherwise, only send a carbon/courtesy

copy to those who may be affected by your message or who may have information or suggestions to add. Don't send email messages out to people who have no interest in what you are sending. Remember that you may be sending mail to readers with varying levels of expertise. Some of your readers may not understand terminology that is familiar to you. Additionally, be sure to follow the same "chain-of-command" and issue escalation protocols as you would with any other oral or written communication. Avoid sending a carbon/courtesy copy to somebody's supervisor in an attempt to "get things done faster" or to put that employee "on blast." This is unprofessional and creates an environment of distrust and hostility. Appropriate use of carbon/courtesy copying somebody's supervisor, is in the normal course of issue escalation or when the supervisor was on the original correspondence, and this is usually limited to collaborative work or an inquiry from the supervisor. And only blind carbon/courtesy copy (bcc) somebody in very limited circumstances. This can be taken as an act of deceit and dishonesty.

When deciding whether or not to send the email to multiple people, consider the following:

- Is this message appropriate to the group?
- Should every member of the group receive this email?
- Does this message apply to the members of this group?
- Do I need to respond to group emails?

**Response Expectation.** As a general rule, you should read and respond to all email by the close of the business day, or at least within 24 hours. Try to acknowledge receipt of a message promptly, especially if it is going to take considerable time to reply fully. As a receiver, it is not necessary to reply to every mail message. When replying to a message sent to multiple addresses it is customary to respond to the sender only. That person then collates all replies for the group as a whole. Although email promises "instant" delivery, it does not guarantee an instant response. If you are uncertain of a recipient's email habits or are not getting any response to your messages, a phone call may be quicker and more effective. Just because you need an immediate response does not mean the recipient is available. And if you require a response, be sure to make that clear. When responding to an email consider the following:

- Email should be viewed and responded to within 24 hours.
- Set email to auto-reply if you cannot respond within 24 hours.
- Email should not be read during instructional time or during meetings.
- Treat parent and student emails as a phone call.
- Email should not be treated as a parent conference.
- Avoid trivial or unnecessary responses.
- Don't forward an e-mail without the permission of the author.
- Pay attention to the distribution list before forwarding received email to someone else. The recipient might have several copies of that item already.

For any questions regarding this bulletin, please contact the District Office.