

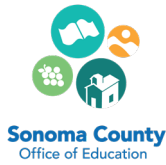
Employee Handbook

SCOE

Sonoma County Office of Education



Amie Carter, Ed.D., Superintendent of Schools
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Welcome

Employees of the Sonoma County Office of Education (SCOE) play a vital role in ensuring the ongoing success of public education in our community. To new employees, welcome to the County Office! An interesting and challenging experience awaits you as a member of the Sonoma County Office of Education staff. You join over 370 other employees who are contributing to our organizational mission of fostering student success through service to students, schools, and the community.

This Employee Handbook has been designed to introduce you to our organization, familiarize you with the guidelines and benefits that impact your employment, and answer some of the questions you may have concerning the County Office and its personnel practices. The employment policies of the Sonoma County Office of Education have been developed specifically with the intent of:

- ◆ Ensuring high standards in all programs and services;
- ◆ Maintaining and developing the professionalism and skill of the staff;
- ◆ Reflecting our commitment to fair and equitable treatment of all employees;
- ◆ Meeting legal mandates that apply to employment rights and responsibilities.

While this Handbook is intended to provide you with a general overview of our employment policies, it does not present a complete description of your employment relationship and should not be read or treated as an employment contract. Where possible, the Handbook guides you to the document, person, or department where you can get more detailed information on specified subjects.

Over time, changing circumstances will require that the policies and benefits outlined in this Handbook be updated, revised, or altered. As you consult the Handbook for information in the months ahead, remember that it may be necessary for you to verify that all applicable information is still current.

Other documents that contain information related to your employment include the Superintendent's Policies and Operating Procedures, Merit System Rules and regulations (for classified employees), and applicable collective bargaining agreements. The SCOE Employee Center of our website—accessed from the link in the upper-right corner of www.scoe.org—contains these documents and other helpful information. In all instances, current policy statements and negotiated contracts take precedence over the information included in this Employee Handbook.

—January 2023

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Introduction

What the County Office of Education Does

The citizens of California, through the state constitution and state legislature, have created a three-level public education system. There are 58 county offices of education in California that form the “intermediate level” of this system, providing a critical link between the California Department of Education (CDE) and local school districts. The state legislature and the CDE set the general direction, goals, and laws of education in California, while the day-to-day delivery of educational services—all the teaching and learning—takes place in local school districts. Linking these two levels of the system are the county offices of education.

Like other county offices, the Sonoma County Office of Education (SCOE) accomplishes its mission by offering a centralized system of services. These services are designed to provide information and assistance so that our county’s schools can meet educational goals, comply with legal mandates, and operate efficiently. At the same time, the County Office serves as a voice for the community, informing the CDE of educational issues, needs, and innovations in our county.

SONOMA COUNTY OFFICE OF EDUCATION

County Superintendent
Amie Carter, Ed.D.

County Board of Education

Gina Cuclis

Herman G. Hernandez

Steven D. Herrington,
Ph.D.

Peter Kostas

Andrew Leonard

Regular meetings of the Sonoma County Board of Education are held on the first Thursday of each month at 3:00 p.m. in the Board Room of the Sonoma County Office of Education. Meetings are open to the public.

The public served by our office voices its education priorities through the election of the Sonoma County Superintendent of Schools, who is the chief administrative officer of our agency and the direct employer. The five-member County Board of Education, an elected body with specific responsibilities related to the operation of SCOE student service programs, provides educational, appellate and fiduciary stewardship for county voters and their communities. The County Office operates with an annual budget of approximately \$70 million, with funding provided by the state, local tax revenues, and the federal government.

The programs and services of the County Office are numerous and diverse. In some instances, they have been created specifically to comply with guidelines set by CDE. In other cases, they have come into being because a centralized service that is accessible to all schools is the most cost-efficient way to meet educational or operational demands. Still other programs and services have been developed in response to the unique educational needs of a particular segment of the county’s student population.

History of the County Office

Like other county offices in California, the history of the Sonoma County Office of Education has been driven largely by the changing educational needs of a growing population base. As the state's population has grown, so too has its need to add structure to the education system to meet new demands. Today's education system has evolved over time—and it continues to evolve—in response to the needs and expectations of California's citizenry. Sonoma County has also changed dramatically over the years. Once completely rural, today's landscape retains its rural feel in places, but many of the hills and valleys are now home to growing numbers of residents. Records indicate that the number of students enrolled in public schools in 1852 totaled 230; today that number is approximately 70,000.

How educational services are delivered to this changing student population has required innovations in teaching; how the whole system is organized to function efficiently on a larger scale has led to the establishment and growth of the County Office.

The role of County Superintendent was initially defined in 1852 by the state legislature as an add-on function to the office of county assessor. From 1852 to 1880, the chief fiscal officer in Sonoma County was officially titled "Assessor and Superintendent of Schools." The sole educational function of the job in 1852 was to oversee the apportionment of state funds to local school districts. In 1860, the Assessor/Superintendent was also given the responsibility of testing and certifying the qualifications of teachers.

The County Superintendent became an elected position in 1879 when a bill was passed taking school duties away from the assessor and mandating county superintendency elections every four years. Elected county superintendents were given new duties to match their new status, most of them having to do with oversight of district operations and reporting requirements to the state. Other responsibilities were added gradually by the state legislature—in 1912, 1915, 1921, 1931 and so on—and the office of the county superintendent began to grow from a "one horse agency" to a small organization of education professionals supported by an expert clerical staff. By 1947, the county superintendent had assumed 22 functions, including curriculum supervision, emergency teacher credentialing, health and nursing services for districts, coordination of educational resources, attendance monitoring, and funding apportionments. Many of those functions have been redefined to conform to contemporary practice.

Sonoma County saw one of its most dramatic periods of growth after World War II, followed by the greatest number of new school openings - 48 in the 1950s - in the county's history. In response to this growth, the County Office began to see its own flurry of development. The elected County Board of Education was officially established in 1956, engaging community representatives in the stewardship of countywide educational activities. In 1964, a very significant structural change occurred when it was mandated by the state that county offices of education become independent from county government. A June 9, 1964 resolution by the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors transferred all educational duties, functions, and budgets to the newly-established Sonoma County Office of Education, a freestanding

institution under the direction of the County Superintendent of Schools. The County Office retains this independent structure today; it is not part of the county government system.

In recent decades, the responsibilities of the County Superintendent have continued to grow. Sonoma County's first Community School opened in the mid-1980s; a 1992 state law designed to help ensure the financial solvency of schools has required county offices to carefully monitor district finances and added new responsibilities to the County Superintendent of Schools; and additional monitoring responsibilities were added in 2013 with the state's implementation of the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) and Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP).

As more programs and services were established, the County Office staff changed to accommodate new needs. The County Office employed 60 individuals in 1956, 367 in 1985, and over 625 in 2007. Today, the Sonoma County Office of Education has over 370 employees and operates under the leadership of Amie R. Carter, Ed.D., who became Sonoma County Superintendent of Schools on January 3, 2023.

Department Overview

Business Services

The Business Services Division includes the following departments: External Fiscal Services, External Payroll & Finance, Internal Fiscal Services, Information Technology, and Facilities, Operations & Maintenance.

- ◆ External Fiscal Services monitors and approves school district budgets, LCAP review support with ESS, and interim reports; and provides financial oversight and guidance to school districts. Other services include direct services, workshops, and trainings for districts and charters in collaboration with Information Technology and Educational Support Services.
- ◆ External Payroll & Finance processes payroll, vendor warrants, and deposits for SCOE and districts/charters using SCOE's financial system; PERS, STRS, W2 and 1099 reporting, and payroll tax payments. This department balances cash for the Schools Fund, allocations of state and federal apportionments, and is the liaison with the County of Sonoma Treasury. Workshops are held to inform districts and charters of retirement laws, reporting requirements and business procedures
- ◆ Internal Fiscal Services supports the internal financial operations of SCOE, including accounting, position control, accounts payable, accounts receivable, ADA reporting, budget development, payroll, federal/state reporting, and the Medi-Cal Administrative Activities (MAA) Program. SCOE is the Region 1 LEC and manages the MAA program for 70 LEAs in five counties: Sonoma, Mendocino, Lake, Humboldt and Del Norte.
- ◆ Information Technology (IT) supports SCOE and local school districts by providing a variety of technology services, including financial system support and training. In partnership with CASBO, SCOE IT developed a Payroll Certification Program.

Information Technology provides Wide Area Network (WAN) resources to Sonoma County schools including Internet access, domain name services, web-server hosting, spam-filtered e-mail accounts, and content filtering to comply with the Child Internet Protection Act (CIPA).

- ◆ Facilities, Operations, and Maintenance oversees maintenance, custodial services, facilities planning and construction, print shop, fleet operations, materials delivery system, and emergency preparedness.

Educational Support Services

SCOE's Educational Support Services (ESS) department provides a coordinated approach to supporting districts and schools in improving student outcomes in Sonoma County through systems support, content support, and partnerships with external agencies. The department provides systems support through Local Control and Accountability Plans (LCAPS) review, differentiated assistance, and continuous improvement processes. Content support is provided to local districts such as cutting-edge professional learning opportunities for teachers, English learner services, training for school administrators, school readiness, library, and instructional technology services.

ESS staff actively supports Sonoma County teachers, administrators, and students in the implementation of the California State Standards, administration of Smarter Balanced assessments, and integration of 21st century teaching and learning practices. Each year, the department facilitates professional learning opportunities for local educators, conducts individual school-site consultations, and provides access to instructional resources. A variety of community-wide initiatives focused on improving education for all students are also supported.

