

E-Mail Archiving and E-Mail Etiquette

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Sent: Tuesday, June 05, 2012 12:33 PM

To: mail_treas; mail_tech_coord; mail_emis; mail_princ; mail_supt; All Access Librarians; access_clerk

Importance: High

Hi all,

We have been receiving a few questions about archiving since we turned on our e-mail archiver last week. I thought I would share a few thoughts for you to share with your users. [Please forward this along to all who you think might benefit.](#)

1. Why? We have been receiving some questions regarding why we are archiving messages. The reason is relatively simple...because we have to. There is mounting case law which holds school districts responsible for their public records. E-mail messages are considered public records that must be kept, much in the same way that districts keep formal letters and communications regarding the operation of the school district. E-mail messages are routinely the first thing that are requested during the discovery phase of lawsuits, and a district's ability to quickly and efficiently respond to these requests is something that is extremely important. Sometimes a district's ability (or inability) to provide these records makes news, and most of the time it is unfavorable coverage. While we have maintained a public record e-mail box for many years for districts to use, the use of this box was not widely publicized, and it was almost impossible to capture everything that could be considered a public record.
2. Personal Messages. Which brings me to personal messages used in our e-mail system. Our Acceptable Use Policy with all of you allows for incidental use of our systems for private or personal business. However, please remember that now we are archiving every message that comes in to our system whether it is saved in your e-mail box or immediately deleted. To that end, I would recommend that you only use your district e-mail account for those messages that directly relate to your work at your district. Personal e-mail accounts are in most cases free to setup (gmail, [your home internet provider, etc.](#)), and will remove the possibility that something you might consider extremely personal will end up as part of a legal discovery in the district. It is not uncommon for us to receive a public records request like this: "All e-mail messages delivered to <your name here> from June 2011 to April 2012". In the past, the only messages we were able to deliver were messages that <your name here> had saved in their folders, but with our new archiver, we will be able to deliver every message, so please keep this in mind.
3. BEFORE YOU CLICK SEND! Which brings me to this...and this might be the most important point to remember from this message. Before you click "Send" on any e-mail message, please read it carefully. The advice I give people is as follows:

"If you would not like to see a copy of that message printed and taped to your office door for all to see, DO NOT CLICK SEND".

As many of you know, e-mail is not a secure form of communication. E-mail messages can be forwarded, saved, printed, faxed to others, mis-replied-to (you have all seen cartoons and TV commercials where people reply-all with an extremely inappropriate response), and all sorts of other actions that you have no control over. E-mail is not an appropriate way to communicate regarding sensitive personnel issues, disciplinary actions, personal feelings about sensitive issues, or anything else that you might consider sensitive or extremely personal. For those situations that require a response, but that response will be sensitive in nature, either in-person or phone calls may be much better suited to the task than e-mail.

If you have any other questions, or need any additional clarification regarding our e-mail archiving process and procedure, please don't hesitate to call or write.

Have a great week!

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PUBLIC RECORDS NOTICE

This message and any response to it may constitute a public record, and therefore may be available upon request in accordance with Ohio public records law. (ORC 149.43)

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