



## KEEPING IN TOUCH

November 2008

Dear Parents:

One of our primary efforts this school year is establishing, implementing, and refining guidelines for ***Effective Communications*** within our employee family and throughout the St. Edmund's Academy Community. The results of several workshops, group discussion sessions, and guidelines used by other schools regarding ***EMAIL GUIDELINES*** are now shared with you. We ask that you read, seek clarification, and follow the guidelines contained in this letter. Please share your comments and recommendations with any member of the administration as we continue to meet our responsibility to coordinate the efficiency and effectiveness of the School's policies, procedures, and processes. ***This communication endeavor is a work in progress.*** At this time, we cannot ensure perfection in all email communications due to numerous existing limitations, which we are trying to work through, but we are committed to the further improvement of this form of communication.

### Email Guidelines for Parent Communications

1. Emails to and from parents and students should be saved in a personal email folder for a period of one year.
2. Email should never be used to discuss contentious, emotional or highly confidential issues. These issues should be dealt with face-to-face or by telephone.
3. Email messages to parents need to be consistent with professional practices used for other correspondence.
4. Using email as the only communication tool is not appropriate in every situation. A parent cannot require that a teacher only correspond using email. Similarly, a teacher cannot make email the only option for communicating with parents.
5. Emails should be short and directional in nature and only include facts and specific information, which may be useful in follow-up conversations by telephone or in person.
6. Email should be used for general information such as class activities, curriculum, assignments, reminders, meeting arrangements, and special events.
7. Emails are appropriate for follow-up on an issue that has previously been discussed.

### Unacceptable Use of Email for Parent Communications

1. Any discussion related to other students.
2. Personal information about other students.
3. Specifics about a sensitive issue which was not initiated by the parent or had not previously been discussed with the parent.
4. Any discussion related to other teachers or staff.
5. Any sensitive student information that should be discussed face-to-face or by telephone.

Also, after receiving legal advice on our email policies and procedures, I need to remind you that emails are public documents accessible to other parties under the Freedom of Information Act and other laws. The St. Edmund's Academy computer/Internet technology system, as is the case with most other institutions and businesses, is housed in a central hard drive unit. All email messages coming into SEA first go into this unit and remain permanently stored within the unit even though the messages are distributed to the designated source. The same is true with messages departing SEA from whatever location. This unit/system is maintained by an external firm in cooperation with our full time IT administration and the SEA business office. Even though extensive filters have been installed, the content of the central hard drive unit is not fully protected from access by inappropriate persons.

## Special Notations

At this time, emails are not acceptable for notifying SEA of changes in a student's dismissal arrangements. This request is being seriously worked on. Programs by other schools are being carefully assessed with calls being placed to schools providing this option. I was in a conversation two weeks ago with an administrator of a school where this notification is (was) an option. Shortly, into our conversation he halted my introduction remarks telling me that only the previous day he sent a notice to the school's parents discontinuing the option due to a host of technical and human issues. Time does not permit, nor is it important, to go into the extensive comments he made regarding the pros and cons of using emails for this purpose. Again, I know that this is only one example, but the experience described is precisely the reason the majority of schools have not found a way to ensure the security, accuracy, and timeliness of using the email option for changes in dismissal arrangements. We will continue our research endeavor with the goal to eventually incorporate this option as part of our effective communication program. BUT, we cannot and will not compromise the safety, security, and well-being of our students. Our present communication process for dismissal is not risk-free for a variety of reasons, and we need you to continue assisting us in its effective implementation before making further adjustments.

As we continue with this communication effort, I offer three types of communication and their definitions that we are using within SEA, and that I would like to see used throughout our School Community. I have found from experience that often ineffective communication results from the sender and/or the receiver not clearly communicating or understanding the expectations. I know that I take a risk of coming across as "lecturing" or being "academic" in our approach to effective communication, but my practical experience in receiving less than the desired results throughout my personal and professional life has so often been traced to the three terms below.

***Attempted Communications – a one-way message is sent in which the sender may or may not expect a response. Examples: this letter; weekly email reminders.***

***Successful Communications – the sender's message usually expects a one-task response and the response is provided. Example: "please call me" and the sender receives a call; the math assignment due on Wednesday is turned in on time.***

*Effective Communications – the sender’s message expects specifics results from the response and those expectations are met. Examples: the action plans implemented for the Annual Fund successfully met the dollar and participation goals; “I now better understand my child’s math progress from our conference.”*

An example of all three types of communications integrated in one situation that happened at SEA recently:

1. Parents requested a meeting with their child’s teachers for a specific reason. – **ATTEMPTED**
2. The meeting was scheduled with all in attendance understanding its purpose. – **SUCCESSFUL**
3. The parent communicated that the meeting’s outcome met all expectations. – **EFFECTIVE**

Effective communication does influence the quality of the home/school partnership---a partnership sustained on mutual respect, mutual confidence, and mutual trust. Thank you for your partnership.

Sincerely,

William L. Kindler

*“Continuous improvement is better than delayed perfection.”*

**Mark Twain**