The department offers a menu of basic services and specialized programs. Basic services, some of which are fee-based, are available to all districts and are provided in the following areas:

- ◆ 21st century skills
- ◆ California Standards in English-language arts and mathematics
- ◆ Data and assessment
- ◆ Early Literacy and School Readiness
- ◆ English learner services
- ◆ History/Social Science
- ◆ Leadership support and development
- ◆ Library media services

- ◆ Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP) technical assistance
- ◆ Maker Education
- ◆ Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS)
- ◆ Parent Education
- ◆ Project-Based Learning
- ◆ Restorative Practices
- ◆ Sonoma County Cooperative for Categorical Programs (Co-op)
- ◆ State and federal programs
- ◆ Student events
- ◆ Teacher support and development
- ◆ Technology for Learners
- ◆ Universal Design for Learning

Through its specialized programs and events, the department also provides targeted service to schools and the community. Many of these programs and events are funded by grants or have distinct funding streams. Specialized programs and events include:

- ◆ California Math Project: North Coast (CMP:NC)
- ◆ California Preschool Instructional Network (CPIN)
- ◆ Child Care Planning Council (CCPC)
- ◆ ieSonoma
- ◆ Statewide mental health, equity, and arts initiatives
- ◆ Teachers Acquiring Language Learner Knowledge (TALLK)

The Educational Support Services department also provides support and service to Sonoma County schools and districts as they design and implement Career Technical Education (CTE) and Student Support programs for their sites. Department staff helps districts develop high school career pathways, connect schools to local workforce development efforts, provide work-based learning coordination, assist schools with career counseling, and enhance career exploration efforts in middle school.

- ◆ *Career Technical Education (CTE) Support*—Working with administrators and teachers, the department provides CTE course development assistance, professional learning opportunities for CTE teachers, and work-based learning coordination for CTE programs in local high schools. All district CTE courses are designed to give students the opportunity to explore career options, develop academic and work-readiness skills, and prepare for industry-defined employment or advanced education.
- ◆ *Work-Ready Certification*—Work-Ready Certification is a program operated in partnership with the Sonoma County Workforce Investment Board designed to verify that students have the entry-level workplace skills that Sonoma County employers require. Student skills are “tested” by employer representatives and certificates are awarded only to those students who are determined to be work-ready.

Human Resource Services

The Human Resource Services department manages all of the Sonoma County Office of Education's personnel procedures and serves as a professional resource for schools regarding employment issues.

- ◆ *Executive Recruitment*—The department provides a cost-effective recruitment service for districts conducting searches for new superintendents and administrators.
- ◆ *Credentials*—Staff in this unit advise Sonoma County applicants on credentialing requirements, review and process credential applications, issue temporary county certificates, and provide information and assistance in interpreting regulations related to certificated assignments. The unit monitors school staff assignments throughout the county to ensure that all administrators and teachers are appropriately credentialed. A substitute teacher consortium, staffed by this unit, verifies that all substitute teachers in the county meet the requirements to serve as substitutes.
- ◆ *Employee Benefits*—This unit administers and manages leaves and health and workers' compensation benefits for County Office of Education personnel.
- ◆ *Fingerprint Services*—Current law requires that all school districts obtain Department of Justice and Federal Bureau of Investigation fingerprint clearance for all new employees. To assist districts in meeting this requirement, the department operates a Live Scan Fingerprint Service, which enables fingerprint impressions to be transmitted electronically.
- ◆ *Human Resource Services Administration*—The services provided for County Office programs include activities such as tracking position vacancies, filling vacancies through promotional and open recruitment, distributing and processing employment applications, organizing interviews, processing employee pay and status changes, and monitoring performance evaluations.
- ◆ *Substitute Assignment*—The department coordinates the recruitment, orientation, and placement of substitute employees in County Office classrooms. Absence Management, an electronic substitute assignment program, is used to fill teacher and assistant positions when absences occur.

North Coast School of Education

Founded in 2015, the North Coast School of Education (NCSOE) partners with the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CCTC) to provide state accredited programs and services for teachers, interns and aspiring administrators. Through continuous improvement, NCSOE stakeholders and program staff use a research-based- common teaching and learning

framework for training and support mentors across all programs to achieve the Unit's vision and build and support relationships, equity and student success.

Through the mission of fostering empathy and equity among strong, creative and connected educators, NCSOE provides personalized, professional learning and training that supports an ongoing cycle of reflection and inquiry. NCSOE strives to make a difference for all students by modeling and practicing respect for the ongoing learning required to build equitable school communities and a just and civil society for all. The goal is to develop a workforce of teachers and leaders who engage in research-based readiness, and who possess 21st century skills to develop and implement innovative methods and ideas in California classrooms, schools and districts.

- ◆ *Teacher Induction Program (formerly BTSA)*—The North Coast Teacher Induction Program (NCTIP) assists schools and districts in providing Teacher Induction that meets both program and credentialing standards for the state of California. NCTIP provides credentialed teachers with a specifically designed, standards-based professional development series, mentoring and coaching, credentialing services, and technical assistance aligned to the California Standards for the Teaching Profession (CSTP). The 2-year program provides a bridge linking the theory, knowledge and skills acquired in the Preliminary Credential Program to the realities of daily classroom teaching. Upon successful completion of Teacher Induction and credential requirements, teachers will be recommended for a California Clear Credential.
- ◆ *Be-A-Teacher Intern Programs* - Accredited in 2016, the Be-A-Teacher (BAT) Intern Programs are an alternative pathway to acquiring a teaching credential that prepares candidates to become teachers for elementary, middle, high school and special education classrooms. Candidates begin with pre-service modules leading to an Intern Credential, are employed and paid by the school district and work closely with a Practicum Supervisor and Mentor while attending a 2-year instructional program of evening classes. Upon successful completion of the Intern Program and credential requirements, candidates will be recommended for a California Preliminary Credential.
- ◆ *The Designated Subjects Program* - The designated subjects Program is a pathway to earning a Career Technical Education or Adult Education Teaching Credential. NCSOE's state accredited Designated Subjects Credential program is designed for New Credential Holders (individuals who have never held a teaching credential) and Existing Credentials Holders (individuals already hold a teaching credential). Candidates are employed as teachers of a Career Technical Education or Adult Education class while receiving ongoing support from course Instructors and Practicum Supervisors to earn a Clear Teaching Credential. New Credential Holders also receive support from Designated Subjects credentials Mentors who meet weekly with Candidates, providing "just in time" coaching and support with short and long term goal setting.

- ◆ *Administrative Induction Program* - The Administrative Induction Program (AIP) offers new administrators who hold a preliminary credential, the opportunity to participate in an individualized induction founded on the California Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (CPSELS). New administrators in California are required to participate in a 2-year induction program in order to clear their administrative credential. In collaboration with a coach, and site supervisor, candidates develop an Individual Induction Plan that will provide them with the opportunity to individualize their induction experience and meet credentialing requirements.
- ◆ *Preliminary Administrative Credential Program* - NCSOE's one year Preliminary Administrative Credential Program (PASC) is designed to provide educational leaders with the theoretical framework and fieldwork to become administrators through a job-embedded experience that also prepares them to take the state-required CA Administrator Performance Assessment (CalAPA). NCSOE is committed to cultivating and supporting effective educators and lifelong learners for California's students. In order to ensure that NCSOE exits the high quality professionals from their programs, NCSOE incorporates a continuous improvement cycle to support candidate learning and as a tool for assessment, evaluation, and implementation of their programs.
- ◆ *Program Holders Programs* - In partnership with accredited school districts, NCSOE provides Permit Holders employed as a "teacher of record" support and specialized training that meets the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing's (CCTC) responsibilities for employing teachers who hold a Provisional Intern Permit (PIP), Teaching Permit for Statutory Leave (TPSL) or a Short Term Staff Permit (STSP) and their Mentors. Districts may work with NCSOE for coursework only or for the full program services with a trained mentor. Upon completion of relevant program coursework and/or requirements, along with meeting licensure requirements, the Permit Holder would then apply to an education preparation program, or upon passing state tests, would be recommended by the credential agency to the CCTS for their California Preliminary Credential.

School and College Legal Services

School and College Legal Services (SCLS) is a joint powers authority that was formed to provide legal and labor relation services for community colleges, school districts, and county offices of education at a reasonable cost. The services provided include personnel matters, facilities issues, student rights and discipline, contracting and purchasing, Brown Act, administrative hearings, collective bargaining, grievance arbitration, litigation, impacts of legislation, and real property matters. (SCLS) is housed in a SCOE owned building adjacent to the Sonoma County Office of Education main office building.

School and College Legal Services is committed to the practice of preventive law through in-service training, legal advisories, and checklists. Recent training programs have covered sexual harassment, employee evaluations, employee discipline, student rights, and student discipline.

SELPA, Special Education Local Plan Area

The Sonoma County SELPA is one of many SELPA agencies, organized by geographic regions that are required by California law to ensure the equitable distribution of funds and full continuum of services for students with disabilities. The SELPA office for Sonoma County is located at 5860 Labath Avenue, Rohnert Park, CA and its operations are cooperatively governed by the County Superintendent and district superintendents' council. SELPA's role is to ensure that specialized needs of each disabled student in the county are appropriately met.

- ◆ *Adaptive Technology Center (ATC)*—The ATC is operated by the SELPA to provide special education students with specialized technology resources that can help them access education and participate in school and community activities.
- ◆ *Infant Program*—Infants and toddlers with vision, hearing, or orthopedic impairments and their families can receive early intervention services in a coordinated, family-centered manner through this SELPA program. Services include assessment; home intervention; speech, physical, and occupational therapy; parent support and training; transportation; and assistive technology.
- ◆ *Program Specialists*—Program specialists offer training and support covering a wide range of topics covered by the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and California special education laws and regulations. Service areas include support for special education teachers and specialists, alternative dispute resolution, positive behavior intervention, interagency coordination, legal compliance, and educationally-related mental health services.

Student Support Services

Alternative Education

Alternative Education operates alternative schools for students who are seriously at risk of school and/or societal failure and provides resources to assist schools in addressing the issues that put children at risk in today's world.

