

PERSONNEL
COMMUNICATION BETWEEN SCHOOL DISTRICT STAFF AND THE PUBLIC

Parents and other members of the public frequently contact teachers and other instructional staff, clerical staff, and building and district administrators with questions regarding programs of education, district facilities, resources, and especially, programs of education for students in the district. These contacts may take place in person, through voice message systems, facsimile transmissions, e-mails, or in writing. Sometimes they occur under circumstances of urgency and sometimes they do not. This is intended to address the tone of such communications and to establish reasonable expectations for district personnel to rely upon when dealing with the public.

The district is in the business of providing service to its students, their parents and other citizens. A reasonable and expected part of that service is responding to requests for information within the access and time constraints imposed by the Minnesota Government Data Practices Act and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). School district staff are expected to respond to requests for information and assistance in a timely and professional manner.

Every employee is the school system's point of contact with the public. The School Board encourages every employee to assume responsibility for the public image of the school system. Good relationships reflect beneficially for the school system and ultimately for each member thereof. School district staff are expected to respond to requests for information and assistance in a timely and professional manner.

Similarly, each and every staff member should expect to be treated with respect and dignity by parents and members of the public.

In the event that a staff member is confronted in a face-to-face or telephone conversation with unacceptable or disrespectful behavior, the following steps should be taken:

1. The offending person should be informed orally and in as calm and professional a manner as the circumstances allow that their conduct is unacceptable and why this is the case. A copy of this procedure may be given, or mailed, to the person.
2. The offending person should be told that if the behavior continues, the discussion will be terminated.
3. The offending person should be informed that a memorandum of the incident will be prepared, provided to the staff person's supervisor and maintained in the files of the district.
4. If the behavior continues, the conversation should be terminated.
5. The incident should be promptly reported to the staff person's supervisor.

If the conduct occurs in the context of e-mail, facsimile transmissions, letters, notes or other documentary forms of communication, steps one through three can be carried out by a similar form of communication or by telephone. In either case, copies of the offending communication and the staff person's response to it should be attached to the memorandum of the incident.

Staff members are encouraged to request the advice and assistance of a supervisor in responding to such a situation.

Unacceptable and disrespectful behaviors include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. Inappropriately raised voices, shouting or yelling toward a staff member;
2. Obscene or foul language, whether directed at the staff member or toward another person;
3. Insulting the staff person's intelligence, judgment or professionalism;
4. Threats, the intimation of violence or behavior which reasonably can be expected to intimidate a staff member, and
5. Unpermitted and unwelcome touching of any nature, regardless of the degree of force used.

In applying this procedure, staff members must always be aware that there is an important distinction between declining to be treated in an unacceptable or disrespectful manner and, on the other hand, refusing to carry out a legitimate request for information or assistance. The former is not a reason for the latter. Time lines created by a statute or a district policy for making a response to an otherwise legitimate request must be observed even while the issue of unacceptable or disrespectful conduct is being addressed.