JACKSON
PUBLIC SCHOOLS



Jackson Public Schools Customer Service Handbook

Jackson Public School District

In our school district, exceptional customer service isn't the exception—it's the standard.

Quality customer service in education is not just about answering questions; it's about creating connections, building trust, and ensuring every scholar, parent, and staff member feels valued and heard.

Please use this customer service guide as a foundation for providing quality customer service to our parents, scholars, staff, and community. By following the suggestions in this guide, employees will contribute to excellence within the school or department as representatives of Jackson Public Schools.

Vision, Mission, Core Values

Vision

We prepare scholars to achieve globally, to contribute locally, and to be fulfilled individually.

Mission

We develop scholars through world-class learning experiences to attain an exceptional knowledge base, critical and relevant skill sets, and the necessary dispositions for great success.

Core Values

At Jackson Public Schools, we believe in the importance of equity, excellence, a growth mindset, relationships, relevance, and a positive and respectful culture.

Equity

Our vision of equity, put simply, is "all means all." We ensure equity by celebrating each scholar's individuality, interests, abilities, and talents, providing each scholar in each school with equitable access to high-quality instruction, courses, and resources, and holding high expectations for all scholars to graduate college-ready and career-minded. Similarly, we recognize and value the individual abilities, experience, and talents of our staff, providing all staff with equitable access to opportunities for development and growth; and ensuring that such opportunities are provided through clear and transparent processes.

Excellence

High expectations for our scholars help to prepare them for college and career paths. High expectations from and for all adults foster ownership, consistency, and transparency. Every member of our district performs with attention to detail and the quality that each task demands in order to achieve great outcomes.

Growth Mindset

Our leaders—scholars, and staff—thrive in environments where belief in their abilities is affirmed. Everyone in the organization embraces the idea that effort and perseverance lead to success.

Relationships

It is essential to develop relationships through mutual respect of culture, social context, and community. This allows us to create a community of safety, trust, productive vulnerability, and genuine connection as we celebrate successes and value opportunities for constructive feedback.

Relevance

Scholars experience relevant education that is engaging, motivating, and inspiring, leading to a lifelong commitment to learning. Our scholars must learn to connect with each other, the larger community, and the 21st-century world, ultimately developing agency to contribute to positive change in Jackson, Mississippi, and the world.

Positive & Respectful Culture

Scholars and staff thrive in learning environments where growth and achievement are the highest priorities and climates are safe, positive, and respectful. These environments engage and excite all scholars, leaving them hungry for more knowledge. All adults contribute to a positive and respectful culture allowing them to experience more productivity, increased retention, and joy at work.

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Best Practices:
Tips for Excellent Customer Service

JPSD employees help set the tone for the school and/or department. They are to be knowledgeable, supportive, encouraging, empathetic, and responsible for the atmosphere within our schools and/or departments. As front-line responders for parents, staff, scholars, and the community, employees are looked to for answers. Representatives are expected to be:

Knowledgeable: Being knowledgeable about the school, department, staff, events, etc., will enhance the ability to provide exceptional service.

- If you do not know an answer to a question, ask someone who does so you will know for next time. Tell the customer, "I do not have that answer, but I will find someone who does." If you need to disconnect the call to get the answer, tell the customer, "I will get back to you." Collect their name, call back number, and email address so you can follow up. If you cannot answer the question and need to transfer the call, say, "Let me get you connected with someone who can answer that question. I am going to transfer you. If, for some reason, the transfer does not go through, you can reach them directly at_____."

- Cross-training with the people in your school or department is a good way of increasing the knowledge base and allows you to help a greater number of people.

Supportive: Parents and guardians may be seeking information from staff—such as details about tardies, grades, or opportunities to speak with administrators—on behalf of their children. At times, they may be unfamiliar with how processes work within the district and will benefit from interacting with someone who is patient, knowledgeable, and understanding.

Encouraging: Encouraging parents and guardians to feel comfortable asking for assistance goes a long way. They should be encouraged to reach out to the district for correct answers.



Best Practices:
Tips for Excellent Service Continued

Empathetic: Practice empathy and patience. As employees, it's not possible to always know what each parent/guardian is going through on the other end of the phone. It's important to be responsible for our actions, and try to help make their situation better.

Each staff member is responsible for creating an environment that is inviting and family-friendly in all district facilities. Below are a few ways to establish this environment.