- ◆ *Community Schools*—The department operates two Community Schools, Amarosa Academy in Santa Rosa and Headwaters Academy in Petaluma. Each classroom on these campuses serves 15-20 students in grades 7-12. The schools offer supportive learning environments for students who are experiencing difficulties in a traditional school setting or exhibiting negative behavior patterns in school or the community. Many of the students have been expelled from their district schools,

identified as habitually truant, or placed on probation by the juvenile court. Community Schools also offer these specialized services:

- ◆ *Adult Education* – As a partner in the Sonoma County Adult Education Consortium with Santa Rosa Junior College, the department provides Non-Credit CTE Adult Education courses throughout the county. While efforts are currently primarily focused on Construction courses, additional courses can be offered in Basic Computer Skills, Small Business Development, and Hospitality.
- ◆ *Independent Study* – This program is for students who, for a variety of reasons, are not able to attend a regular, daily, seat-time program. A blended learning program allows students to customize their educational program and to access support services at the Amarosa Academy school site.
- ◆ *The Adera Teen Parent Program* (located on the Amarosa Academy site) provides education and support services so pregnant and parenting teens can continue their education. The program also provides childcare and related support services to assist teen parents in graduating from high school.
- ◆ *Court Schools*—Court Schools provide instruction for youth residing in court-supervised programs, such as Juvenile Hall and Probation Camp.
- ◆ *Foster Youth Services*—The department’s grant-funded Foster Youth Services program works to expand the educational support available to the 500+ foster youth living in Sonoma County. By removing barriers that occur due to frequent changes in home placement, this program helps ensure that foster youth can benefit from uninterrupted education and gain access to educational support services.
- ◆ *Homeless Education*—The department works in collaboration with local school districts to ensure that homeless students attend school, participate fully, and succeed.
- ◆ *School-Court Education Liaison*—The department provides support for families of youth involved with the juvenile justice system. The liaison works closely with the court system to address the educational issues of students in detention, on probation, or subject to truancy court actions.

Behavioral Health Services

The SCOE Behavioral Health Services Department strives to improve mental health, wellbeing, and educational outcomes for all students, families, and staff in Sonoma County. Using a multi-tiered model shaped by data-driven partnerships with districts, we design and coordinate school-based, culturally responsive and inclusive mental health and wellness support for students, families, and staff. We strive to increase protective factors, prioritizing support for marginalized population, starting with those situated farthest from opportunity.

Special Education

These programs offer a variety of specialized instructional services for children who have physical, emotional, or mental disabilities. This department operates classes for some of the county's students with the most severe disabilities and offers support services at district schools.

- ◆ *Early Childhood Education (ECE)*—SCOE offers a variety of learning experiences for preschoolers who are eligible for special education services. Children who are 3 to 5 years old receive instruction geared to their individual needs. Special day classes, programs that build mobility skills, specialized services for young children on the autism spectrum, counseling and mental health services, and remedial speech and language instruction are among the many services available. Individualized Education Programs (IEP's) are developed for each student by the School District of Residence with a team that includes the child's parents or caregivers and the ECE Special Education teachers, specialists and administration who will be working with the child. SCOE only accepts preschoolers referred by the child's School District of Residence.
 - Service options include:
 - Special Day Classes/Autism Specialty Programs
 - Special Day Classes/Non-Categorical
 - Specialized Health Services
- ◆ *Programs for Students with Severe Disabilities*—SCOE offers programs and assistance for students who have medically fragile conditions and/or severe disabilities. These classes are taught by staff with specific training for meeting the needs of students with significant medical, cognitive, and communication concerns. The classrooms have specialized equipment and resources to assist students with learning adaptive technology and alternative communication options are made available to students as determined by their IEP.
- ◆ *Programs for Students with Emotional/Behavioral Disorders (EBD)*—SCOE operates the TREC (Teaching Responsibility, Educating, Counseling) Program to meet the unique needs of students who exhibit emotional and behavioral challenges. The program is dedicated to helping these students manage significant emotional reactions, learn to behave responsibly, increase positive social interactions, increase resilience, and improve academic progress. The program consists of a continuum of special education classes designed to give students access to the core curriculum in a setting that also allows them to benefit from individual and small group counseling and get social skills training. Education-related mental health services are also infused throughout the school day.
- ◆ *Transition Program*- The transition program is designed to “teach work” to special education students, ages 18-22 and to support their growth into adulthood. Program activities take place in the community – at work sites and other locations – with the

goal of helping students acquire the skills to secure and maintain employment after they leave school. The daily living, academic, and domestic skills that are an integral part of working and the adult world are also emphasized. Transition students learn to ride public transportation, budget earnings, behave appropriately in public, follow directions and more. As students progress, they fine-tune their work abilities, determine job preferences, and learn to work with growing independence.

Employment Policies

Equal Employment Opportunity and Non-harassment

The Sonoma County Office of Education is an equal opportunity employer. This means that employment decisions are based on merit and business needs, and not on gender, color, race, ancestry, creed, religion, national origin, age, handicap or disability, medical condition, marital status, sexual orientation, veteran status, citizenship status, or any other factor rendered unlawful by federal, state, or local law. This policy applies to all terms and conditions of employment, including but not limited to hiring, placement, promotion, termination, layoff, recall, transfer, leave of absence, compensation, and training.

Further, it is the expectation of the Sonoma County Office of Education that employees not discriminate against each other or non-employees based on the above-mentioned factors.

The County Office also supports the goals of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in hiring, accommodating, promoting, and retaining qualified employees with disabilities. All employees are expected to help implement the goals of the ADA.

Non-harassment - The Sonoma County Office of Education is committed to maintaining a work environment that is free of discrimination. In keeping with this commitment, the County Office expressly prohibits any form of unlawful employee harassment. Harassment consists of unwelcome conduct, whether verbal, physical, or visual, that is based upon a person's gender, color, race, ancestry, creed, religion, national origin, age, handicap or disability, medical condition, marital status, sexual orientation, veteran status, citizenship status, or another protected group status. All such harassment is unlawful.

Sexual harassment deserves special mention. It is the policy of the County Office to provide an education, employment, and business environment free of sexual harassment as defined by state and federal mandates. The County Office expressly prohibits unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, or other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature, especially where:

- ◆ Submission is made either explicitly or implicitly a condition of employment;
- ◆ Submission is used as a basis for employment decisions affecting an individual;
- ◆ Such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with work

performance or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive work environment.

Offensive comments, jokes, innuendos, and other sexually oriented statements are also prohibited.

All County Office employees are responsible for helping to ensure that the work environment is free from harassment. If you feel that you have experienced or witnessed harassment, you should immediately notify your supervisor, a deputy or assistant superintendent, the County Superintendent, or any other supervisory employee. Your complaint will be kept confidential to the maximum extent possible. The County Office forbids retaliation against anyone who has reported harassment.

The County Office will investigate all harassment complaints thoroughly and promptly. If the County Office determines that an employee is guilty of harassing another employee, appropriate disciplinary action will be taken against the offending employee. Additional Title IX information and related forms are available on line.

Uniform Complaints - A uniform complaint is a written statement alleging discrimination, harassment, or violation of a federal or state law. There are specific legal guidelines about what constitutes a uniform complaint, how such complaints are filed, timelines, resolution procedures, and appeals. This information is outlined in the Superintendent's Policies.

Employees may submit uniform complaints in writing to the Director of Human Resource Services who is the compliance officer for the County Office. Complaints must be submitted within six months of the alleged incident. All uniform complaints will be investigated as required by law and a written decision will be issued within 60 days.

Not all complaints fall under the scope of the uniform complaint process. Procedures for submitting other types of complaints are also outlined in the Superintendent's Policies and Operating Procedures, which are available online.

Medical Examinations and Criminal History Review

As part of the County Office's employment procedures, an applicant may be required to obtain a post-offer/pre-employment health examination by a medical practitioner to determine whether the applicant is capable of performing the responsibilities of a specified position. Any offer of employment that an applicant receives from the County Office is contingent upon, among other things, satisfactory completion of required health examinations.

The County Office may require post-offer/pre-employment health examinations for any open position provided the requirements are included in the announcement of the opening.

Tuberculin Testing—To prevent the spread of tuberculosis in the education environment, each employee of the County Office must submit evidence of freedom from active tuberculin infection prior to employment. Tuberculin tests, including intradermal skin tests and chest x-

rays (when necessary), are provided by the County Office at no expense to employees. Evidence of freedom from active tuberculin infection must be submitted every four years thereafter. The Adult Tuberculosis (TB) Risk Assessment Questionnaire is acceptable in lieu of the skin test, but not chest x-rays. The Human Resource Services department notifies employees when testing is scheduled.

Fingerprinting—As a means of ensuring that no member of the staff has been convicted of a narcotics crime, sex crime, or other offense, which would preclude their employment by an educational institution, the County Office requires that employees be fingerprinted. All employees must be fingerprinted and receive clearance from the state Department of Justice and Federal Bureau of Investigation prior to the first day of employment. The Sonoma County Office of Education has a fingerprint service at the main office where fingerprints are taken and submitted for clearance. The County Office pays for the processing fees.

The County Office reserves the right to determine if a conviction would make a candidate unsuitable for employment.

Questions about post-offer/pre-employment health examinations, tuberculin testing, or fingerprinting may be directed to the Human Resource Services department.

Orientation for New Employees

Prior to the date of your employment or at a date that is feasible, you will participate in an orientation program conducted by the Human Resource Services department and various members of your department, including your supervisor.

The first phase of this orientation will be the traditional Human Resource Services department briefing that provides you with essential information regarding the County Office and your new position, compensation, benefit programs, and other job-related matters and requirements. You will be asked to complete all necessary forms at this time, such as medical benefit plan enrollment forms, beneficiary designation forms, and tax forms. You will also be required to present information establishing your identity and your eligibility to work in the United States in accordance with applicable federal law.

