



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

October 28, 2005

Ms. Merri Schneider-Vogel
Bracewell & Giuliani, L.L.P.
711 Louisiana Street, Suite 2300
Houston, Texas 77002

OR2005-09794

Dear Ms. Schneider-Vogel:

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# 235342.

The Houston Independent School District (the "district"), which you represent, received a request for all pending information requests filed by a named person and the responsive information, transcripts of all depositions related to a particular lawsuit, and a specific memorandum from a named individual. You inform us that the requestor clarified the request to indicate that the district could redact personal medical information. Thus, the district may withhold this information from the submitted documents. You claim that portions of the submitted information are excepted from disclosure under section 552.101 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed the submitted representative sample of information.¹ We have also considered comments submitted by an attorney representing one of the deponents in the requested information. *See Gov't Code § 552.304* (providing that member of public may submit comments stating why information should or should not be released).²

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.

²We note the attorney submitted a transcript of a deposition. Because the district did not submit such information, we do not address this information. *See Gov't Code § 552.301(e)*.

Initially, we note that you did not submit the requested pending information requests or the information responsive to those requests, nor did you submit the requested memorandum for our review. Further, you have not indicated that such information does not exist or that you wish to withhold any such information from disclosure. Therefore, to the extent information responsive to this aspect of the request exists, we assume that you have released it to the requestor. If you have not released any such information, you must release it to the requestor at this time. *See* Gov't Code §§ 552.301(a), .302.

Section 552.101 excepts from disclosure "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision." This section encompasses information protected by other statutes. Section 21.355 of the Education Code provides, "A document evaluating the performance of a teacher or administrator is confidential." In Open Records Decision No. 643 (1996), this office interpreted this section to apply to any document that evaluates, as that term is commonly understood, the performance of a teacher or administrator. In that opinion, this office also 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. Open Records Decision No. 643. Similarly, 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.* Upon review, we conclude that the submitted information does not consist of evaluations for purposes of section 21.355, and therefore, may not be withheld under section 552.101 on that basis. The district must release the information to the requestor.

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); *Texas 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 Office of the Attorney General 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. 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,



Jaime L. Flores
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

JLF/jpa

Ref: ID# 235342

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Mr. Jason Spencer
Houston Chronicle
801 Texas Avenue
Houston, Texas 77002
(w/o enclosures)

Mr. Christopher L. Tritico
Essmyer & Tritico, L.L.P.
4300 Scotland
Houston, Texas 77007
(w/o enclosures)