



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

May 31, 2005

Ms. Lydia Perry
Law Offices of Robert E. Luna, P.C.
4411 North Central Expressway
Dallas, Texas 75205

OR2005-04707

Dear Ms. Perry:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under the Public Information Act (the "Act"), chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 225293

The Lewisville Independent School District (the "district"), which you represent, received a request for the resume and personnel file of a named person, as well as all documents and correspondence concerning that person's reassignment. You claim that portions of the submitted information are excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101, 552.102, and 552.114 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

We note that the district has not submitted to this office copies or samples of the resume of the named person or any documents or correspondence concerning that person's reassignment. Thus, we assume that any information maintained by the district that is responsive to these portions of the request has been released to the requestor, to the extent it exists. If not, the district must release such information immediately. *See Gov't Code §§ 552.006, .301, .302; Open Records Decision No. 664 (2000) (concluding that section 552.221(a) requires that information not excepted from disclosure must be released as soon as possible under the circumstances).*

We now turn to your arguments for the submitted information. Section 552.101 of the Government Code excepts from required public disclosure "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision." Gov't Code § 552.101. This section encompasses information other statutes make confidential. Section 1324a of title 8 of the United States Code provides that an Employment Eligibility

Verification Form I-9 “may not be used for purposes other than for enforcement of this chapter” and for enforcement of other federal statutes governing crime and criminal investigations. *See* 8 U.S.C. § 1324a(b)(5); *see also* 8 C.F.R. § 274a.2(b)(4). Here, you state that the release of the I-9 form would be “for purposes other than for enforcement” of the referenced federal statutes. Therefore, the submitted I-9 form is confidential under section 552.101 of the Government Code.

Next, you claim that a portion of the submitted information consists of teacher evaluations that are protected under section 21.355 of the Education Code, which is also encompassed by section 552.101 of the Government Code. Section 21.355 provides, “A document evaluating the performance of a teacher or administrator is confidential.” This office has interpreted this section to apply to any document that evaluates, as that term is commonly understood, the performance of a teacher or administrator. Open Records Decision No. 643 (1996). In that opinion, we concluded that a teacher is someone who is required to hold and does hold a certificate or permit required under chapter 21 of the Education Code and is teaching at the time of his or her evaluation. *Id.* Similarly, we concluded that an administrator is someone who is required to hold and does hold a certificate required under chapter 21 of the Education Code and is administering at the time of his or her evaluation. *Id.* We agree that the information you have marked evaluates an individual’s performance as a teacher. Thus, these teacher evaluations are confidential under section 21.355 and must be withheld under section 552.101 of the Government Code.

Next, you claim that portions of the submitted transcripts are excepted under section 552.102(b) of the Government Code. Section 552.102(b) excepts from disclosure all information from transcripts of professional public school employees other than the employee’s name, the courses taken, and the degree obtained. Gov’t Code § 552.102(b); Open Records Decision No. 526 (1989). Thus, with the exception of the employee’s name, the courses taken, and the degree obtained, the district must withhold the submitted transcripts pursuant to section 552.102(b) of the Government Code.

Finally, you claim that a letter contained in the submitted information consists of personally identifiable student record information. Section 552.114 excepts from disclosure student records at an educational institution funded completely or in part by state revenue. Gov’t Code § 552.114. This office generally applies the same analysis under section 552.114 and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (“FERPA”). *See* Open Records Decision No. 539 (1990). 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 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). Section 552.026 of the Government Code

provides that “information contained in education records of an educational agency or institution” may only be released under the Act in accordance with FERPA.

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. *See* Open Records Decision No. 634 at 6-8 (1995). In this instance, you have submitted information that you contend is confidential under FERPA. Accordingly, we will address your claim.

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). Such information includes both information that directly identifies a student, as well as information that, if released, would allow the student’s identity to be easily traced. *See* Open Records Decision No. 224 (1979) (finding student’s handwritten comments protected under FERPA because they make identity of student easily traceable through handwriting, style of expression, or particular incidents related). Having reviewed the letter in question, we have marked the information that must be withheld pursuant to section 552.114 of the Government Code. The remaining information must be released.

In summary, the submitted I-9 form must be withheld under section 552.101 of the Government Code. The district must withhold the teacher evaluations under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 21.355 of the Education Code. With the exception of the employee’s name, the courses taken, and the degree obtained, the district must withhold the submitted transcripts pursuant to section 552.102(b) of the Government Code. Additionally, we have marked the information that must be withheld under section 552.114 of the Government Code. The remaining 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, upon receiving this ruling, the governmental body will either release the public records promptly pursuant to section 552.221(a) of the Government Code or file a lawsuit challenging this ruling pursuant to section 552.324 of the Government Code. If the governmental body fails to do one of these things, 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); *Tex. Dep't of Pub. 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,



Jaclyn N. Thompson
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

JNT/krl

Ref: ID# 225293

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Mr. Dave Lance
The Dallas Morning News
P. O. Box 655237
Dallas, Texas 75265
(w/o enclosures)