The department director and/or department staff in your newly assigned area will conduct the second phase of your orientation. Here, specific job responsibilities will be reviewed and co-workers who can provide day-to-day support will be introduced.

The County Office's orientation program is designed to familiarize you with the agency's structure, goals, clients, and services; provide you with a clear understanding of your job responsibilities and your supervisor's expectations; and give you a comfortable footing on which to begin your new employment relationship.

Probationary Period

You have been hired with the hope and expectation that your employment at the County Office will be long-term and satisfying. The initial period of employment, often called a probationary period, provides an opportunity for you and the County Office to get acquainted with each other and assess the ongoing viability of the employment relationship. During this initial period of employment, your supervisor will meet with you to discuss your performance and to provide you with written evaluations. In turn, you are encouraged to provide your supervisor with your views about your assigned position.

As specified in collective bargaining agreements and Merit System Rules (for classified employees), employees of the County Office serve in a probationary status upon initial employment and upon promotion to any position, which is at a higher classification than previous positions. Probationary periods vary in length depending on the type of position and/or the terms specified in collective bargaining agreements. Certificated management staff and are employed on a contract basis, do not have a formal probationary period and serve “at will”.

If you are a member of a collective bargaining unit, please consult your contract or the Merit System Rules for specific information about the length of your probationary period. Unrepresented employees may contact their supervisor or the Human Resource Services department.

Performance Appraisal

To ensure that you perform your job to the best of your abilities, it is important that you be recognized for good performance and that you receive appropriate suggestions for improvement when necessary. Consistent with this goal, your performance will be evaluated by your supervisor on an ongoing basis and you will receive periodic written evaluations.

All written evaluations will be based on your overall performance in relation to your job responsibilities and will also consider your conduct, demeanor, and record of attendance. Our appraisal system is designed as a two-way communication process: you have an opportunity to discuss your major accomplishments and your supervisor can offer suggestions and direction for desired performance and professional growth. The County Office encourages you to work with your supervisor to develop an individualized performance plan and to mutually establish performance goals for the future.

Employees are normally evaluated once per year at their anniversary date, in the final months of the school year, or at a set time of year (for example, teaching assistants are evaluated in February/March). Teachers who have been employed by the County Office for more than two years and employees in the SEIU bargaining unit with five or more satisfactory evaluations in the same classification may have extended periods of time between evaluations. To learn the specific date and frequency of your performance appraisal, contact your supervisor or the Human Resource Services department. The Superintendent’s Policies and Operating

Procedures contain comprehensive information about the appraisal process, as do all of the collective bargaining agreements. You may obtain a copy of the form that will be used in your evaluation from your supervisor or the Human Resource Services department.

In addition to the regular performance appraisals described above, your supervisor may conduct special written evaluations at any time to advise you of the existence of performance problems. All written evaluations become part of your employee file maintained by Human Resource Services.

Compensation

Work Hours

The County Office maintains an official 40-hour workweek. The typical workday for employees at the main Skylane facility and other office sites is from 8:00 A.M. to 5:00 P.M., Monday through Friday. For employees working in classrooms, schedules are arranged by program supervisors and may vary. Employees working an eight-hour day are entitled to two 15-minute rest breaks, scheduled as close to the middle of each 4-hour shift as possible, and a 30- to 60-minute unpaid meal period, normally taken between 11:30 A.M. and 2:00 P.M. You and your supervisor collaboratively arrange the scheduling of breaks. If you are a part-time employee, your supervisor will arrange your work hours and schedule.

Teachers, teaching assistants, and other staff who work directly with students have work hours that vary significantly from standard office hours. Consult your collective bargaining agreement to verify your negotiated work hours, if applicable.

Daily and weekly work schedules may be changed from time to time at the discretion of the County Office. Changes in work schedules will adhere to the conditions specified in the Merit System Rules and/or collective bargaining agreements, if applicable.

Work year—Many positions at the County Office involve direct contact with students or teachers. Employees in these positions have specified work years that correspond to student attendance. Every certificated employee receives an annual contract that specifies the days of service in their work year. Days of service for classified employees, like teaching assistants, with work years tied to student attendance are specified in collective bargaining agreements.

Salary Schedules and Placement

To attract and retain qualified staff, the County Office endeavors to pay salaries that are competitive with those of similar educational employers and the labor market here in Sonoma County. With this in mind, general salary ranges have been established for each County Office position through a careful analysis of the work required and the responsibilities of each job. Periodically, the County Office reviews job specifications and salary schedules to ensure that

they are rated appropriately. Salary schedules for positions covered by bargaining units are negotiated and clearly specified in each collective bargaining agreement.

If you are given a salary increase, it will normally be effective on July 1 or at the start of a new school year. Note that the official anniversary date for all employees is July 1.

Remember that your total compensation at the County Office consists not only of the salary you are paid, but also of the various benefits you are offered, such as group health and life insurance and your retirement plan, as described in a later section of this handbook.

Questions regarding salary schedules or your individual salary should be directed to your supervisor or the Human Resource Services department. Collective bargaining agreements also provide specific information about negotiated salary schedules and placement.

Pay Procedures and Payroll Deductions

County Office employees are paid on a monthly basis, normally on the last working day of the month. There are several options available to you with regard to how you receive your monthly paycheck. You may:

- ◆ Obtain your pay via direct deposit to your bank or credit union.
- ◆ Pick up your paycheck from a designated employee in your department.
- ◆ Have your paycheck sent to you via the U.S. mail.

During your orientation session, the Human Resource Services staff will discuss your options for receiving your check and provide any necessary forms. Please review your paycheck for errors when it is received. If you find a mistake, report it to Business Services as soon as possible. You should also immediately report to Business Services any misplaced or lost payroll warrants. Business Services can verify that your warrant has not been cashed and issue a replacement warrant.

Upon separation from employment, you will be paid all amounts due to you in accordance with applicable law. Your final paycheck will normally be issued on the last day of the month in which your final day of County Office employment occurs. If payment on the last day of the month is not possible, payment will be made on the next available payroll following separation.

Payroll deductions—The County Office is required by law to make various deductions from your paycheck. These may include amounts for federal and state income tax, Medicare, social security, and retirement. If you have questions about these deductions, consult the payroll staff in Business Services.

In addition to the mandatory deductions, a variety of voluntary deductions can be made from your paycheck at your request, including contributions for health and life insurance, union dues, tax-sheltered annuities, savings bonds, credit union payments, and others. Contact the payroll staff in Business Services to arrange for voluntary deductions and to obtain the

necessary authorization forms. (Note that deductions for tax-sheltered annuities require that an account be established with an approved vendor prior to submitting any SCOE paperwork. For information on 403(b) accounts visit [www.403\(b\)Comply.com](http://www.403(b)Comply.com) and look under Sonoma County Office of Education to see the approved vendor list. For CalPERS 457 accounts, visit <https://calpers.voyaplans.com>.)

Overtime Procedures

If you are classified as a **nonexempt** employee, you will receive compensation for approved overtime work—that is, work you perform beyond 40 hours in a week or eight hours in a day. If you work overtime, you will be compensated by overtime pay, or compensatory time-off, equal to one and a half times your normal pay rate.

Your department director must approve any overtime you work first. Your supervisor will obtain prior approval to assign overtime work to you and, in cooperation with the department director, determine if compensation will be awarded in terms of overtime pay or compensatory time-off. Your supervisor will attempt to provide you with reasonable notice when the need for overtime work arises, however, advance notice may not always be possible.

Overtime pay, if granted, is issued separate from your regular payroll warrant. The pay period for overtime pay ends on the last day of each month and payment is issued on the 10th of the following month. You must submit a Supplemental Pay Authorization form, with proper authorizations, by the last day of the month to receive overtime pay.

Compensatory time-off, if granted, is also recorded on the Supplemental Pay Authorization. The Human Resource Services department maintains records on compensatory time-off and can acquaint you with the guidelines for recording and using earned time.

Employees who are classified as **exempt** do not receive overtime compensation as the rate of pay for these positions is considered full compensation for all time required to fulfill assigned duties.

Your supervisor can answer any questions you have about the County Office's overtime procedures. The Superintendent's Policies and Operating Procedures detail the process for submitting Supplemental Pay Authorization forms.

Fringe Benefits

The County Office has established a variety of employee benefit programs designed to assist you and your eligible dependents in meeting the financial burdens that can result from illness, disability, and death. Benefit programs may include, but are not necessarily limited to medical, dental, vision, and life insurance for employees and their eligible dependents; an income protection plan; and workers' compensation insurance. Detailed information on benefits is available on the SCOE website. [Click here to visit the SCOE website about benefits.](#)

The County Office negotiates with each collective bargaining unit concerning the payment schedule for benefits, including the level of employee and employer contribution. If you are a member of a collective bargaining unit, please consult your agreement for information about the benefits that are available to you and how your benefits are funded. If you are an unrepresented employee, the Human Resource Services department will provide you with applicable benefits information. Group health and life insurance programs are described in summary plan description booklets that are available from the insurance provider. Descriptions of insurance programs are contained in the County Office's master insurance contracts with insurance carriers, which are maintained by the Human Resource Services department.

If changes to your insurance coverage are required, please be advised that there are specified times when changes can be implemented. Some changes may take place only once a year at a time determined by the insurance carrier, while others must be made within 30 days of a qualifying event. If you change your name, address, or marital status, or if you gain or lose a dependent, please contact Human Resource Services as soon as possible to ensure that you maintain proper coverage. Once a year, the County Office has an open enrollment period in which employees may change medical insurances, add dependents who were not previously covered or delete current dependents who are currently covered.

