

A PEATC

Do You Know....



Factsheet for Virginia's Parents How to Communicate Effectively by Email

Using Email to Communicate about Your Student's Education

Now more than ever busy people are depending on the most efficient and simple ways to transmit information. Scheduling meetings, forwarding agendas, assigning tasks, are all some of the ways that e-mailing meets communication needs.

Email is a quick and effective means of communication. But sending your message by email can sometimes result in misunderstandings. For example, emails written while emotional or angry can damage relationships and create ongoing problems. **Email is a written record**, just like a letter, and can be used in legal proceedings. Therefore, they should be **clear, concise, factual, and unemotional**.

Think about your **e-mail appearing in the newspaper**. A good rule of thumb when corresponding by email is to never write anything that you wouldn't mind seeing on the front page. Once an email enters cyber space, you have lost all control over where it will end up or the effect it will have on those working with your child.

Tips for Using Email Successfully

- **Be Professional.** When writing an email, be **nice and respectful**. Be friendly, but be sure to use titles (Dr., Ms., Mrs., or Mr.) unless the recipient has asked you to address them by their first name or if you do not know how to properly address them.
- **Treat the Subject Line as an Information Tool.** A **short title** will help give the reader an idea of the intent of the message, e.g., *Request to discuss extended year services*.
- **Use a Business Writing Style.** Keep your email message **short and to the point**. Concise and clear writing will ensure that the reader understands what you are trying to communicate. If you have a number of points to make, use bullets, numbers, or section titles.
- **Check Your Tone.** It can be difficult to determine "tone" from an email. You may think that you are just being direct, but the recipient may think that you are being rude. To help prevent a misunderstanding of what you're trying to say, **be polite** - use "please" and "thank you" when writing emails.

Parent Involvement is Key to Student Achievement

Your student's achievement depends on a number of things, including **your involvement and participation as a parent**.

Developing an **effective partnership** with your student's school and those who work with your student will help your child be successful.

Engagement and effective communication are both key to ensuring that your student meets their goals throughout his school career.

This includes collaborating with the school, helping your student with homework, asking questions, keeping the school team informed, supporting positive behavior at home and keeping open lines of communication.

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- **Don't Send an Email while Angry or Upset.** Save the first draft of an email-- and in a day or two, rewrite it in a way that will result in a positive outcome rather than bad feelings. Ask someone else to read it before you hit send. **If you have to communicate right away** (e.g., there is a deadline for response), try to at least wait a couple of hours between the time you write the email and the time you send it so you have time to reflect on the message and tone.
- **Don't Capitalize Your Message.** Capitalization in an email constitutes **shouting**. The person who reads it will focus on how you wrote the message instead of what you wrote.
- **Avoid Negative Comments.** If you put something negative about the school or school staff in an email, you can be fairly certain **that message will get out**. This can have a long-lasting impact on your relationship with those who work with your child. Think about how you would feel if you received the email.
- **Observe Confidentiality:** If you are including confidential information that only the recipient should see, **mark your communication as confidential**. That may not stop it from being shared, but your intent will be clear.
- **Courtesy Copying and "Reply to All."** For simple emails or ones which require a simple yes or no response, you may not need to copy multiple people. **Direct your email to the those who really need to see it**—those who can help and those who need to be aware of the situation.
- **Reply to Emails You Receive.** If possible, always reply to emails. A simple response that you've received the email and will reply to questions at a later time is better than no response. With spam filters, the sender may not know if you have received their email.
- **Spell and Grammar check:** Always check your spelling and grammar before sending an email. **What you write and how well you write** it reflects upon you.
- **Large Attachments May Need Advance Notice:** Not everyone can open large files. If you can, provide a link to the file. If that isn't possible, let the recipient know what you have sent so they can contact you if they can't open it. You can also use the zip feature to send multiple files.

Avoid Misunderstandings and Damaged Relationships

- **Think** about what you want and need to say.
- **State your concerns** clearly, concisely, and in a polite and respectful manner.
- **Reread your email** for content and tone.
- **Make changes** to the email that will make it clearer and unemotional.
- **Ask someone else to read the email** and give you suggestions.
- **Rewrite the email** based on the feedback you have received.
- **If you are angry or upset**, hold the email at least over night so that you can reassess what is in it and how it was written.

PEATC's mission focuses on building positive futures for Virginia's children by working collaboratively with families, schools and communities to improve opportunities for excellence in education and success in school and community life.

For more information about us, please contact:

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