

From: [Superintendent](#)
To: [EPS.MailList](#)
Subject: Pictures in Outlook -- How that came about and why
Date: Monday, February 10, 2014 7:01:29 AM
Importance: High

Dear Colleague:

I've never been one to count the number of days we've been in school, or the number of days left in the year. But I do know when the mid-point has arrived because that's when SOSR season begins, and a few high school kids usually bring up the subject of semester finals. Also, about this time of year I cross the 150 mark if I'm on track to meet my school visit goals (as of Friday, it was 156). During recent visits, a few folks have mentioned being surprised that their pictures suddenly appeared in our Outlook emails in November and December. Whoops. That shouldn't have happened – being surprised, I mean.

It was not supposed to be a surprise, and I am sorry if it was a surprise to you.

Well over a year ago I had a conversation with our employee association presidents about significant changes to accompany building our Community Resource Center. Among those changes were the new website, technology platform and Outlook upgrades.

As we prepared to convert 10,000 pages of web site information to a new format, I insisted that our photos be included so students, parents, and others can know who we are when they contact us. I asked that our Instructional Technology team implement the staff photo feature in Outlook in a way that keeps the pictures *inside* our district Outlook system – to verify that emails sent *from* our system to addresses *outside* our system do NOT include the photos. I wanted the photos to appear in our Outlook system so *we* can connect with each other.

Other high functioning, collaborative organizations have found that visual connections help build relationships and foster collaboration among staff and with customers. At my request, our IT staff researched how to make that happen across our 39 square miles and nearly 30 different worksites; connecting you and more than 2,000 of your colleagues who work together on behalf of students.

It was my responsibility to ensure you were aware of these adjustments – all of which are designed to increase our connectivity with parents and among all of our schools and support offices.

For those of us who remember the floppy drives of the '80s, the term "high tech and high touch" is familiar; for those who've grown up with the Web, let me assure you, the meaning is still golden. We have incredible technology that can connect us and support our work and our students, but technology can be a very cold, impersonal medium. A warm, smiling face in an email makes such a huge difference to me. I

hope it does to kids, parents, and you, too.

In time, even more technological connectivity will become the “new normal” in our schools and support facilities. For example, many staff are already using Skype in their personal lives and as a way to connect students across the state, nation and world. Some of the Community Resource Center (CRC) meeting rooms are equipped with hardware that will make it possible to Skype (or use whatever software is available in the future) with schools, and I expect our staff work computers will be equipped with conferencing software at every work station. Eventually, schools’ main conference rooms will have video conferencing technology that will reduce our need to travel among sites.

Communications systems, security systems and electronic “badges” to open doors are being tested here at the CRC before they are rolled out to all district facilities – depending upon the availability of Capital Facilities Bond funds. Some of the security system costs for schools were included in the 2010 capital levy. Video security systems that meet the standards of the CRC testing phase will be installed in schools beginning this spring. Future expansion and replacement of aging security technology infrastructure is part of what district voters will approve or reject when they vote on the Capital Facilities Bond on Feb. 11.

In our personal lives today we make choices to balance the need for security with today’s technological tools designed to connect us. We teach students about being careful in cyberspace, and we make our own choices about whether to have Facebook or Twitter accounts. (Yes, I have both, and am adept at neither.)

As a public employee, you have a right to expect that your supervisors are also attentive to your safety – while also respecting our organizational obligations to be open, transparent, accountable and accessible to the public. My decision to include photos in Outlook was carefully considered and discussed with bargaining group representatives, although I have to say, that was over a year ago.

I was then – and am today – convinced that these visual images help build cross-district connections and reinforce that we are indeed “one” in our work and our mission. I’ve heard from those who agree and those who don’t. Friday, during a walkabout, I heard from Instructional Technology staff that a dozen or so teachers at one of our elementary schools can’t wait to have their picture retakes uploaded in Outlook so they can more meaningfully connect with peers, parents and students. Yes, we’ve done some retakes for folks who don’t like the current picture, and we’ve blocked a few pictures where unusual personal safety risks exist.

In addition to the Outlook upgrade with photos, you may have noticed other adjustments to make it easier for our public to access their schools. Our new website was designed with feedback from staff, from community and from parents. Its consistent design and consistent information make it easier for staff and the public to find the same information about each school or department in the same manner. Our school, departmental and district pages have a similar look and feel so all users

innately know they are on an Everett Public School web page – and that this is a professional, high functioning organization prepared for the 21st century ... not the 20th century. The new, forward-looking visual imagery in district emails is planned to be consistent, professional, and easily recognizable as a “district” message.

School board meeting information is available on line in BoardDocs, organized in a consistent format with consistent naming protocols. This is done not just because it looks better, but because when a staff member or member of the public “searches” for information on BoardDocs, we want that information to come up consistently and make their search easier. In the near future, you’ll also be able to view board meeting video recordings using the BoardDocs system.

District advisory council meetings, among them, the Fiscal Advisory Council, Capital Facilities Advisory Council, Equity and Access Advisory Council, and the Presidents’ Council, were the first district-wide advisory groups that I established in 2009-10. Their inclusion of staff, parents, community and students has opened district processes and engaged people in new and expanded ways.

The Fiscal Advisory Council and Capital Facilities Advisory Council work in particular was highlighted in a Jan. 5, [Daily Herald editorial endorsing the Capital Facilities Bond](#). This is a district that does difficult work in extraordinarily innovative, collaborative and open ways. That kind of work – and our skill at connecting with each other and with our public – will continue to build community support and nurture partnerships on behalf of our students.

When you see me “learning by walking around” during my school or support site visits, please say hello, and share something you think I should know about your work and how we can connect with one another even more effectively over time.

I appreciate that some staff have brought questions about the Outlook photos to my attention and given me this opportunity to share how I believe 21st century tools support 21st century collaboration, creativity, communication, innovation, and problem solving for our community and students.

I also say “thank you” and “congratulations” to everyone who was involved in producing the district’s annual *Celebration of Innovation* last week. The event gets better and better every year, and I’ve heard nothing but praise for dozens of interactive displays and demonstrations of the 21st century learning excitement happening in our classrooms. In case you’ve not seen it, the district’s homepage includes a link to the video documentation and “man on the street” interviews Cascade High School teacher Scott Shafer and his students conducted during the celebration. You can also see a rotating gallery of photos from that night under the “Students” tab on the homepage.

Please consider this a virtual “fist bump” and “high five” for the interconnected and collaborative work you are doing – and for this year’s learning successes – those we’ve reached and those ahead in the months before us.

Warm wishes,
Gary