The Human Resource Services department will advise you of your rights and responsibilities concerning health and insurance benefits should your eligibility change due to promotion, transfer, or other circumstances. In general, benefits commence on the first of the month following the month of hire and cease on the last day of the month of termination, with the following two exceptions: 1) teachers who work the entire school year receive health benefits through September; and 2) teaching assistants who work the entire school year receive health benefits through August. The County Office reserves the right to amend or terminate any benefit program or to require, increase, or decrease employee premium contributions toward any benefit through negotiations with collective bargaining units.

For information regarding any benefit program, check the SCOE website. Benefit plan contact information, group plan numbers, and detailed information about all dental, medical, and vision plans are available at www.scoe.org/benefits. If you don't find the information you're seeking online, contact the Human Resource Services department at 524-2824.

Continuation of benefits—If you retire, resign, or are terminated from the County Office's employ or if your work hours are reduced, you may have the right to retain your health insurance coverage through COBRA. Continued coverage may also be available to your eligible dependents upon your death, separation, or divorce or upon termination of a child's dependent status under the County Office's health insurance programs.

Eligible employees or their dependents who choose to retain health coverage under the above-mentioned circumstances will be charged the full cost of coverage plus a 2% administrative fee. Those who have reduced their working hours or who have been released from employment may retain coverage for no more than 36 months. Other qualifying events allow individuals to retain coverage for a time period of between 18 months and five years,

depending on the qualifying event. Coverage will end if you or your dependent fail to make timely payments for insurance premiums, secure health insurance coverage through subsequent employment or remarriage, or become eligible for Medicare benefits. Coverage may also cease if the County Office terminates its group health plan.

Human Resource Services will notify you of your option to continue health benefits at the time your termination occurs or your work hours are reduced. For further details regarding continuing or converting your health insurance benefits, please contact the Human Resource Services department at 524-2824.

Workers' compensation—If you experience an illness or injury arising from your employment, you may be eligible for workers' compensation. The amount of benefits payable and the duration of payment will depend upon the nature of your illness or injury. Each and every occupational illness or injury, no matter how minor, must be reported immediately to your supervisor. If you are injured on the job, please also call the RESIG Workers' Compensation early intervention nurse at 836-7457. This ensures that the County Office can assist you in obtaining appropriate coverage. Please note that your failure to follow this procedure may result in required reports not being filed in accordance with law, which may jeopardize your right to benefits.

Questions regarding workers' compensation insurance should be directed to the Human Resource Services department at 524-2634. Information about filing workers' compensation reports is contained in the Superintendent's Policies and Operating Procedures.

Disability insurance—If you experience an illness or injury that is not job-related or if your Workers' Compensation claim is denied, you may be eligible for salary continuation through an income protection plan. The amount of the benefits payable and the duration of payment will depend on the nature and length of your illness or injury as well as your job classification, length of time in your retirement system, and your age at the time of your disability. If you will be absent from work for more than five days due to disability, or if you have questions regarding your eligibility for disability insurance, please contact the Human Resource Services department at 524-2824.

Flexible Employee Benefit Plan

The County Office offers employees the opportunity to participate in a Flexible Employee Benefit Plan, sometimes called an IRS 125 Flex Plan, to meet personal and family health and welfare needs. Through participation in the Flex Plan, employees may direct a portion of their salary to medical and dependent care expenses on a nontaxable basis. The Flex Plan allows the use of pre-tax dollars for otherwise after-tax, out-of-pocket expenses associated with health insurance premiums, health care costs, childcare, and day care for disabled dependents. This may result in a tax savings for participating employees. Note that any dollars directed to the Flex Plan that are not used in the plan year will be forfeited.

The Human Resource Services department will provide you with general information about the Flexible Employee Benefit Plan during your orientation session. For more information,

contact Self-Insured Schools of California (SISC) Flex, our Flex Plan administrator, at (661) 636-4710 or <http://sisc.kern.org/flex>.

State Retirement Plans

The County Office has a retirement program to assist you in your post-employment years. Two state retirement plans are in effect for County Office employees: the California Public Employees' Retirement System (CalPERS) for classified personnel and the California State Teachers' Retirement System (CalSTRS) for certificated personnel. As specified in California's Education Code, membership in and contributions to one of these two retirement systems is mandatory for most County Office employees. The County Office also contributes to the retirement systems on behalf of participating staff.

The Human Resource Services department will provide you with information about retirement plans during your orientation session. They will tell you if participation is mandatory or optional and let you know what level of employee contribution is required.

Monthly contributions to CalPERS and CalSTRS are made for you by payroll deduction at the established rate of your total salary, exclusive of overtime. Please contact Business Services, or your retirement plan directly, if you have questions about your retirement plan. Both retirement systems have online resources, which can be accessed at www.calpers.ca.gov or www.calstrs.com.

Employee Assistance Program

Through its Employee Assistance Program (EAP), the County Office provides employees and their family members with the opportunity to receive free confidential assistance in addressing personal and/or work-related concerns. This program is provided by SISC through Anthem. The agency's professional counselors can help you and your family deal with issues such as stress, balancing work and family needs, drug or alcohol problems, marital issues, depression, parent/child tensions, work-related problems, coping with death or chronic illness, physical abuse, etc.

To encourage candid discussion with the professional counselors, EAP services are completely confidential. No information is provided to the County Office; the agency does not release the names of employees utilizing their services.

For more information about the Employee Assistance Program or to schedule a confidential appointment, call 800-999-7222 or visit anthemeap.com and enter SISC. The Human Resource Services department can also provide you with general information about this program.

Smoking Cessation Reimbursement Program

The County Office will reimburse employees up to \$50 for successfully completing a smoking cessation program. Employees applying for this benefit must show proof of program completion and may not have received reimbursement from the Smoking Cessation Reimbursement Program within the previous twelve months. The County of Sonoma has

information about smoking cessation programs on their webpage ([click here for more information at BreatheEasy](#)) or the Northern California Center for Well-Being at (707) 575-6043 or ([click here for information at www.norcalwellbeing.org](http://www.norcalwellbeing.org)). Kaiser and the EAP program both provide tobacco cessation classes.

Public Transportation Reimbursement Program

The County Office maintains a Commuter Benefits Program that rewards employees who help reduce air pollution and traffic congestion by decreasing single-occupant commute trips. You can earn \$3 per day each time you rideshare and \$20 each month that you commute by bicycle 10 or more times. An online tool has been set up so that you can record your trips and find potential commuting partners here at SCOE or at neighboring worksites. Find more information and learn how to participate visit <https://www.scoe.org/pub/htdocs/commute.html>

Time-Off Benefits

Vacations

The County Office recognizes the importance of time away from the job and wishes employees to have opportunities for rest, recreation, and other personal activities.

If you are a **certificated** employee, your time away from work—your vacation—is realized through the scheduling of work and non-work days. As the activities of certificated employees are typically tied to student attendance, extended periods of non-work days are generally scheduled during the summer months. Work schedules for certificated employees are determined by collective bargaining agreements and/or individually negotiated employment contracts. As work schedules vary significantly from employee to employee, you may wish to consult these documents for additional information about your work schedule. Please note that non-work days for certificated employees are unpaid days off from work.

If you are a **classified** employee, annual vacations provide you with time away from your job. The amount of vacation you are entitled to depends upon your status as exempt or nonexempt, the number of hours in your workweek, and your length of service with the County Office. Classified employees accumulate paid vacation at rates established by Merit System Rules, Superintendent Policies, and collective bargaining agreements. Consult these documents for information about vacation allowances or contact Human Resource Services.

Collective bargaining agreements also contain guidelines on vacations for teaching assistants, including specific usage rules and payment schedules, which differ from those for other classified employees. For teaching assistants in Community School, Court School, and Special Education programs, vacation is amortized in annual pay and employees do not take vacation days off.

If you are entitled to take vacation as time off, your vacation must be scheduled and approved by your supervisor in advance of being taken. Although vacation days begin accruing from the date of hire, no vacation may be taken until six months of continuous employment. Vacation days may be carried over into successive fiscal years up to certain maximums as specified in collective bargaining agreements, Superintendent Policies, and Merit System rules.

Vacations may be taken as weekly periods, as individual days, or in half-hour increments as long as the period chosen meets with departmental approval. In the event that a holiday observed by the County Office falls within a scheduled vacation period, you will not be charged a vacation day for the holiday. Upon termination of employment, classified employees will be compensated for all accrued but unused vacation, if you have completed six (6) months of continuous service to the Sonoma County Office of Education.

Questions regarding vacation and scheduled non-work days may be directed to your supervisor or the Human Resource Services department. Human Resource Services maintains ongoing records of the number of vacation days accrued by classified staff and how many days are available for use. Leave balances are also included on your monthly pay stub. Classified employees should also refer to the discussion of Attendance and Absences presented later in this handbook for information about scheduling vacations, obtaining supervisor approval, and recording days away from work.

Holidays

The County Office recognizes the following holidays:

- ◆ New Year's Day
- ◆ Martin Luther King Jr. Day
- ◆ Lincoln Day
- ◆ Presidents' Day
- ◆ Memorial Day
- ◆ Juneteenth
- ◆ Independence Day
- ◆ Labor Day
- ◆ Veterans Day
- ◆ Thanksgiving Day
- ◆ Day following Thanksgiving Day
- ◆ Christmas Eve Day
- ◆ Christmas Day
- ◆ New Year's Eve Day
- ◆ New Year's Day

Holidays falling on a Saturday are normally observed on the preceding Friday. Holidays falling on a Sunday are normally observed on the following Monday. You will be notified at the beginning of each school year of the actual date these holidays are observed by the County Office. The main Skyline office is closed on the days holidays are observed.

Typically, **certificated** staff have scheduled non-work days on holidays. Non-work days are unpaid days off from work.

