Old Town Academy E-mail Guidelines for Parent-Teacher Communication

Overview

Old Town Academy K-8 Charter School uses the school blog (www.oldtownacademy.org) as its main means of communicating vital information to parents and guardians: school events, calendar changes, academic programs and reports, and news effecting charter schools will be posted on the blog and automatically sent to all blog subscribers. The School also recognizes that electronic mail (e-mail) can be a valuable communication tool, when it is used judiciously and in accordance with privacy laws and the School Internet Ethics Code. In the interest of ensuring that email is a positive influence on our learning community of committed parents/guardian, teachers, students, and friends, we are instituting this Email Guidelines for Parent-Teacher Communication. Here are some guidelines for insuring that email helps improve communication and teaching rather than interfering with both:

- OTA Teachers spend very long, very rewarding, but also very exhausting days and should be spending their evenings resting and reviewing the day as they make plans (if necessary) to improve on our students' learning experience in the morning.
- OTA Teachers cannot do this if they have 5-10 emails waiting in their email box every night (5 emails at 5-15 mins each means a conscientious teacher could end up spending anywhere from 25 – 75 + minutes a night on the computer. If the numbers seem unrealistic, keep in mind that some parents/guardians might sending 4-5 emails all by themselves in a single day).
- OTA lead teachers oversee 28 students, studying 8 OTA Core Learning Strands. Even with help in music and math labs, our lead teachers are still responsible for monitoring our students' achievement (competence, curiosity, and creativity) in 28 x 8 = 224 different subjects over a 9-week quarter. They have enough to do!

So please think twice before you send an email or a text (*please do not send texts without explicit permission from teacher*):

- Do I need to send it at all? Can I get the answer on the class blog? Can I ask my child to find out tomorrow?
- Can it wait? and

And please, if you decide you do need to send an email:

- Keep your emails short: 1-2 paragraphs is a good rule;
- Keep the content appropriate:
    - OTA faculty and staff may not reply to emails that reveal

student records, discuss other non-related students by name, discuss other OTA staff or faculty, or contain contentious, emotional, or highly confidential information.
    - OTA faculty and staff may discuss and welcome your communications on field trips, volunteering, help with supplies, and other topics that help them help your children have the best year possible.

To help us implement School email policy, OTA Faculty and most Staff members are provided with School e-mail accounts to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of communication both within the School and with the parent/guardian community. The Executive Director reserves the right to decide if teachers can use e-mail as a means of communication with parents and guardians.

General E-mail Guidelines for Parent/Guardian Communication

OTA Faculty and Staff using e-mail to correspond with parents are required to follow to the following guidelines:

- Faculty and Staff must use a school provided e-mail account for all parent communications.
- Faculty and Staff must adhere to the Old Town Academy K-8 Charter E-mail Retention Policy (all official emails are saved on OTA servers for at least 2 years).
- E-mail must ***never be used to discuss contentious, emotional or highly confidential issues***. These issues should be dealt with face-to-face or by phone.
- E-mail messages to parents should be consistent with professional practices for other correspondence. This includes grammar, format and salutation.
- E-mails that reside on the OTA servers ***may not be confidential***. E-mail messages may be requested by the public under the Right-To-Know Law and may, unless they are exempt under the law, be open to public inspection.
- E-mails should be ***short and directional in nature and only include facts***.
- E-mail parents only when they have agreed that e-mail is an appropriate form of communication and they have signed the *Old Town Academy E-mail Permission Form*.
- Only communicate with OTA parents at e-mail addresses listed on their e-mail permission form.
- Care should be given when using student names. Refer to students

by first name, initials or your son/daughter depending on the content. ***Do not discuss non-related students***.

- The School maintains e-mail accounts for teachers to facilitate parent/teacher communication and internal staff communication. The Executive Director reserves the right to block or filter e-mail messages to staff that are not directly related to School business or to OTA's educational mission.

Acceptable Use of Parent Communication

- E-mail should be used for general information such as; class activities, curriculum, assignments, tests, deadlines and special events.
- To arrange for a meeting/telephone call regarding a student issue including a general description of the issue e.g. "I would like to arrange a meeting to discuss your daughter's attendance."
- Follow-up on an issue that has previously been discussed.

