

The School District of Osceola County
E-mail (and Other Electronic Communications) Retention Guidelines

There is no specific retention period for e-mail, because it is not a record in itself but merely a means of transmission. You can't simply fill a storage box with "e-mail" and assign a single retention to the box. You must retain e-mail based on the *content* of the message. See below for the explanation of electronic communications contained in Florida Department of State's Records Schedule GS1-SL:

ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATIONS

GS1-SL

There is no single retention period that applies to all electronic messages or communications, whether they are sent by e-mail, instant messaging, text messaging (such as SMS, Blackberry PIN, etc.), multimedia messaging (such as MMS), chat messaging, social networking (such as Facebook, Twitter, etc.), or any other current or future electronic messaging technology or device. **Retention periods are determined by the content, nature, and purpose of records, and are set based on their legal, fiscal, administrative, and historical values, regardless of the format in which they reside or the method by which they are transmitted.** Electronic communications, as with records in other formats, can have a variety of purposes and relate to a variety of program functions and activities. The retention of any particular electronic message will generally be the same as the retention for records in any other format that document the same program function or activity. For instance, electronic communications might fall under a CORRESPONDENCE series, a BUDGET RECORDS series, or one of numerous other series, depending on the content, nature, and purpose of each message. Electronic communications that are created primarily to communicate information of short-term value, such as messages reminding employees about scheduled meetings or appointments, might fall under the "TRANSITORY MESSAGES" series.

E-mail falls into two categories: transitory messages and messages which have a specific retention. Below is the description for transitory messages, taken from Records Schedule GS1-SL:

TRANSITORY MESSAGES

GS1-SL

Item #146

This record series consists of records that are created primarily to communicate information of short-term value. **"Transitory" refers to short-term value based upon the content and purpose of the message, not the format or technology used to transmit it.** Examples of transitory messages include, but are not limited to, reminders to employees about scheduled meetings or appointments; most telephone messages (whether in paper, voice mail, or other electronic form); announcements of office events such as holiday parties or group lunches; and recipient copies of announcements of agency-sponsored events such as exhibits, lectures, workshops, etc. Transitory messages are not intended to formalize or perpetuate knowledge and do not set policy, establish guidelines or procedures, certify a transaction, or become a receipt.

E-mail that is **transitory** can be deleted after read. This should be done daily to avoid filling In-Boxes with unnecessary clutter. Examples of transitory messages include:

- Reminders for meetings or announcements regarding daily activities
- Phone message from the front desk
- A co-worker asking you to meet for lunch, or after work hours

Retention specific e-mails are those created in connection with District business and are intended to perpetuate, communicate, or formalize knowledge. Many of these are public records. They must be retained according to the District records retention manual, based on guidelines established by Florida Department of State. These e-mails should be printed or stored electronically and kept for the required amount of time. Most student information is confidential, but must still meet retention requirements. (These are not normally filed in student cumulative folders.) Some examples include:

- Information regarding a student's final grade – Retain until posted to permanent record.
- Discipline (Major offense) – Retain 3 school years. (Record copy should be with administration.)
- Information Request Records relating to answering inquiries from the public, including general agency information – Retain 1 fiscal year, provided applicable audits have been released.

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Some guidelines:

Think before you write, and again before you push the “send” button.

Don't put anything in an e-mail that you wouldn't want to see on the front page of the local paper.

Consider making a call, or having a face-to-face conversation with the person you are e-mailing.

Remember that you don't have to respond to an individual via e-mail just because they contacted you that way.

The District has the right to monitor all e-mail use.

Always keep in mind that you, the user, are ultimately responsible for your e-mail content and conduct.

Following are some examples of records possibly contained in e-mails:

A secretary may have e-mails related to: payroll, attendance and leave, general correspondence and memoranda, calendar, and the selection process for student achievement and teacher awards.

A teacher may have e-mails related to: course information, class schedules, student class work, discipline, calendar, student attendance, grants, and the selection process for student achievement and teacher awards. *The School Board attorney recommends that teachers not communicate with parents via e-mail. Our Network Acceptable Use policy (School Board Rule 8.60+) states that sending student identifying information, via e-mail, over the network system, may be done only when the sender and receiver are members of the District's FirstClass e-mail.*

In determining retention requirements, you must first determine whether you hold the record copy or a duplicate.

Record copy versus duplicate – in most cases the originator of the record holds the record copy (the one on which retention is based), while receiving individuals hold duplicates. For externally generated records, normally the office that performs the last administrative act holds the record copy. Most duplicates have an OSA retention – retain until obsolete, superseded, or administrative value is lost.

If you have the record copy, you must file it with the item(s) to which it relates (paper or electronic).

If you receive an e-mail, or are cc'd on a message that is sent out to a group, the sender is required to retain the record.

If you are working on a project with others (for example, a grant) and sharing records, make sure that any information sent via e-mail is retained properly. Information should be stored in one file, which becomes the record copy. This requires that all involved in the project contribute to the record file so that it is complete. Each participant may also keep their own file (duplicate – OSA retention).

Remember that while e-mail provides us with a quick way to share information over long distances, it also carries the responsibility of using and managing it wisely. **Again, you are responsible for your e-mail content and conduct.**