Typically, **classified** employees receive the above-mentioned holidays, plus two additional floating holidays, as paid days off from work. Floating holidays must be scheduled and approved in advance of being taken. They are usually used in full-day increments, but may be taken in one-hour increments, and must occur in the fiscal year in which they are earned or they are forfeited. Teaching assistants follow unique policies regarding holiday leave; these employees should consult their collective bargaining agreement and/or their supervisor for further information regarding holiday provisions.

For questions about holidays, contact your supervisor or Human Resource Services and consult your collective bargaining agreement. If you are a classified employee and want to schedule a floating holiday, please follow the procedure outlined in the Attendance and Absences section of this handbook.

Sick Leave

The County Office recognizes that inability to work because of illness or injury may cause economic hardship. For this reason, we provide paid sick days to employees. Employees accrue sick days at the rate of one day per month for each month of full-time employment. Part-time employees earn sick leave on a prorated basis.

Eligible employees may carry over an unlimited number of unused sick days from year to year to ensure that such days are available in the event of a long-term illness. However, no employee is paid for accrued unused sick days at the time of termination. Unused sick leave of retiring employees may be applied as service credits as allowed by the applicable retirement plan. The procedure to follow when you are absent due to illness or injury is set forth in the discussion of Attendance and Absences presented later in this Handbook. If you are off work for five or more days due to illness or injury, you must provide a doctor's release to return to work *before* returning to your worksite. The doctor's release is submitted to the Human Resource Services department. Human Resource Services staff will notify your department when you are cleared to return to work.

The County Office may require additional documentation from an employee's doctor or medical practitioner to verify sick leave absences. This documentation may be required when an employee's record shows extended chronic absenteeism, a pattern of absences, or exhaustion of earned sick leave, or in other instances deemed appropriate by the County Office.

Sick leave may be transferred from a prior employing school district or county office of education if it has been less than one year since that employment ended. During your orientation session with the Human Resource Services department, you can complete the necessary paperwork for this transaction.

Employees who have used all of their sick leave and are still absent due to illness or injury should contact Human Resource Services for information about long-term differential leave, long-term disability insurance, and other options available to ease the economic hardship caused by inability to work.

Other Leaves of Absence

In addition to sick leave, the County Office provides employees with other types of leave to meet the wide variety of circumstances, which cause individuals to be absent from their place of employment. Types of leaves recognized by the County Office include:

- ◆ Bereavement leave;
- ◆ Family care leave;
- ◆ Industrial injury or accident leave;
- ◆ Jury duty/witness leave;
- ◆ Leave without pay;
- ◆ Long-term, unpaid leave of absence (including sabbaticals);
- ◆ Medical leave of absence;
- ◆ Military leave;
- ◆ Parental leave;
- ◆ Personal necessity leave (This type of leave is not in addition to sick leave, but provides greater flexibility in using sick leave for emergency situations);
- ◆ Pregnancy disability leave (PDL).

The types of leaves granted to employees, leave duration, and specifications as to salary continuance, accrual of benefits, and eligibility are issues that are negotiated with collective bargaining units. Employees who are members of collective bargaining units should consult their current agreement for detailed information about allowable leaves; non-union employees can obtain information from their supervisor, the Human Resource Services department, Merit System Rules, and/or the Superintendent's Policies and Operating Procedures.

In all instances, employees who are requesting leave should endeavor to do so in advance. The procedure for requesting leave is presented in the Attendance and Absences section on the next page. Note that you must submit an Extended Leave Request form to your supervisor in order to obtain any paid leave over 10 days and for all leave without pay. Except in cases of emergency, Extended Leave Requests must be submitted eight weeks prior to the beginning date of the leave.

Time off for voting—If it is impossible for you to vote in a national or state election during off-duty hours due to time constraints, you will be allowed as much as two hours of paid time off to vote. Time off for voting must be arranged with your supervisor at least two days in advance.

Employee Rights and Responsibilities

Attendance and Absences

The County Office expects all employees to assume diligent responsibility for their attendance and promptness. Regular attendance at work is as important to you as it is to the County Office. Your ability to be at work as scheduled will assure you of a full paycheck each payday and will influence

your opportunities for advancement. Unnecessary absences place an unfair burden on other employees and negatively affect the performance and productivity of the County Office.

The County Office recognizes that, due to illness and other compelling reasons, it may be necessary for you to be absent from work on occasion. During orientation, new employees are instructed on how to sign in and use an automated attendance system called Absence Management to record absences and request substitute coverage if needed. Should you be unable to report to work as scheduled, you should notify the County Office as described below.

- ◆ If your absence does not require substitute coverage—Notify your supervisor, department director, or other designated department employee as soon as possible on the day of your absence. If it is impossible for you to notify the County Office of your absence, a family member or friend may do so for you. Your supervisor should be notified daily if your absence continues unless you are granted an authorized leave. In addition, you must enter your absence in the Absence Management system at www.aesoponline.com or by calling (800) 942-3767.
- ◆ **If your absence requires substitute coverage**—Contact Absence Management by phone at (800) 942-3767 or via the Internet at www.aesoponline.com at least two hours before the start time of your absence. If you are unable to report your absence two hours before it begins, please call your supervisor or the Human Resource Services department (524-2679) to ensure substitute coverage.

Absenteeism or tardiness that is not reported or is excessive in the judgment of the County Office is grounds for disciplinary action. Please note that if you are absent and fail to notify the County Office, we may assume that you have abandoned your job.

Requesting leave or vacation time—The County Office has developed a formal system for employees to request and report time away from work. This system provides an explanation for employee absences and allows for accurate recordkeeping of leave usage. Please report all absences via Absence Management.

Anticipated absences require prior approval. In such instances, reporting the absence via Absence Management functions as both the means by which approvals are obtained and the documentation via which leave accounting takes place. Please submit absences to your supervisor as far in advance as possible when the need for leave time is anticipated. Minimum notice of five working days is required except in special or emergency situations, but advance planning is requested whenever possible.

The Superintendent's Policies and Operating Procedures contain detailed information about requesting leave and vacation time. Your supervisor and/or the administrative assistant in your department can instruct you on how to use Absence Management to request and/or report absences. If you have questions about the amount of leave or vacation time available to you, consult your collective bargaining agreement or contact Human Resource Services at 524-2824.

Please note that falsification of records is grounds for disciplinary action. If an employee has not reported their absence via Absence Management, the supervisor's information will serve as official record.

Recording attendance for certificated management staff—Because they work an individually-negotiated and nonstandard work schedule, certificated management employees may be required to complete additional record-keeping documents to account for work and non-work days. Information about these record-keeping requirements will be provided to employees, as applicable, by the Human Resource Services department.

Professional Conduct

The effective operation of the County Office requires the services of persons with integrity, high ideals, and human understanding. As an integral member of the County Office staff, you are expected to adhere to acceptable standards of professional conduct and endeavor to provide prompt and effective service to the clients of the County Office.

Please remember, that no matter what position you hold you are a representative of the County Office. The people with whom you come in contact will form opinions about the County Office through observation of your conduct and attitude. You are encouraged to observe the highest standards of professionalism and demonstrate sincere respect for the rights and feelings of others at all times.

If your performance or conduct falls short of established standards, the County Office will endeavor, as appropriate, to provide you with a reasonable opportunity to correct the deficiency. If, however, you fail to make the correction, you may be subject to discipline up to, and including, dismissal.

Personal appearance and demeanor—The County Office encourages employees to wear clothing that demonstrates their high regard for education and presents an image consistent with their job responsibilities. We recognize that different styles of dress may be appropriate for different jobs at the County Office. Whatever your job, you are expected to be appropriately attired to perform your assigned work and accommodate appropriate health and safety practices. Please use good judgment in your choice of work clothes and present yourself in a way that best represents you and the County Office. Employees are also expected to keep their work environments clean and orderly.

Confidential information—In the course of your work, you may have access to information about school business, students, tests, and records, which should be regarded as restricted, privileged, or confidential. Except for information, which has been designated for public distribution, you are expected to maintain the confidentiality of the information you have access to. Before leaving your workstation for the day, please lock all files and clear all work areas of confidential materials. Any employee who willfully releases confidential information will be subject to disciplinary action up to and including dismissal. Any employee who inadvertently or carelessly releases confidential information may also be subject to disciplinary action, including the denial of further access to such information and any other steps necessary to prevent further unauthorized release of information.

Public statements—The County Office wishes to keep the public informed about all matters related to the education of students within Sonoma County and encourages the use of the news media to communicate with the general public. Public statements on behalf of the County Office should reflect current policy and be coordinated through the County Superintendent or their designee.

You are encouraged to cooperate with the news media, but should always make it clear that you are expressing your own personal viewpoint unless you are forwarding the County Office's official position on the matters involved. Should you have questions about the appropriateness of making a public statement, please confer with your supervisor.

Conflict of interest—The responsibilities of the County Office necessitate that employees conduct their day-to-day activities in an ethical and responsible manner without conflict of interest in accordance with all applicable statutes, authorities, and regulations.

The Sonoma County Office of Education respects your rights to engage in activities outside of employment which are private in nature; however, you are expected to protect the County Office's interest, avoid undue outside influence on work-related decisions or activities, and comply with all applicable laws and regulations.

Your supervisor is available to review any activities, which you believe might be a conflict of interest with your position at the County Office. The Superintendent's Policies provide some guidance regarding areas of potential conflict, such as nepotism, investments in conflict with official duties, private employment, consulting, and tutoring.

Soliciting and selling—In the interest of maintaining a proper business environment and preventing inconvenience to others, we ask that employees not distribute promotional, political, controversial, and other non-instructional materials or solicit other employees unless approved by the County Superintendent. Non-employees are likewise discouraged from distributing material or soliciting employees on County Office premises.

Communication and Problem-Solving

On occasion, you may have a complaint, suggestion, observation, or question about your job. The County Office wishes to encourage employee communication and to consider both your ideas and your complaints. Please share any suggestions you have about how our operations could be improved.

