

- Many teachers receive unauthorized materials or spam that inundates their system.
- Allows participation by an infinite audience.

### **Protect yourself**

- Be aware that electronic communication can generate additional workload.
- Never use a personal computer account for school communication to parents or students, and exercise caution when using school based computers.
- Never leave a computer unattended when it is logged into the school board system.
- Protect your username and password against identity theft, to prevent unauthorized email under your name, or access to school documents.
- Respond to complex messages from parents by telephone or make time for a face-to-face meeting.
- If possible, limit communication to postings on the school's homework bulletin board site (such as Test on Tuesday, Assignment due next Wednesday).

### **If you must send messages**

- Always save a copy of the original message.
- Always use spelling and grammar checks on materials that you plan to email or post on a website.
- Signatures should include your name, assignment title and school name.
- Avoid unnecessary attachments.
- Do not write emails in capital letters.
- Never forward a message without permission from the sender first.
- Always maintain exemplary professional standards when sending email messages to students, parents, colleagues (including friends) and administrators on board equipment.

### **BE ALERT, AWARE AND RESPONSIBLE!**

OECTA  
Counselling and Member  
Services Department  
65 St. Clair Ave. E.  
Toronto, ON M4T 2Y8  
416-925-2493 or 1-800-268-7230

ONTARIO ENGLISH  
**Catholic  
Teachers**  
ASSOCIATION

[www.oecta.on.ca](http://www.oecta.on.ca)

# **electronic communications**



## ***Appropriate and Professional use of:***

- email (board or personal)
- text messaging • Internet/web surfing
  - chat rooms • instant messaging
  - blogs • school websites
- bulletin boards • homework boards
  - telephone voice mail

## OECTA'S CONCERNS

### Problems

- Lack of privacy or security
- Lack of access to a school computer in a private setting
- Websites that malign teachers
- Spam
- Cyberbullying
- Forged or altered email messages
- Identity of sender disguised
- Messages forwarded without permission

### Hazards

- Board or school homework websites
- Online address books
- Unauthorized distribution of email addresses
- Unreasonable expectation that there will be ongoing communication at all hours by parents, administration and students
- Informal communication may be interpreted as lack of professionalism
- Permanent written record of conversations

### Risky behaviour

- Careless messages or messages deemed to be libelous, defamatory, offensive, racist or obscene
- Visits to websites deemed inappropriate
- Cyberbullying and misunderstandings
- Use of familiar and casual tone

### Advice

- Always maintain a professional demeanour in all interactions with students, parents, colleagues and administrators.
- Failure to communicate appropriately puts teachers at risk with the employer, College of Teachers, Children's Aid Society and police.
- **Do not email students**, always maintain professional boundaries with students and avoid communications that could be interpreted as personal.
- Never use your home/personal computer for contact with parents or students.

### No privacy or security

- Have no expectation for privacy in anything that you create, store, send or receive on the board's computer system.
- Sending an email message is like sending a postcard: if you don't want it posted on the bulletin board, then don't send it.
- Furthermore, there is no guarantee of privacy for communications through external servers.
- Teachers risk discipline, up to and including discharge, by visiting websites that are deemed inappropriate by the board.

### Communicating with students

- Do not email students for personal reasons.
- Avoid a casual, familiar tone that can erode boundaries.
- Never use inappropriate language.
- Do not comment on student-parent or student-student relationships.
- Never share or receive personal information.

### Communicating with parents

- Beware that your email can be used as evidence of your conduct.
- Your messages may be forwarded to a much wider audience – deliberately or unintentionally.
- Avoid participating in lengthy email exchanges that consume a lot of time. In addition to adding to your workload, protracted exchanges may be prone to misinterpretation.
- Never send confidential information by email.

### Cyberbullying

- Electronic social cruelty, prevalent among adolescents.
- Teachers are sometimes targeted for electronic harassment, including doctored email messages, reconfigured photos or anonymous emails that contain insults, threats or sexual innuendo.