

Your E-mails From Class Are Not Private

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The Oklahoma Attorney General has stated that e-mails can be subject to the Open Records Act and therefore open to the public. Moreover, it has long been established that computers at schools are district property and are not for the personal use of the employee.

Members should carefully read district e-mail and Internet policies in order to find out if it is permissible to use the school's computer and network for personal use, or if employee are only allowed to use the system for school business.

Whether you are using a school computer for personal reasons or school-related business, a superintendent can look at any e-mail you send or receive on a school computer and can also find out every Internet site you have accessed.

If you are using a school computer or laptop at home, the computer is still the district's property and subject to complete review. Even if you are using your own personal computer, at home or at school, but you are using the district's networking system to access the Internet, the district may have the right to look at any e-mail or Web site that was accessed through the school's computer network.

It is important to note that even after an e-mail or Internet site has been deleted a record of each e-mail or Internet address may still be stored on the computers hard drive or maintained in the district's central network server.

Not all Internet problems relate to offensive or questionable material. A teacher who has 10,000 hits on a Beanie Babie© site, or has sent and received 5,000 e-mails, may be subject to allegations of using the computer too much during class time.

Additionally, before sending an e-mail to a student or parent, make sure school policy allows this type of communication. It is advisable to only discuss school-related materials and refrain from addressing personal matters when communicating with parents and students via e-mail. Furthermore, there is no guarantee that the person on the other side of the e-mail is actually the student or parent they purport to be.

For maintaining student privacy, please make sure you are sending an e-mail to the correct person and no one else has access to that correspondence.

Remember, prior to using any school computer or network server for personal e-mails or Internet surfing, always review school policies to find out what is allowed and what is prohibited.