Unacceptable Use of Parent Communication

E-mail should not include:

- Any discussion related to other students.
- Personal information about other students.
- Specifics about a sensitive student issue which was not initiated by the parent or had not previously been discussed with the parent. (e.g. 'I am concerned that your daughter failed the last three tests and was not at school again today.')
- Any discussion related to other staff.
- Any sensitive student information that would normally be discussed face-to-face or by phone. (e.g. 'I am concerned that your daughter may have a learning disability.')

Generic Email Response

If an OTA faculty or staff member believes that a topic is too sensitive for an e-mail reply, parents/guardians will receive a generic response indicating this:

> Thank you for your e-mail. Old Town Academy does not use email to discuss sensitive and/or confidential student information. In order to best address your concerns and quickly answer your questions, please feel free to call me at 619-574-6225 and I will be happy to discuss this with you further. Thank you.

> Thank you for your e-mail. I feel this concern is too sensitive for email. I would prefer to speak in person regarding this matter. I will call you on _____ at _____ AM/PM to discuss this matter further. Thank you.

Old Town Academy Email Guidelines for Parents

E-mail may be a fast and convenient way for you to send messages, but this may not be the case for many of our teachers. Some teachers read their e-mail messages in the morning before school,
some read them at the end of the day, and some read them during the school day. Many teachers prefer to use the phone to speak directly to parents; and on some topics they are not permitted, by school policy, to use email to communicate.

For these reasons, please remember if you choose to send an e-mail message to a member of our professional staff, **you may not get an immediate reply**. In fact you may not receive an e-mail reply at all, since the staff members will determine how best to contact you: by e-mail, phone, or to schedule a personal conference.

When using e-mail:

1. A signed e-mail permission form must be on file in the OTA office. The permission form will indicate the e-mail address(es) that will be used to communicate with School staff. Only authorized e-mail addresses will be used by OTA faculty and staff to communicate with parents. Please send e-mail messages from an authorized e-mail account.
2. Please *send only non-vital messages* by this medium. For example, do not use e-mail to inform a teacher that your child is not to go home with his/her usual carpool today. A teacher may not have time to read your message in a timely fashion. Instead use the telephone to be sure your message is received and clearly understood.
3. Your child's academic progress, learning expectations, or behavioral issues are best addressed through a telephone conversation or by scheduling a personal conference with your child's teacher. An e-mail message on these matters is not appropriate.
4. Please remember that e-mail is not necessarily confidential. Confidential information should be conveyed by phone or personal contact.
5. Please identify yourself in the subject line of your e-mail message and, if appropriate, the name of your child.
6. For all medical or health concerns, please contact the Office Staff by phone (619-574-6225).
7. Please keep all contacts professional. Jokes, amusing or special stories, chain letters, or commercial solicitations are inappropriate

and reduce valuable teaching time.

8. Mass e-mail to the School staff or the OTA parent/guardian body must be approved by the Executive Director of OTA before sending the e-mail.

The School maintains email accounts for teachers to facilitate parent/teacher communication and internal staff communication. The Executive Director reserves the right to block or filter email messages to staff that are not directly related to School business or to the OTA's educational mission.

Remember that e-mail is a quick way to send a message, but it is not necessarily the best way to get a quick reply.

Old Town Academy K-8 Charter School E-Mail Authorization Form

PARENT/GUARDIAN-TEACHER COMMUNICATION THROUGH E-MAIL:
Although e-mail has become a valuable communication tool, it is important to remember that it is not always a completely secure and confidential method of communications. We would like to make e-mail available as another possible way for parents to communicate with their child's teachers where appropriate. We are, however, concerned about **maintaining privacy laws**, especially as they relate to student records.

We will therefore ask that OTA faculty and staff not send any student information via e-mail unless we have a signed permission form from the parent/guardian. This includes any e-mail addresses that are entered on your enrollment forms. If your email address changes, you are required to fill out and sign an updated form before we send information to the new address.

Student Name/s:

_____

I grant permission for information regarding my child to be sent to me via e-mail, at the following e-mail address(es):

Mother:
Email 1: _____
Email 2: _____

Father:
Email 1: _____
Email 2: _____

Guardian:
Email 1: _____
Email 2: _____

Parent Signature: _____
Date:_____

Please send this completed agreement to the school office.