Email etiquette at TOPS

TOPS is a community that works closely together and thrives on the energy and investment that all of us put into the work. Because we are working on behalf of our children, we all feel passionate about the work we do. At times, this passion has caused difficult communication between members of our community, and these difficulties have been exacerbated by the impersonal nature of email communication. Most members of the TOPS community have come to use email as a regular and central form of communication, and for this reason we offer the following guidelines for email messages about any issues related to our school. By adhering to these guidelines, we can help model respectful communication for our children. Site Council members agree to abide by the following guidelines.

Purpose
♦ We encourage person-to- person or face-to-face communication whenever possible and suggest that email be used primarily for informational purposes such as disseminating information, scheduling meetings or soliciting feedback.

Audience
♦ Email messages should be sent to as few individuals as necessary, and direct responses to one individual should not be sent to multiple recipients; BCC (blind carbon copy) should never be used to conceal recipients. Personal responses to an individual should not be sent to a listserv.

♦ BCC is best used to keep private the email addresses of recipients of large broadcast emails, in which case we suggest that you list no address publicly. The opposite is also true, in order to maintain trust, send to no recipients through BCC when any recipients are publicly listed.

♦ Do not forward personal email to listserves or other groups without the author’s permission.

Content
♦ Be concise with email messages; avoid irrelevancies and multiple subjects.

♦ Avoid “flaming,” the expression of extreme emotion or opinions in an email message. Never insult or criticize third parties.

♦ Keep in mind that all email messages can be forwarded to others, and are public and permanent.

♦ The best way to end an email dialogue that makes you feel uncomfortable is to pick up the phone or seek out the individual in person.

Organization
♦ Stick to the subject listed in the header of the email; if a series of responses has developed and changed subject, change the subject listed in the header. Use descriptive subjects that help guide recipients to the action expected (i.e. include “FYI” or “Please respond today” as part of the subject).

♦ Fill in the recipient addresses for your message only when you have finished writing the message; this way, you will avoid sending your message before you are confident you are saying what you intend to say.

Source: Many of these guidelines are based on Yale University Library training materials, http://www.library.yale.edu/training/netiquette/