

Media Relations

The Solano County Office of Education (SCOE) respects the public's right to information and recognizes that the media significantly influence the community's understanding of school programs. In order to develop and maintain positive media relations, SCOE desires to reasonably accommodate media requests for information and to provide accurate, reliable, and timely information.

Media representatives are welcome at all County Board meetings and shall receive meeting agendas upon request.

Media representatives, like all other visitors, shall register immediately upon entering any school building or grounds when school is in session.

The following guidelines provide direction toward SCOE's efforts to maintain ongoing communications with the public and media.

1. The Public Information Officer (PIO) is designated by the County Superintendent to develop and maintain a positive relationship with the education editor, editor, reporters, or contact person at each of the newspapers and radio/cable television stations located within Solano County.
2. Designated spokespersons should address only their area of expertise and may answer news reporters' questions when queried directly. Staff will apprise the PIO and his/her immediate supervisor of encounters with the media involving SCOE programs, sites, students, or staff.
3. Every attempt will be made by the PIO to submit news and feature story ideas to the media on a systematic and regular basis.
4. SCOE will use a variety of communication devices for school news coverage: news releases, e-mail, and telephone updates including urgent information, letters to the editor, editorials, public service announcements, media advisories, and newsletters.
5. News releases shall be submitted to the PIO. The information may be edited for appropriateness and accuracy. If revisions are made, a copy of the finalized news release will be sent to the staff member who initiated the item and his/her supervisor when appropriate.
6. Media coverage in the form of newspaper/magazine photo features or as a feature article may be requested in place of a regular news release.
7. In cases of emergency or disaster, all news releases and press contacts will be the responsibility of the PIO in conjunction with the Superintendent or designee.
8. Staff may provide the media with student directory information, including, but not limited to, the name of a student, school of attendance, grade level, honors, and activities, unless the student's parent/guardian has submitted a written request that such information not be disclosed. SCOE shall not release information that is private or confidential as required by law, policy, or administrative regulation. No other access to student records or personally identifiable student information may be provided without written parent/guardian permission.

Interviewing and Photographing Students

SCOE shall not impose restraints on students' right to speak freely with media representatives at those times which do not disrupt students' educational program. However, interviews of students may not create substantial disorder or impinge on the rights of others. Therefore, in order to minimize possible disruption, media representatives who wish to interview students at school are strongly encouraged to make prior arrangements with the principal. At their discretion, parents/guardians may instruct their children not to communicate with media representatives.

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.

When interviewing or photographing a special education student, s/he shall not be identified as a special education student without prior, written parent/guardian permission.

Media Communications Plan

In order to help develop strong relations with the media, the PIO along with the Superintendent or designee shall develop a proactive media communications plan. This plan may include, but not be limited to, information related to programs and needs, student awards, school accomplishments, and events of special interest.

The plan shall specify SCOE's primary media contact to whom all media inquiries shall be routed. Spokespersons designated to speak to the media on behalf of SCOE include the PIO, Superintendent, County Board president, and members of the Chief Administrative Team. Other staff members may be asked by the Superintendent or designee to speak to the media on a case-by-case basis, depending on their expertise on an issue.

The Superintendent or designee shall provide training on effective media relations to all designated spokespersons.

Crisis Communications Plan

During a disturbance or crisis situation, the first priority of SCOE staff is to assure the safety of students and staff. However, SCOE recognizes the need to provide timely and accurate information to parents/guardians and the community during a crisis. SCOE also recognizes that the media have an important role to play in relaying this information to the public. In order to help ensure that the media and SCOE work together effectively, the PIO along with the Superintendent or designee shall develop a crisis communications plan to identify communication strategies to be taken in the event of a crisis.

The crisis communications plan may include but not be limited to identification of a media center location, development of both internal and external notification systems, and strategies for press conference logistics. The crisis planning process should include input from local law enforcement and media representatives.

Legal Reference:

EDUCATION CODE

32210-32212 Willful disturbance of public school or meeting

35144 Special meetings

35145 Public meetings

35160 Authority of governing boards

35172 Promotional activities

GOVERNMENT CODE

54954.1 Requests for agenda

EVIDENCE CODE

1070 Refusal to disclose news source

PENAL CODE

627-627.10 Access to school premises

Legal Reference: (Continued)

COURT DECISIONS

Lopez v. Tulare Joint Union High School District, (1995) 34 Cal.App.4th 1302

ATTORNEY GENERAL OPINIONS

95 Ops.Cal.Atty.Gen. 509 (1996)

Policy Cross-Reference:

0450 Comprehensive Safety Plan

1100 Communication with the Public

1112.1 Working with the Media

1112.2 Public Relations and Communication Plan

1240 Volunteer Assistance

1250 Visitors/Outsiders

1340 Access to District Records

3515.2 Disruptions

3516 Emergencies and Disaster Preparedness Plan

3580 District Records

4131 Professional Development

4119.23 Unauthorized Release of Confidential/Privileged Information

5125 Student Records

5125.1 Release of Directory Information

5145.2 Freedom of Speech/Expression