

CCCOE Media Relations Guidelines

These guidelines cover the basics of how to handle contact with the news media.

These guidelines also provide information on news media access to students in CCCOE programs.

As a public agency, CCCOE has a responsibility 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 Office is designated as the agency's principal liaison with the news media. Among its responsibilities, the office:

- Ensures that CCCOE responds to news media inquiries in a timely, honest, and cooperative way
- Works to increase public awareness about CCCOE by promoting media coverage through news releases, "story pitches," and other strategies

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

In some cases, a Communications Office representative will act as the official media spokesperson on a given issue.

In many – if not most – cases, CCCOE managers and administrators (deputy superintendent, associate superintendents, directors, principals, coordinators) will be called on to act as spokespersons because they have the needed information, experience, expertise or perspective. Communications staff works 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 the news media.

When the Media Call You

A reporter, producer 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 or comments for an education news story

When a news media representative calls your office/site:

All staff should act with courtesy and professionalism when taking calls from the news media. How this call is handled may be the reporter's first impression of CCCOE and may be reflected in any resulting news coverage.

Try to take a media call right away or return the call within 15 minutes. If you can't do this, refer the media representative to the CCCOE Communications Office at 925/942-3420 or 925/942-3330. (We don't want news stories involving CCCOE to say that we were unavailable for comment – which is what could happen if we don't return the call!)

CCCOE Media Relations Guidelines (continued)

When answering or returning the media calls, determine:

The reporter's name, media outlet, phone, fax, 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 Office, please don't say you are not allowed to talk to a reporter or have to get permission to do so. (That would actually violate your constitutional right to free speech!) Instead, tell the reporter: "Our agency policy is to refer all media inquiries to our Communications Office. You can reach them at 925/942-3330."

Don't let a reporter compel you 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 Office to determine the appropriate response.

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

Ensure that the reporter's deadline is met.

When the Media Show Up

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

Additional Considerations:

Even if a reporter is on site, you don't have to answer questions on the spot. Reschedule the interview for a mutually agreeable time so you can gather information and prepare a response.

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 interfering with classes or other school activities.

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

However, CCCOE students who are under the jurisdiction of the Juvenile Court and/or supervision of the Probation Department cannot be interviewed, photographed, or filmed --- even on a confidential basis – without prior approval. (See Guidelines on Media Access to Students in CCCOE Programs.)

CCCOE Media Relations Guidelines (continued)

Special education students have a legal right to maintain confidentiality as to the nature of their disability. Members of the media should be requested not to reveal the nature of a student's disability in any news coverage. Ensure that any students to be interviewed or photographed have a signed CCCOE release form on file.

Mind your manners. Be courteous. Be friendly. But also remember that just as you are on the job, so is the reporter.

The reporter, no matter how congenial or affirming, is a colleague in the world of work; doing the work he or she is paid to do. Reporters have three objectives in an interview: facts, context, and quotes. Everything you say and do – including body language, offhand jokes, and so on – may be observed and reported on by the media representative, who is simply looking for ways to do his/her best job: To make the story “come alive” for the audience. Be aware.

Don't educate. The reporter's job is similar to that of a building contractor. He or she is expected to construct something whole and complete using a variety of resources and tools. CCCOE's input to a story is usually just one corner of the foundation, or perhaps one of the timbers. **Don't offer to teach the reporter everything about an issue;** you run the risks of unintentionally:

- MISleading/MISinforming the reporter.
- MISunderstanding the questions asked of you (this often occurs when you speak outside your area of expertise or authority). and
- Being MISunderstood by the reporter.

When You Want to Call the Media

When you believe you have a positive news story to share with the public, contact the Communications Office. The office coordinates CCCOE's media contacts and is the **only CCCOE department authorized to distribute news releases or hold news conferences.**

Please do not call a reporter directly without first consulting with the Communications Office.

Contact Communications at least one week in advance of events you want to publicize.

A communications specialist will work with you to gather information and determine if and how the news media should be contacted. The specialist will use measures similar to those used by editors and reporters to determine if your story is newsworthy, for example:

Is it about something new/unusual/a first? Is this a new approach to solving problems? Is this a new way of doing things?

Is this story interesting and relevant to the public who reads the newspaper, listens to the radio or watches TV? Editors and reporters will want to know why their readers, listeners, and viewers should care about the story – not why it's important to CCCOE.

