



## MEDIA RELATIONS GUIDELINES

These guidelines cover the basics of how to handle contact with the news media. They also provide information on news media access to students in CCCOE programs.

It is the philosophy of the Contra Costa County Office of Education to be open and responsive to information requests from the news media. Public awareness of our agency and its work is vital to our accountability and success. The news media are a major vehicle for communicating with our public.

CCCOE's Communications Department is designated as the agency's principal liaison with the news media. The Chief Communications Officer acts as the County Office spokesperson. Among its responsibilities, the department:

- Ensures that CCCOE responds to news media inquiries in a timely, honest, and cooperative way;
- Works with schools and departments to ensure that media relations issues are handled appropriately.

The Department has expertise in media relations and weighs each contact to determine the best way to provide information:

In some cases, a Department representative may act as the official media spokesperson on a given issue.

In other cases, CCCOE managers and administrators (assistant superintendents, directors, principals) will be called on to act as spokespersons because they have the needed information, knowledge, experience, or perspective. Department staff can work with designated spokespersons to prepare for media interviews as needed. Communications staff are always available to provide support, consultation, and training in situations involving contact with news media.

### When the Media Call You

A reporter or other news media representative may call your office or site for a number of reasons, for example:

- To get information for a story about CCCOE or one of its programs or schools;
- To get information about a CCCOE student or staff member;
- To get information/comments for an education news story

### When a news media representative calls your office/site:

All staff should act with courtesy and professionalism when responding to the news media. This interaction may be the

reporter's first impression of CCCOE and may be reflected in resulting news coverage.

Try to take a media call right away or return the call as soon as possible. If you can't do this, refer the media representative to the CCCOE Communications Department at 925-942-3420. (We don't want news stories to say that we were unresponsive or unavailable for comment - which is what could happen if we don't return the call!)

When answering or returning media calls, determine:

- The reporter's name, media outlet, phone, e-mail
- The reporter's deadline
- The subject/intent of the story
- What the reporter wants - information, interview, photo/videotaping, site visit

When referring the media to the Communications Department, please don't say you are not allowed to talk to a reporter or have to get permission to do so. Instead, tell a reporter: "Our Office policy is to refer all media inquiries to our Communications Department. You can reach them at 925-942-3420."

Don't feel compelled to answer questions on the spot. It is always beneficial to prepare for an interview to provide accurate information. Reschedule the interview for a mutually agreeable time so you can gather information and prepare a response.

Work with the Communications Department to determine the appropriate response.

Inform the Communications Department as soon as possible if and when you have contact with the news media.

Ensure that the reporter's deadline is met.

## Media Relations Guidelines-continued

### When the Media Show Up

A reporter or camera crew may show up unannounced at a school or site. This is most likely to occur in crisis situations at a school or in the community. Or it could occur if the media learn about an event or activity at your site from another source.

When dealing with reporters and camera crews who may show up unannounced, use the same general guidelines for handling media calls. Even if a reporter is on your site, you do not have to answer questions on the spot. Nor do you have to provide unfettered access to your site. News media representatives have certain rights of access to public schools for legitimate news-gathering purposes. At the same time, school officials have the authority to deny such access when they believe the media's presence is disruptive or interferes with classes, other activities or the safe operation of your school.

CCCOE encourages site administrators to make every effort to accommodate the reasonable requests of legitimate news media for access to our schools and departments so long as that access does not disrupt the peaceful conduct of educational activities.

### Guidelines for Staff Contact with Media to Promote Student Events

- First step: If you have an event you believe to be media worthy, check with the principal or immediate supervisor for approval prior to contacting the Communications Department for media coverage.
- Contact the Communications Department for assistance in contacting media. The Communications Department works with the local media on a regular basis and can coordinate all press procedures and releases. There are also other opportunities that we may be able to assist you with. 925-942-3420; 925-942-3429 [tkoehne@cccoc.k12.ca.us](mailto:tkoehne@cccoc.k12.ca.us); [jlance@cccoc.k12.ca.us](mailto:jlance@cccoc.k12.ca.us)

#### *Examples of strong news stories include:*

- Unique or unusual programs or special events
- Expert commentary on and interpretation of current events (especially if it is a new or controversial issue)
- Interesting or unusual student/staff stories/profiles with strong human interest

#### *Examples of weaker stories include:*

- Conferences, guest speakers, and visitors
- Programs/events that are not unique – unless they represent an interesting trend
- Routine awards/appointments

\* The Communications Department can determine which media outlets might be interested in the story and how the information should be conveyed.

Some news items may be more appropriate for publicity through CCCOE-published newsletters, web pages and social media.

### Campus/Staff/Student Access

- Media representatives, like all other visitors, shall register immediately upon entering any school building or grounds when school is in session. A media representative shall always be escorted by an administrator or district/school representative when on school grounds.
- In order to protect the privacy and safety of students, a media representative who wishes to photograph students on school grounds should first make arrangements with the principal or designee. All students shall be checked by the school office to verify that a student has been granted authorization by their parents to be photographed. This stipulation also applies to any directory information about the student: name, grade level and school. **Ensure that any students to be interviewed or photographed have a signed Parent/Guardian Release on file.**
- When interviewing or photographing a student in our special education program, he/she shall not be identified as a special education student without prior, written parent/guardian permission.
- Do not post any photos on your teacher or school website that identifies a student by name without prior parent permission.
- Group photos of students participating in an activity can be posted without obtaining parent permission as long as no individual identifying information is posted along with the photo.
- Please call or email us for assistance. We are here to help share your stories and events!  
Terry Koehne, Chief Communications Officer  
Jonathan Lance, Communications Specialist:  
925-942-3420; 925-942-3429  
Terry Koehne Cell: 925-858-2942  
[tkoehne@cccoc.k12.ca.us](mailto:tkoehne@cccoc.k12.ca.us)/[jlance@cccoc.k12.ca.us](mailto:jlance@cccoc.k12.ca.us)