- Be responsible for the atmosphere. A bad interaction with a team member can result in a negative impression of the entire Jackson Public School District.
- Maintain a professional and helpful attitude at all times.
- Assume responsibility for assisting the customer or directing the customer to the appropriate person.
- Be knowledgeable about the school, departments, staff, and events happening at the school or in the district.
- Cross-train in the main communication area so employees can respond to the largest number of inquiries possible.
- Always maintain a professional, helpful, and friendly attitude. Do not let a sour mood or difficult day come through the phone. If necessary, put the negative feelings aside to help the customer. You can brighten someone's day with excellent customer service, and you will also brighten your own.
- Remain positive when the person requesting help is in a bad mood or not getting the answers they need.
- Make eye contact and repeat their request so they know you are listening to them. Example: "Just to reiterate, you said this/you are wanting this...is that correct?"
- Remember to smile. Its impact can be felt even over the phone. "How you think about the customer influences how you respond to them." – Marilyn Suttle, Customer Relations Author
- Treat all customers with dignity and respect.

Remember, we want to leave customers with a positive view of JPSD.

Every Caller: A Valued Customer

When answering the telephone, please remember these three things:

- Treat the customer with respect and courtesy.
- Strive to understand by listening and addressing the purpose of the customer's call.
- Remember, to all callers, **YOU** are Jackson Public School District!

Who are the customers?

- Parents
- Students
- Vendors
- Outside Agencies
- Other JPSD employees

Often people think of "customers" only as patrons who are paying for a service. In reality, our customer is the community and anyone who relies on us for service.



Telephone Courtesy

SMILE! You only get one chance at a first impression. Callers will form a positive or negative impression of you and the school or office in less than 10 seconds.

<u>Treat the caller with the same courtesy and respect with which you wish to be treated.</u>



A representative's attitude is communicated by:

- Voice
- Tone
- Pitch
- Helpfulness
- Courteous Language
- Attentiveness
- Positive and Proactive Communication

A good last impression is as important as a good first impression. End the conversation with a smile and on a positive note. Let callers know that you are glad they called and are looking forward to hearing from them again. Reassure them and reiterate any names and telephone numbers.





Answering Phone Calls

Promptness Counts
Telephone lines should be answered by the third ring.

Greeting
Be sure to answer the telephone with a smile.

School or Department
Keep it simple! The name of the office should be descriptive yet brief.

Your Name
State your name so the caller may reach you if disconnected or if the caller needs additional information from you specifically.

Offer Assistance
Offer a greeting, your name, and assistance.
Official JPS Greeting: **"Hello, and thank you for calling (department or school name here). This is (your name here). How may I assist you?"**

Ending the Call
End the call on a positive note, such as, "Thank you for your call," or "Have a great day."

Tips to Remember:
- Establish a schedule that will ensure that someone is available to answer calls if there is a need to leave the desk.
- Speak at a normal pace (not too fast or too slow).
- Use proper grammar and avoid slang and endearing terms such as "honey" or "sweetie."
- Avoid chewing gum or eating while speaking on the telephone.
- Provide training to substitutes, students, and new employees if they are assigned to answer telephones.
- If a caller asks a question, take the time to give him or her a clear answer or response.
- If the call is going on and on with no resolution, this is also an opportunity to take a break. Ask to put them on hold. Take a 10-second breather and return to the call with a fresh smile.
- During the call, use the caller's name to add a sense of connection.
- Promptly respond to voicemails/messages. Each staff member will return calls and emails within one to two business days. If a response cannot be provided in the allotted time, the caller will be notified and given an estimated time of response.



Placing a Caller on Hold

If you need to place a caller on hold, **be sure to first ask** if he/she AGREES to hold. Allow the caller to answer before you push the hold button. If the caller does not want to be placed on hold, give them the option to leave a message.

Examples of asking a caller if you can place them on hold:

- "May I place you on a brief hold?"
- "May I ask who's calling?" (Check and see if the person that they are calling for is available).

Tell the caller why they need to be placed on hold.

- "May I place you on hold while I check for you?" (If the caller asks if a certain person is in).
- Make sure the caller knows you have not forgotten about them. After 30 seconds to a minute, get back on the line and give them an update. If it's going to take you more than 2 minutes to get an answer, ask them if you can take a message and return their call.

If you are asked to screen calls for someone else, use the phrase "May I ask who's calling?," "What is the call regarding?," or "May I place you on a brief hold as I verify if (he or she) is available?"

When picking up a call from a hold or a transfer, thank the caller for holding.

- "Please hold, while I transfer your call."

End the call with: "Thank you for your patience; have a great day."



Referring a Caller to a Different Location

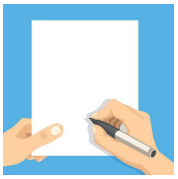
If a caller has reached the wrong office, make every effort to re-direct the caller to the appropriate location. When referring the caller to another school or department, follow these steps:

- Provide the caller with the telephone number and/or extension. If possible, offer to transfer the call.
- Remain on the line during the transfer so that you can inform the other party of the needs of the caller.
- When referring the caller to another location, make every effort to do so in a timely manner.

