

A GUIDE TO PARENT TEACHER COMMUNICATIONS



Dodge City Middle School values the strong home-school partnership that we have with our community.

Next to high quality instruction in the classroom, our partnership stands as one of the most significant factors in a child's education. Dodge City Middle School wants to ensure that we have an open and highly collaborative relationship with all our parents and that our communication is strong. In addition, we want to address any concerns you may have over the course of the year in a positive, constructive, and reasoned manner. Parents have three direct ways to communicate with teachers: the telephone (voice mail), e-mail and face-to-face meetings. E-mail has become a preferred choice of communication in our society because it is fast and convenient.

However, this technology has its drawbacks, especially for our teaching staff. E-mail has added to everyone's workload and has led to an expectation for a turn-around time that might not be possible. With this in mind, we would like to clarify the guidelines for what is effective and appropriate in terms of e-mail communication.



REALITIES

- The teachers' top priority during the school hours is working directly with the children. As such, the classroom environment does not allow teachers to check their e-mails regularly. In most cases, teachers check and respond to e-mails before and after school.
- Teachers are sometimes unavailable because of meetings, illness, conferences or training sessions, which will delay their response.
- Teachers devote a considerable amount of time before and after school developing lesson plans, preparing the room for daily activities, grading work, and reviewing the curriculum, standards and assessments that must be taught.

CONSIDERATIONS

- Timing – Please remember the classroom environment and the complexity of a teacher's day. If you don't receive an immediate answer to your e-mail, it doesn't mean you are being ignored. A teacher will generally respond within 24 hours.
- What is the goal? Please consider your goal in communicating with the teacher. If your purpose is to share information, or give the teacher time to think about an issue, an e-mail is appropriate. However, if you would like two-way dialogue on a complex issue, e-mail is not appropriate. Please consider a telephone call or request a face-to-face meeting.
- Volume – Each middle school team has at least 120 students to their classrooms. Please consider how many e-mails teachers could potentially receive throughout the day from parents!

ADDITIONAL THOUGHTS

- Teachers are very interested in communicating with parents, especially if a student is experiencing difficulty at home or at school.
- Communication, although important, needs to be controlled. Responding to emails takes thought and reflection.
- Unfortunately emails leave a lot of room for misunderstanding. Direct phone or face-to-face contact with the teacher will lead to better communication and problem-solving.

FOUR STEP CONCERN MANAGEMENT PROCESS

Step 1	Contact the teacher via e-mail, phone or message at the office and teacher will respond within one business day.
Step 2	If you send an e-mail to the teacher, please state the general concern. If the concern can be resolved through e-mail, the teacher will address it through e-mail. However, if the concern is more involved, please state it without detailing all the specifics. We have found that the best way to resolve concerns is to discuss them, and not try to resolve them through e-mail. E-mail is not an adequate collaboration tool to address concerns, but it does serve to express the need to work on the issue.
Step 3	The teacher will connect with you to understand and resolve the concern. It could be an e-mail or phone call. If necessary, the teacher would offer a time for a face-to-face meeting.
Step 4	If you and the teacher cannot resolve the concern, please ask that the principal participate in the problem-solving process. The principal will be the final arbiter on matters relating to student concerns. In a rare case, the matter may be referred to the Assistant Superintendent or Superintendent.

E-MAIL ETIQUETTE TIPS

1. These guidelines can help parents and teachers use e-mail in ways that would be most beneficial. Never use e-mail for matters of controversy or distress. If you have a serious matter, please meet with the teacher directly.
2. Do not barrage a teacher or members of the school staff with multiple e-mails on the same topic. Keep your comments to the point.
3. Never say anything in an e-mail that you wouldn't want published.
4. The rules for civility in e-mails are the same as in face-to-face meetings. Convey a positive tone in your emails. This will set the stage for a cordial relationship with the teachers and other school personnel.

We thank you in advance, for following this process. We can best meet your needs by working together, face-to-face or on the phone as appropriate. We want to ensure that our decisions for your children are thoughtful, measured, and within our capacity to reasonably deliver. Our experience tells us that students benefit most when we work together to meet their needs in a culture of respect and collaboration.