



July 1, 2002

Ms. Laura Enriquez-Guerra
Records Management Specialist
Ysleta Independent School District
9600 Sims Drive
El Paso, Texas 79925-7225

OR2002-3562

Dear Ms. Enriquez-Guerra:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 165192.

The Ysleta Independent School District (the "district") received a request for "[a]ll items presented to the Board of Trustees in connection with" the grievance of the requestor's client, a district employee. You claim that the requested information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.026, 552.101, and 552.114 of the Government Code and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 ("FERPA"). We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted representative sample of information.¹ We have also considered comments submitted by the requestor. *See* Gov't Code § 552.304 (providing that interested party may submit comments stating why information should or should not be released).

FERPA provides that no federal funds will be made available under any applicable program to an educational agency or institution that releases personally identifiable information (other than directory information) contained in a student's education records to anyone but certain

¹We assume that the "representative sample" of records submitted to this office is truly representative of the requested records as a whole. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 499 (1988), 497 (1988). This open records letter does not reach, and therefore does not authorize the withholding of, any other requested records to the extent that those records contain substantially different types of information than that submitted to this office.

enumerated federal, state, and local officials and institutions, unless otherwise authorized by the student's parent. *See* 20 U.S.C. § 1232g(b)(1). "Education records" means those records that contain information directly related to a student and are maintained by an educational agency or institution or by a person acting for such agency or institution. *Id.* § 1232g(a)(4)(A). This office generally applies the same analysis under section 552.114 and FERPA. Open Records Decision No. 539 (1990).

Section 552.114 excepts from disclosure student records at an educational institution funded completely or in part by state revenue. Section 552.026 provides as follows:

This chapter does not require the release of information contained in education records of an educational agency or institution, except in conformity with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974, Sec. 513, Pub. L. No. 93-380, 20 U.S.C. Sec. 1232g.

In Open Records Decision No. 634 (1995), this office concluded that (1) an educational agency or institution may withhold from public disclosure information that is protected by FERPA and excepted from required public disclosure by sections 552.026 and 552.101 without the necessity of requesting an attorney general decision as to those exceptions, and (2) an educational agency or institution that is state-funded may withhold from public disclosure information that is excepted from required public disclosure by section 552.114 as a "student record," insofar as the "student record" is protected by FERPA, without the necessity of requesting an attorney general decision as to that exception.

In this instance, the district has submitted the responsive information that it believes to be subject to FERPA. Therefore, we will address the applicability of FERPA to that information. Information must be withheld from required public disclosure under FERPA only to the extent "reasonable and necessary to avoid personally identifying a particular student." *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 332 (1982), 206 (1978). For purposes of FERPA, a student's handwritten letters constitute "education records" in that they contain information about identifiable students. *See* Open Records Decision No. 224 (1979) (student's handwritten comments that would make identity of student easily traceable through handwriting, style of expression, or particular incidents related in comments protected under FERPA). We note that the requestor refers to section 552.023 of the Government Code which provides a special right of access to information held by a governmental body that relates to the person and is protected by laws intended to protect that person's privacy interests. However, FERPA protects the privacy interests of the student. Therefore, the requestor does not have a special right of access under section 552.023 to any of the student information subject to FERPA. We have marked the types of information that may reveal or tend to reveal information about a student that must be withheld pursuant to FERPA. All other information must be released.

This letter ruling is limited to the particular records at issue in this request and limited to the facts as presented to us; therefore, this ruling must not be relied upon as a previous determination regarding any other records or any other circumstances.

This ruling triggers important deadlines regarding the rights and responsibilities of the governmental body and of the requestor. For example, governmental bodies are prohibited from asking the attorney general to reconsider this ruling. Gov't Code § 552.301(f). If the governmental body wants to challenge this ruling, the governmental body must appeal by filing suit in Travis County within 30 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.324(b). In order to get the full benefit of such an appeal, the governmental body must file suit within 10 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.353(b)(3), (c). If the governmental body does not appeal this ruling and the governmental body does not comply with it, then both the requestor and the attorney general have the right to file suit against the governmental body to enforce this ruling. *Id.* § 552.321(a).

If this ruling requires the governmental body to release all or part of the requested information, the governmental body is responsible for taking the next step. Based on the statute, the attorney general expects that, within 10 calendar days of this ruling, the governmental body will do one of the following three things: 1) release the public records; 2) notify the requestor of the exact day, time, and place that copies of the records will be provided or that the records can be inspected; or 3) notify the requestor of the governmental body's intent to challenge this letter ruling in court. If the governmental body fails to do one of these three things within 10 calendar days of this ruling, then the requestor should report that failure to the attorney general's Open Government Hotline, toll free, at 877/673-6839. The requestor may also file a complaint with the district or county attorney. *Id.* § 552.3215(e).

If this ruling requires or permits the governmental body to withhold all or some of the requested information, the requestor can appeal that decision by suing the governmental body. *Id.* § 552.321(a); *Texas Department of Public Safety v. Gilbreath*, 842 S.W.2d 408, 411 (Tex. App.--Austin 1992, no writ).

Please remember that under the Act the release of information triggers certain procedures for costs and charges to the requestor. If records are released in compliance with this ruling, be sure that all charges for the information are at or below the legal amounts. Questions or complaints about over-charging must be directed to Hadassah Schloss at the Texas Building and Procurement Commission at 512/475-2497.

If the governmental body, the requestor, or any other person has questions or comments about this ruling, they may contact our office. We note that a third party may challenge this ruling by filing suit seeking to withhold information from a requestor. Gov't Code § 552.325.

Although there is no statutory deadline for contacting us, the attorney general prefers to receive any comments within 10 calendar days of the date of this ruling.

Sincerely,



Cindy Nettles
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

CN/jh

Ref: ID# 165192

Enc. Submitted documents

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