When the caller requests information that you can readily obtain from another office or person, make every effort to do so. This will save the caller the time and frustration of making several calls.

The caller will long remember and appreciate receiving outstanding customer service!





Taking Messages

If a caller is trying to reach an employee who is unavailable, offer the caller one of these three options:

- To speak with someone else who can assist
- To hold
- To leave a message
- Whenever possible, give the caller complete contact information. Include their name, phone number with extension, and email address. Include available hours if known.

If the person being called will be absent for an extended period of time, it may be best to refer the caller to someone else. For example:

"Peter is at a meeting this afternoon and will return to the office in the morning. May I take a message for you?"

OR

"Tom is out of the office and will return on the 23rd. May I refer you to someone else who may assist you?"

Refrain from using the statements below when an employee is unavailable.

- He went to the restroom.
- She is out to lunch.
- He went home early.
- She's at the doctor's office.
- He's on break.
- She has not come in yet.
- He's out sick.

Instead, use a more professional phrase such as "is away from her desk," "away from the office at this time."

Some administrators prefer their messages be sent to them electronically. Discuss this option with the supervisor or administrator before using it.

Taking Messages Continued

If you use a message pad, we recommend one with the capacity to make a duplicate copy.

All messages should include the following information:

- The name of the message recipient (first and last name)
- The name of the caller or visitor (first and last name)
- Location or place of business of the caller or visitor
- The date
- The time
- The actual message
- Preferred contact along with their phone number and/or email address

Indicate any other specifics (e.g. call back, returning the call, was in to see you, will call again, urgent, please call immediately, etc.).

Sign the name on the message.

Responses will be timely. Each staff member will return calls and emails within one to two business days. If a response cannot be provided in the allotted time, the caller will be notified and given an estimated time of response.

If you are taking a second message, take the telephone number again and label the message “#2.”

Print or write legibly.

Verify the spelling of the caller's first and last name and the telephone number to ensure accuracy.

If the person leaves more than one telephone number, be sure to write on the message the times when the person can be reached at those numbers.



Responding to an Upset Customer

Allow the caller time to fully explain the reason for their call and why they are upset.

If the caller is using profanity, verbally attacking, or threatening you, be calm but firm. Explain that you want to assist with the problem and state that they must refrain from using profanity.

Restate your understanding of the caller's concerns in their own words to ensure you understand why they are upset. For example, after the caller has expressed his or her position, you might say, "I understand that this is very upsetting. What I hear you saying is____. Is that accurate?"

Once the caller says "yes" or agrees that you understand the problem, offer assistance. Resolve the concerns or refer the caller to someone who can resolve the concern. If practical, stay on the line with the caller until you are sure the concern is being addressed by someone who can resolve it.

Agree on a plan of action. Do not agree to or promise to do something you cannot deliver.

If you must refer the caller to someone else, provide the person receiving the call with the background information you received from the caller.

If the call is disconnected for any reason, give the caller the direct number and their name in another way.

Be sure to follow up as soon as possible.





Using Voicemail

When Setting Up the Voicemail

Identify yourself and your school or office; keep it short and simple.

When recording the greeting, speak clearly and slowly.

- For example: "Hello, you have reached (your name) with (the school or office). I am not available at this time. Please leave your name and the best number. Forimmediate assistance, you may call (name) at (number). Thank you."

Check messages frequently and return calls promptly.

When providing several options in your outgoing message, make sure that all the options you provide are valid.

Always give the caller the option to speak to a live person.

When Leaving a Voicemail Message

Speak clearly and slowly.

Identify yourself and the school office.

State what the call is regarding.

Always leave the telephone number and the time when you can be reached.

- For example: "This is (the name) from (the school or office). Please call me at (the number) regarding (the concern). I can be reached at (indicate the best time to reach you). Thank you."
- There is no harm in stating the name and phone number twice, and this can be a big help to those who are trying to write down the information.

Best Practices for Supervisors

Keep the staff well informed. Each school and department should develop a procedure to ensure that those assigned to answer the telephone are properly informed when other staff members are unavailable to receive calls.

Communication with staff assigned to answer the telephone needs to be ongoing. Staff that are assigned to answer the telephone should be informed when they are expecting an important call, unable to take calls, or when they will be in meetings.

Specific whereabouts and return times of staff should be clearly communicated to those assigned to answer the telephone so that they are equipped with accurate information to offer excellent customer service.





Email Etiquette

Email is a widely used and highly effective form of business communication. Due to the sheer volume of messages being read and written, we may be more prone to making embarrassing errors. These mistakes can have unintended consequences. Following these tips may help you avoid those errors.