Misunderstandings or conflicts can arise in any organization and good communication goes a long way toward resolving such issues before they become problems. To ensure effective working relations, it is important that such matters be resolved before serious problems develop. Many incidents will resolve themselves naturally; however, should a situation persist that you believe is detrimental to you or the County Office, you should follow the procedure described here to bring your complaint to management's attention.

First, discuss the problem with your immediate supervisor. If your problem is not resolved after discussion with your supervisor or if you feel a discussion with your supervisor is inappropriate, you are encouraged to request a meeting with your department director. In an effort to resolve the problem, the department director will consider the facts, conduct an investigation, and review the matter with other staff as appropriate. You may request that a coworker or union representative, if applicable, be present at any stage of this procedure.

If you are not satisfied with your department director's decision and wish to pursue the problem or complaint further, you may prepare a written summary of your concerns and request that the matter be reviewed by the County Superintendent or designee.

The County Office does not tolerate any form of retaliation against employees availing themselves of this procedure. This procedure should not be construed, however, as preventing, limiting, or delaying the County Office from taking disciplinary action against any individual in circumstances where disciplinary action is appropriate.

Professional Growth

A knowledgeable, well-informed, and skilled employee contributes greatly to the success of the County Office. With prior approval, employees are encouraged to participate actively in conferences, workshops, training activities, and courses that will enable them to improve their competencies in job-related skills.

As part of your performance appraisal, you and your supervisor may develop a performance plan that includes specific goals for professional growth. Participation in activities that are part of your professional growth plan, or that you would like to independently propose, require specific prior approval by your supervisor and department director. Written proposals should be submitted to your supervisor to gain approval. If approved, employees may receive release time from work with pay, reimbursement for travel, enrollment fees, and/or reimbursement for supplies. Terms of agreement are based on the needs of the agency, the benefits of the program, the potential for individual growth, and budget considerations.

Out-of-county professional growth activities require the submission of a Conference Attendance Request form and approval by the County Superintendent.

Inservice training and cross-training opportunities are also available for employees wishing to broaden their skills. Your supervisor can assist you in finding out about the variety of professional growth opportunities available to you.

Maintaining Licenses and Credentials

Many County Office positions require that employees hold specific credentials, certificates of competency, or licenses. Teaching credentials, administrative credentials, nurse services credentials, and driver licenses are examples of such required certifications.

If you are employed in a position that requires licenses and/or credentials, you are personally responsible for keeping them current. Each license or credential actively used or required by your job description must be registered with the County Office. *The County Office may withhold your pay if you fail to register and maintain all required licenses and credentials.*

The Human Resource Services department employs Credential Analysts to assist certificated staff with procedures and questions. They can be reached at 524-2794 or 524-2987.

Personnel Records

The County Office maintains personnel files on each employee. These files contain documentation regarding all aspects of employee tenure with the County Office, such as performance appraisals, beneficiary designation forms, disciplinary notices, and letters of commendation.

Keeping personnel records up-to-date—Keeping your employment record correct and up-to-date is very important. The Human Resource Services department should be notified promptly of any changes in your name, home address or telephone number, marital status, number of dependents, name of beneficiary, dependents listed for insurance purposes, scholastic achievements, individuals to notify in case of emergency, and so forth.

Reviewing personnel records—Employees may inspect their personnel record, upon request, by contacting the Human Resource Services department. Human Resource Services will arrange a convenient time for you to view your file when a member of the staff can be present.

You will be notified in writing by your supervisor or department director if derogatory material is being placed in your personnel record. Upon notification, you will have the opportunity to review and comment on the contents of the material.

Further information about placing and reviewing material in personnel files can be found in the Superintendent's Policies and in collective bargaining agreements. Your supervisor, the Human Resource Services department, or your union representative can answer any questions you may have about personnel records.

Reimbursable Expenses

With prior approval, the County Office will reimburse ordinary and necessary expenses incurred by you in the performance of your job. It is the practice of the County Office to reimburse actual "out-of-pocket" expenses incurred as a result of attending authorized meetings, conferences, and conventions and performing other official duties. Mileage, meals, parking, and lodging are reimbursed at IRS-approved rates.

A Conference and Travel Expense Claim form must be submitted to your department director by the tenth of the month for expenses incurred in the previous month. All receipts must be attached to the Claim. It is recommended that you keep a copy of the Claim and attachments. Reimbursement will typically be received within 15 days.

Employees may apply for a travel advance to help defray anticipated expenses when traveling on official County Office business. As specified in collective bargaining agreements, certain employees may be eligible for prepayment of reimbursable expenses.

Please note that any employee traveling outside of the county for official County Office business must obtain authorization prior to embarking on travel. This accounting system for out-of-county travel has been developed to protect employee liability in case of accident and to ensure that the County Office can contact a traveling employee should the need arise.

Specific information about travel advances, expense claims, and out-of-county travel approval can be found in the Superintendent's Policies and Operating Procedures. Please consult your supervisor if you have any questions about reimbursable expenses.

Termination of Employment

Employees desiring to terminate their employment relationship are urged to notify the County Office at least two weeks in advance of their intended resignation. Such notice should be given in writing to your immediate supervisor, and then forwarded to your department director and the Human Resource Services department prior to gaining final approval from the County Superintendent. Proper notice generally allows the County Office sufficient time to calculate all monies to which you may be entitled and to include such monies in your final paycheck.

The County Office generally discourages certificated employees from resigning during the school year for which they have been contracted. However, release from contract may, in some instances, be granted.

Employees who plan to retire from County Office employment are urged to provide a minimum of two months' notice. Proper notice ensures that any retirement benefits to which an employee is entitled commence in a timely manner.

Although the County Office hopes that all employment relationships are long-term and mutually rewarding, the County Office reserves the right to terminate an employment relationship during the probationary period without cause and after the probationary period for cause as specified in applicable collective bargaining agreements, Merit System Rules and regulations, and/or management contracts.

Exit interviews are normally scheduled for outgoing employees and will include meetings with your supervisor or department director, Human Resource Services department staff, and other persons as applicable. The purpose of these interviews is to review your eligibility for benefit continuation and conversion, ensure that all necessary forms are completed, collect all County Office property that may be in your possession (e.g., keys, access cards, and equipment), and provide you with an opportunity to discuss your job-related experiences.

Health and Safety

Drug, Alcohol, and Tobacco Free Workplace

It is the policy of the County Office to maintain a drug- and alcohol-free workplace in keeping with the spirit and intent of the Drug-Free Workplace Act of 1988. The use of controlled substances is inconsistent with the behavior expected of employees, subjects all employees and visitors to unacceptable safety risks, and undermines our ability to operate effectively and efficiently.

In this connection, please be advised that the unlawful manufacture, distribution, dispensation, possession, or use of controlled substances in the workplace is prohibited. If you violate this

prohibition, you will be subject to criminal prosecution and/or disciplinary action in accordance with collective bargaining agreements, Superintendent’s Policies, the California Education Code, and all other applicable state and federal laws and regulations.

As a condition of employment, all employees are required to abide by the County Office’s policy of maintaining a workplace free of drugs, alcohol, and tobacco. The term “workplace” includes all premises where the activities of the County Office are conducted and in all places and all vehicles where you or any other employee are performing assigned duties.

Employees who feel they have a substance use/abuse problem are urged to voluntarily seek confidential assistance through the Employee Assistance Program or rehabilitation programs. To access the services provided by our Employee Assistance Program, call (800) 999-7222.

In the event that you are convicted of any criminal drug statute violation occurring in the workplace (including a plea of *nolo contendere*, i.e., no contest), you must notify the County Office within five days of conviction.

Employees who violate any aspect of this policy may be subject to disciplinary action up to and including termination. At its discretion, the County Office may require employees who violate this policy to successfully complete a drug abuse assistance or rehabilitation program as a condition of continued employment.

Tobacco-free environment—Smoking and tobacco use is prohibited in all facilities owned and/or operated by the County Office, whether indoors or out-of-doors, and in all County Office vehicles, whether on County Office property or off the premises. Please see page 21 of this Handbook for information on reimbursement for employees participating in smoking cessation programs.

Minimizing Exposure to Bloodborne Pathogens

It is the policy of the County Office to meet federal and state standards for minimizing the risk of exposure to bloodborne pathogens and other potentially infectious materials in the workplace. Employees who may be at risk of exposure to bloodborne pathogens primarily include those individuals who provide direct care to students.

During your orientation briefing, the Human Resource Services department will tell you if your job classification is one that is considered to be at risk of exposure. Upon employment at the County Office, all employees are provided with information about bloodborne pathogens exposure control and required to view a training video.

Hepatitis B vaccinations are provided at no cost to employees who are at risk of exposure to bloodborne pathogens and to other employees who request the vaccination. Information about obtaining the Hepatitis B vaccinations is available from Human Resource Services.

Safety

The County Office is committed to providing a safe and healthful work environment. In keeping with this commitment, the County Office has an Injury and Illness Prevention Program in place and complies with relevant federal and state occupational health and safety laws.

All employees are expected to work diligently to maintain safe and healthful working conditions, to participate in County Office safety programs, and to observe all established precautionary measures and safe work practices. No individual will be required to perform job duties under unsafe or hazardous conditions or to execute tasks that endanger their health, safety, or wellbeing. The County Office will endeavor to advise employees of occupational safety and health hazards and provide safety devices, protective equipment, and training on safe work practices.

If you identify an unsafe condition or an occupational safety or health hazard, please complete a Hazard Report form immediately and forward it to your supervisor. The Hazard Report form may be obtained from Business Services or the SCOE website and can be submitted confidentially, with or without your name and signature. If you are not comfortable submitting the report to your supervisor, please forward the form to Human Resource Services.