Is this story timely? Is it tied to an issue/event currently in the news?

Some news items may be more appropriate for internal publicity, such as through CCCOE published newsletters and Web pages. These include the quarterly Circuit newsletter distributed to all CCCOE staff, and other newsletters produced by CCCOE's departments and programs.

CCCOE Media Relations Guidelines (continued)

Guidelines on Media Access to Students in CCCOE Programs

Students in Juvenile Court Schools

CCCOE serves hundreds of minors in institutional settings who are under the jurisdiction of the Juvenile Court and supervision of the Probation Department.

The Court protects the interest of minors under its jurisdiction by ensuring confidentiality of records, documents, and information about their involvement in the justice system. Such records include news stories (print and broadcast), videos, and articles about the minors' participation in programs connected with the justice system – such as Juvenile Court Schools (JCS) and Community Schools.

As a partner with the Court and Probation, CCCOE takes seriously the obligation to protect our students' confidentiality rights.

Any news media contact with minors in JCS programs, activities, and events must be approved in advance as outlined below. *The following rules also apply to CCCOE staff who wish to videotape or publish photos/articles involving these minors.*

The CCCOE Communications Office can assist members of the news media and staff in securing the necessary approvals and clearances outlined below.

For minors removed from the physical custody of the parent/legal guardian and under the jurisdiction of the Juvenile Court and supervision of the Probation Department (e.g. students in juvenile hall, Orin Allen Center):

Anyone who wishes to interview, photograph, videotape, or voice record a minor (or wishes to invite media coverage of an activity involving minors) must send a formal request seeking permission from the Presiding Judge of the Juvenile Court in advance. The request must describe the purpose of the contact and the intended audience for the final product.

Written consent of students and their parents/guardians is required

Once a formal request is received, the Court secures approval from Probation and attorneys as necessary. The Court usually will grant a limited waiver of confidentiality allowing media access but prohibiting minors' identities from being revealed.

- Photos/videos cannot show faces, profiles or any other identifiable feature of minors.
- Names of minors must remain confidential and cannot be used in final products.
- Confidential information about a minor's case, including the conduct that led to his or her involvement with the Juvenile Court, cannot be published, broadcast, divulged or used for any purpose.

Allow at least 10 working days for this approval.

CCCOE Media Relations Guidelines (continued)

Once media access has been granted:

It is generally in the best interest of students that only their first names be used and photos/videos not reveal their facial identities. This is because while the news story may be positive, the student's connection to alternative education can be a stigma and raises safety and security concerns.

Media representatives, students, and staff must not discuss confidential information about a minor's case, including the conduct that led to being placed on probation or expelled from school.

All Other Students in CCCOE Programs (Special Education*, Community Schools, ROP, YDS)

Members of the media engaged in legitimate news gathering on a public school campus may speak to, photograph and film students without prior permission from parents.

However, it is the policy of the CCCOE to require a Parent/Guardian Photo/Video/Web Site Release Form be signed for any planned media coverage of our students.

Students may decline to speak to the media and may refuse to be interviewed, filmed, or photographed. Also, parents have the right to withhold permission for their children to be interviewed, filmed, or photographed. For this reason, it may be helpful to have these parents sign an "opt-out" (News Media Access to Students) form at the beginning of the school year. If parents have expressed either orally or in writing, that they do not want their children speaking to or being photographed by the media, then the school must honor this request.

Time permitting, a site administrator may wish to inform parents when media visits will take place. A simple written statement can be given to parents (and translated into the appropriate languages) prior to the media coming onto your campus.

Parent/Guardian Photo/Video/Web Site Release Form for CCCOE Uses

Frequently, CCCOE will want to include students in our own agency print, video, audio, and electronic communications. Please ensure that a signed Parent/Guardian Photo/Video/Web Site Release Form is on file for any student included in CCCOE-produced publications, videos, Web pages, and other communications.

The Parent/Guardian Photo/Video/Web Site Release form is not applicable to students in Juvenile Court Schools.

*Note: According to a California Attorney General opinion dated August 26, 2002: "Members of the news media may not attend a child's individualized education program [IEP] meeting as observers even though their attendance has the consent of the parents." The opinion also says, "members of the news media, as well as members of the public, may attend the next level in the process at the discretion of the parents...which is a [due process] hearing the parents may request if they disagree with any part of the IEP that the public agency intends to implement." (Source: California Department of Education)