

Bangor School Department
Email Guidelines for Teacher and Parent Communication

Introduction

The Bangor School Department recognizes that electronic mail (email) is a valuable communication tool that is widely used across our society. Staff members are provided with district email accounts to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of communication both within the organization and with the broader community.

General Email Guidelines for Parent Communication

Staff using email to correspond with parents must adhere to the following:

- Using email as a communication tool with parents is voluntary, but staff must periodically check email to determine if parents are initiating or seeking communication. A parent cannot require that a staff member correspond via email just as a staff member cannot make email the only option for communicating with parents.
- Email parents only when they have agreed that email is an appropriate form of communication and they have volunteered their email address.
- Email messages to parents should be consistent with professional practices for other correspondence. This includes grammar, format (salutation and closing), and professional tone.
- Emails should be short and directional in nature and only include facts.
- Email must never be used to discuss contentious, emotional or highly confidential issues. These issues should be dealt with face-to-face or by phone. To this end, see Generic Email Response Samples on the next page.
- Communication through email should occur only between the email addresses of the teacher and confirmed email addresses of the parent(s) /guardian(s). Teachers should not reply to or forward emails with recipient addresses beyond those provided by parent(s)/guardian(s) (e.g. cc's, forwards, groups, contact lists).
- All emails to and from parents and students must be saved in an email folder for a period of one year.
- All emails that reside on the district servers are not confidential. The public may request email messages under the Open Records Act.

Acceptable Use for Parent Communication

- Email should be used for general information such as class activities, curriculum, assignments, tests, deadlines and special events.
- To arrange for a meeting or telephone call regarding a student issue including a general description of the issue (e.g. "I would like to arrange a meeting to discuss your daughter's attendance").

Unacceptable Use for Parent Communication

Email should not include:

- Any discussion related to other students.
- Personal information about other students.
- Specifics about a sensitive student issue which was not initiated by the parent or had not previously been discussed with the parent. (e.g. "I am concerned that your daughter failed the last three tests and was not at school again today").
- Any discussion related to other staff.
- Any sensitive student information that would normally be discussed face-to-face or by phone (e.g. "I am concerned that your daughter may have a learning disability").

Other Electronic Communication

- Text messaging with parents (or any Bangor School Department communication) through social networking sites such as Facebook or MySpace is not acceptable.

Generic Email Response Samples

If a teacher chooses not to use email as a communication tool with parents or feels like the topic is too sensitive for an email reply, here are a few generic responses:

1. Thank you for your email. The Bangor School Department does not use email to discuss confidential student information. In order to best address your concerns and quickly answer your questions, please feel free to call me at (insert school phone number) and I will be happy to discuss this with you further. Thank you for your active interest in Bangor Schools.
2. Thank you for your email. I feel this concern is not appropriate for email communication. I would prefer to speak with you in person regarding this matter. I will call you on (state the date and time) to discuss this matter further. Thank you for your active interest in Bangor Schools.
3. Thank you for your email. Because discussions about student accommodations under Section 504 or IDEA are not appropriate through email, I am requesting that you contact your child's case manager by phone or that you arrange a meeting in person. Thank you for your active interest in Bangor Schools.

Bangor School Department Email Guidelines for Parents (To be posted on the Bangor School Department website)

While email is a fast and convenient way for parents to send messages, teacher use of email varies for many reasons. Some teachers read their email messages in the morning before school, some read them at the end of the day, and some read them during the school day. Many teachers prefer to use the phone to speak directly to parents.

For these reasons, please remember if you choose to send an email message to a member of our professional staff, you may not get an immediate reply. In fact you may not receive an email reply at all, since the staff members will determine how best to contact you: by email, phone, or to schedule a face-to-face meeting.

When using email:

1. Please send only non-vital messages by this medium. For example, do not use email to inform a teacher that your child is not to go home on the bus. A teacher may not have time to read your message in a timely fashion. Instead use the telephone to be sure your message is received and clearly understood.
2. Your child's academic progress, learning expectations, or behavioral issues are best addressed through a telephone conversation or by scheduling a face-to-face conference with your child's teacher. An email message on these matters is not appropriate.
3. Please remember that as a communication medium, email is not confidential. As such, confidential information should be conveyed by phone or personal contact.
4. Please identify yourself in the subject line of your email but do not include the name of your child here. A generic statement in the subject line such as "Regarding one of your students" is suggested. Please include the student's first and last name within the body of the email.
5. For all medical or health concerns, please contact your child's school nurse by phone.
6. Please keep all contacts professional. Jokes, amusing or special stories, chain letters, or commercial solicitations are inappropriate and reduce valuable teaching time.
7. Mass emails to the school department staff are not an appropriate use of this technology.
8. Please remember that email is not always the best way to achieve quality communication between teachers and parents.