Safety suggestions of any sort may be submitted, preferably in writing, to your supervisor or to the Safety Advisory Committee. The County Office would like to assure you that you can provide reports on safety hazards, request safety information, or make safety suggestions without fear of reprisal.

Employees should understand that compliance with safety requirements is a condition of employment that will be evaluated, together with other aspects of your performance, as part of the performance appraisal process. Due to the importance of safety considerations, employees who violate safety standards, cause hazardous or dangerous situations, or allow hazardous conditions to remain when they could be effectively remedied may be subject to disciplinary action up to and including termination.

For further information about safety issues, see the Injury and Illness Prevention Plan (located on the SCOE website) or contact your supervisor.

Emergency preparedness—Each County Office site has a disaster plan for employees to follow in the event of an earthquake, fire, or other major disaster. Your supervisor or the administrator at your site will provide you with a copy of the disaster plan for your location. Please familiarize yourself with the plan. Emergency preparedness drills will be conducted periodically to further acquaint you with the procedures to follow in an emergency.

Disaster service worker status—Under state law, County Office employees are considered “disaster service workers” and may be assigned to perform activities that promote the protection of public health and safety or the preservation of lives and property in the event of a declared emergency. Therefore, you are encouraged to attend all safety and disaster response training offered to employees, and prepare your family to respond to a disaster even if you are not present.

Use of cell phones when driving for work-related business—When operating a vehicle to perform County Office business, employees are reminded to follow all applicable laws and to practice safe

driving procedures. Employees who receive a cellular telephone or cell phone stipend for the purpose of conducting official business are expected to use a hands-free device and refrain from checking email or texting when using County Office-supplied telecommunications services while driving.

Facilities and Office Operations

County Office employees work in a variety of facilities throughout Sonoma County including the main office building on Skylane Boulevard, Juvenile Hall, classrooms at district sites, and other locations. Wherever you are assigned, please observe that facility's guidelines as they pertain to security, parking, equipment usage, and housekeeping procedures for common areas such as employee lounges and kitchens. Your supervisor or the administrator at your work site will acquaint you with applicable guidelines.

Security—Access to all County Office facilities is limited to authorized persons only and many facilities have security systems in place during non-work hours. If you require access to your job site during non-work hours, please see your supervisor. If approved, you may be issued keys and/or access cards and given detailed instructions about entering your site after hours. Please follow security guidelines carefully and exercise extreme care so that unauthorized persons do not enter the building.

You are also requested to secure files and clear work areas of confidential materials prior to departing your work location at the conclusion of your workday. At all times, it is advisable to see that your personal property and valuables are kept in a safe place.

Energy conservation and recycling—The County Office recognizes the value of energy conservation and recycling and requests employee participation in all efforts to implement environmentally responsible programs. A recycling program is in operation at the main County Office facility and at other assigned work locations. Please participate in the recycling program at your site, if applicable, and conserve energy whenever possible.

Telephone, email, Internet usage, and personal correspondence—County Office telephone and computer systems are intended for official business use. When replying to incoming telephone calls and email messages, employees are expected to treat every caller with respect and courtesy. It is requested that you keep personal calls and email brief and to a minimum. Please refrain from using County Office computers for personal Internet research or correspondence and arrange to have all personal email sent to your home account.

Bulletin and digital display boards—To ensure that employees have access to posted information, bulletin and digital display boards are located throughout our facilities in areas that employees frequently visit. These boards are used to communicate official government information on equal employment opportunity, wage and hour laws, health and safety regulations, and other issues. They are also used to communicate information of particular interest to employees.

Personnel Administration

Merit System for Classified Employees

California's Education Code outlines a process of personnel administration for classified employees. This personnel process, called the Merit System, ensures that all classified personnel are selected, promoted, and retained without favoritism or prejudice, on the basis of merit and fitness. The Merit System is designed to provide an employment process that is focused on political neutrality, equal opportunity, and competitive merit.

The County Office of Education has adopted a Merit System for classified employees as set forth in the Education Code. A nonpartisan Personnel Commission oversees our Merit System and establishes the rules that govern the terms and conditions of classified employment. The Commission approves job classifications and salary schedules, reviews eligibility lists for employment, hears appeals on discipline, and serves as a forum for the concerns of classified employees. The director for Human Resource Services is responsible for implementing classified employment procedures that conform to the regulations of the Merit System and the rules established by the Personnel Commission.

The Personnel Commission provides written documentation of the Merit System rules and regulations and encourages classified staff to become familiar with the contents of this document. The Merit System works in concert with the collective bargaining agreements that apply to classified staff.

You can access a copy of the Merit System Rules in the SCOE Employees Center section our website, www.scoe.org.

Collective Bargaining Agreements

There are currently three collective bargaining units that represent employees of the County Office. Confidential and management employees are not represented. Thus, the terms and conditions of employment at the County Office are not the same for all individuals.

If you are a member of a collective bargaining unit, many of the terms and conditions of your employment—including your wages, holidays, vacation entitlement, etc.—are defined in the collective bargaining agreement entered into between the County Office and the union that represents you.

Please refer to this document for current and specific information regarding your employment at the County Office. However, in addition to the items covered in collective bargaining agreements, there is other information that impacts your employment relationship with the County Office.

Since this Employee Handbook is a general publication prepared for all County Office employees, it is possible that a conflict may arise between an item in this Handbook and an item in your collective bargaining agreement. If such a conflict does exist, the terms in your agreement will govern without nullifying any other items in this publication.

If you have questions regarding your employment as expressed in your collective bargaining agreement, contact your union representative. Other questions may be directed to your supervisor or the Human Resource Services department.

Position Announcements

The County Office wishes to keep employees informed about internal job openings in the hope and expectation that employees will find new opportunities to develop professionally while continuing in County Office employment. The Human Resource Services department has established a job-posting program to give all employees an opportunity to apply for positions they are both interested in and qualified for. Announcements for all open positions are accessible via a link on the SCOE website to EdJoin.org, a statewide website where all open positions are listed.

In order to be eligible for a posted position, you must meet the minimum hiring specifications and be an employee in good standing. You are responsible for monitoring job postings and for completing and filing all required application materials with the Human Resource Services department by the closing date and time specified. Applications must be received in the Human Resource Services department by 4:30 P.M. on the closing date. You are not required to notify your supervisor when submitting an application for a posted position.

Should you have questions about any posted position, want to learn more about specific job duties, or need assistance determining whether you meet the minimum qualifications; please do not hesitate to contact the Human Resource Services staff for assistance.

Employment of Relatives

The County Office permits the employment of qualified relatives of employees as long as such employment does not, in the opinion of the County Office, create actual or perceived conflict of interest. In order to preclude situations of possible conflict of interest, the County Office will not appoint an employee to a position over which a member of their immediate family maintains supervisory or evaluation responsibilities. Immediate family as used here means grandparents, parents, spouses, siblings, children, grandchildren, or in-laws.

Reference Requests

All inquiries about current and former employees of the County Office, including requests for verifications of employment, employment references, and requests for information about the cause or reason for separation from County Office employment, should be forwarded to the Human Resource Services department. Letters of recommendation issued on behalf of the County Office for current or former employees must first be submitted to a deputy/associate/assistant superintendent or the Human Resource Services department for approval.

Individuals not acting on behalf of the County Office may agree to provide a letter of recommendation, but only authorized recommendations may be provided on County Office letterhead.

Should you desire to use the County Office as a reference, please be advised that all inquiries will be answered truthfully and accurately by authorized personnel.

Questions regarding reference requests may be directed to your supervisor or the Human Resource Services department.

Disciplinary Action

The County Office wishes to promote a cooperative and supportive working relationship with employees and places trust in the abilities of its staff. However, in those instances when employees act improperly due to unthinking behavior or willful neglect, a fair and orderly process for employee discipline will be implemented in accordance with Merit System Rules, Superintendent's Policies and Operating Procedures, and collective bargaining agreements.

If an employee fails to correct a deficient work habit or violates established policies, contracts, agreements and/or laws, disciplinary action will be recommended. Whenever possible, discipline will be progressive in nature, with the severity of discipline tailored to the offense or deficiency. The degree of discipline administered in any given situation depends upon the severity of the infraction. Your supervisor is responsible for thoroughly evaluating circumstances and facts as objectively as possible and selecting the most suitable form of discipline.

If you have questions about employee discipline, your supervisor, the Human Resource Services department, or your employee representative can provide you with additional information.

Employee Recognition

The County Office wishes to recognize employees who provide exceptional contributions or exemplary service to our operations. Employee awards are presented annually to an outstanding certificated, classified, and management employee for service to the County Office (Golden Bell Awards) and to the County Office employee who has best served local school districts (Outstanding Service Award).

A committee is appointed by the County Superintendent to review nominations and select annual award recipients. Nominations are provided by County Office and district staff for employees who:

- ◆ Propose ideas or procedures that improve the efficiency of operations;
- ◆ Perform special acts or services in the public interest;
- ◆ Provide exemplary service to local school districts, clients, and the public;
- ◆ Make exceptional contributions to the effectiveness of County Office operations by superior accomplishments;
- ◆ Contribute to the improvement of educational programs;
- ◆ Enhance job performance by initiating self-improvement.

Employee awards are presented at the start of each school year. Also recognized are employees who have completed 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, 30, 35, or more years of service for the County Office.

In addition, the Personnel Commission has established a Team Player Award, which is presented annually to a classified employee who has an exemplary record in the areas of community involvement, workplace performance, integrity, and overall attendance.

Accessibility Notice

The Sonoma County Office of Education is committed to making its online materials and information accessible to individuals of all abilities.

Individuals may obtain an alternate, accessible version of the content in these documents by contacting webmaster@scoe.org and by including a copy of the document as an attachment. If you are unable to attach a copy of the document, please indicate the document name and website location. SCOE staff will respond to your request within 2-business days.