Nothing is Confidential

- Golden Rule of Email – Would you want to see this in the newspaper or on social media? If not, do not put it in an email. Sometimes, a phone call is a better option.
- A basic guideline is to assume that others will see what you wrote.
- Do not write anything that would be harmful to you or hurtful to others.
- Do not reply when you are angry or upset.
- Remember, you lose tone, inflection of speech, and body language when using written communication. If you are concerned about how the email might be interpreted, have someone else proofread it for you.

Include a clear, direct subject line. People often decide whether to open an email based on what is in the subject line. Examples of subject lines:

- Jackson Public Schools in the News - FYI
- Decision Needed - Please Reply
- Contract Attached - For the Records
- For Action - Deadline of January 1, 2050
- School Site Council - Meeting Date Change
- Question About the Presentation
- Parent Concern - Please Follow Up

Keep the fonts, colors, and sizes classic.

- The emails should be easy for others to read.
- Generally, it is best to use 10 or 12-point type and an easy-to-read font such as Arial, Calibri, or Time New Roman.
- Black is the safest color choice.

Use a professional greeting

- Each greeting should show respect for others and use courtesy titles, like Mr., Mrs., or Dr., if necessary.
- Each situation will need to be evaluated on its own.

Email Etiquette Continued

Keep it brief.

- Be concise. Try to keep the email to about 25 lines or less.

Do not type in all CAPS.

- That is considered yelling or reflects a shouting emphasis.
- If you bold the type, know that you are bolding the statement, and it will be taken that way by the other party. A good example of items to bold would be a deadline or meeting date within the body of the email. This will assist the reader in finding the important dates.

Think twice before hitting "reply all."

- Refrain from hitting "reply all" unless you really think everyone on the list needs to receive the response. No one wants to read a string of emails from 20 people that do not add anything relevant to the conversation. (Do not reply to everyone to say, thank you.)
- As the writer, you can restrict the receiver from being able to "reply all" by adding the receiving email to the BCC line. They will not be able to reply to anyone else that is in the BCC line. They will be able to reply to anyone who is listed in the TO or CC section.
- Think about the reasons for adding addresses TO, CC, and BCC.

Always end the emails with a closure.

- Examples include "Thank you," "Sincerely," or "Best regards," much as you would in a standard business letter. This can also be included in the signature line.

Utilize the Jackson Public Schools template for the email signature line. Include thefollowing information:



- Your first and last name
- Job title
- School or department
- Your office phone number
- Your school or department website link
- Your other important links that are specific to your department or school site



Using an Out of Office Message

Employees who will be out of the office for two or more days should create an '"Out of Office" message. Include the following information in the out-of-office responses:

- The dates of the absence.
- The date you will return to the office.
- Whether or not you will be checking emails while out of the office.
- An estimated time when you will be able to respond to messages.
- An emergency contact name.

E-Mail - Example:

I will be out of the office starting (starting date) through (end date) and returning (date of return). During this period, I will have limited access to my email.

If you need immediate assistance during my absence, please contact (contact's name) at (contact's email address). Otherwise, I will respond to the emails as soon as possible upon my return.

Warm Regards,
[Your Name]

Voicemail - Example:

Hello,

You've reached Stacey Smith in the HR Department. I am currently out of the office from December 7th to December 11th. I will not have access to email during this time.

If you need immediate assistance, please call my HR team at 559-591-0000. Otherwise, please leave a message. Please clearly state your name and phone number, and I will return the call on December 14th.

Thank you.

ALL CUSTOMERS WILL BE TREATED WITH DIGNITY AND RESPECT

JPS Representatives will accomplish that by:

- Creating an environment that is inviting and family-friendly in all district facilities.
- Acknowledging and greeting customers, parents, and students with “Good morning” or “Good afternoon” in a friendly manner, even if they are not specifically here to see you.
- Communicating in a friendly and professional manner even though it may be a tough day.
- Being courteous and helpful during customer interactions no matter how we are feeling.
- Assuming the responsibility of assisting the customer or directing the customer to the appropriate person. For example, making phone calls to obtain the appropriate person who can help the customer if you cannot.
- Ensuring that the information provided to customers is accurate and consistent, even if it requires a follow-up contact.
- Always greeting customers with a genuine smile and friendly attitude.
- Watching body language, facial expressions, and tone of voice while greeting customers.
- Making eye contact when speaking to and assisting customers.
- Being patient and adaptable- making customers feel more comfortable and speaking to them in their native language if possible.
- Having the ability to read customers as they arrive by watching and listening for subtle clues. Observe cues related to the customer’s current mood, patience level, personality, and language to better assist them.
- Keeping a calm and understanding manner by relating to their problem to help solve their dilemma or situation.
- Putting food/drink aside to assist a customer in a professional manner. Also, avoid chewing gum or sucking on candy during customer interactions.

Notes