



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS  
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OR2010-06706

Dear Ms. Rodriguez:

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#378789.

The Southwest Independent School District (the "district"), which you represent, received a request for several categories of information pertaining to a named district employee from an investigator with the Texas Education Agency ("TEA"). You state you have released some of the requested information to the requestor. You state you have redacted student identifying information pursuant to the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act ("FERPA"), section 1232g of title 20 of the United States Code.<sup>1</sup> 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 information.

Section 552.101 of the Government Code excepts from disclosure "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision." Gov't Code § 552.101. Section 552.101 encompasses section 261.201 of the Family Code, which provides as follows:

(a) [T]he following information is confidential, is not subject to public release under [the Act] and may be disclosed only for purposes consistent

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<sup>1</sup>The United States Department of Education Family Policy Compliance Office (the "DOE") has informed this office that FERPA does not permit state and local educational authorities to disclose to this office, without parental consent, unredacted, personally identifiable information contained in education records for the purpose of our review in the open records ruling process under the Act. The DOE has determined that FERPA determinations must be made by the educational authority in possession of the education records. We have posted a copy of the letter from the DOE to this office on the Attorney General's website: <http://www.oag.state.tx.us/open/20060725usdoe.pdf>.

with this code and applicable federal or state law or under rules adopted by an investigating agency:

- (1) a report of alleged or suspected abuse or neglect made under this chapter and the identity of the person making the report; and
- (2) except as otherwise provided in this section, the files, reports, records, communications, audiotapes, videotapes, and working papers used or developed in an investigation under this chapter or in providing services as a result of an investigation.

Fam. Code § 261.201(a). We note that the district is not an agency authorized to conduct a chapter 261 investigation. *See id.* § 261.103 (listing agencies that may conduct child abuse investigations). However, you state the submitted information includes reports of alleged or suspected abuse made to the Child Protective Services Division of the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (“CPS”), as well the identity of the person making the report. Upon review, we find that this information is within the scope of section 261.201 of the Family Code. Therefore, this information, which you have marked, is generally confidential pursuant to section 261.201 of the Family Code.

We note that TEA’s request states that it is seeking this information under the authority provided to the State Board for Educator Certification (“SBEC”) by section 249.14 of title 19 of the Texas Administrative Code.<sup>2</sup> Accordingly, we will consider whether section 249.14 of title 19 of the Texas Administrative Code permits TEA to obtain information that is otherwise protected by the exception discussed above. *See* Open Records Decision No. 451 at 4 (1986) (specific access provision prevails over generally applicable exception to public disclosure).

Chapter 249 of title 19 of the Texas Administrative Code governs disciplinary proceedings, sanctions, and contested cases involving SBEC. *See* 19 T.A.C. § 249.4. Section 249.14 provides in relevant part:

- (a) [TEA] staff may obtain and investigate information concerning alleged improper conduct by an educator, applicant, examinee, or other person subject to this chapter that would warrant the [SBEC] denying relief to or taking disciplinary action against the person or certificate.

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<sup>2</sup>Chapter 21 of the Education Code authorizes SBEC to regulate and oversee all aspects of the certification, continuing education, and standards of conduct of public school educators. *See* Educ. Code § 21.031(a). Section 21.041 of the Education Code states that SBEC may “provide for disciplinary proceedings, including the suspension or revocation of an educator certificate, as provided by Chapter 2001, Government Code.” *Id.* § 21.041(b)(7). Section 21.041 also authorizes SBEC to “adopt rules as necessary for its own procedures.” *Id.* § 21.041(a).

(c) The TEA staff may also obtain and act on other information providing grounds for investigation and possible action under this chapter.

19 T.A.C. § 249.14. In this instance, the TEA requestor states that he is investigating alleged improper conduct by the named district employee and needs to review the requested records to determine whether measures need to be taken against the employee's teaching credentials. Thus, we find that the information at issue is subject to the general right of access afforded to the TEA under section 249.14. However, because the information you have marked is specifically protected from public disclosure by section 261.201 of the Family Code, we find that there is a conflict between this statute and the right of access afforded to TEA investigators under section 249.14.

We note that section 249.14 does not specifically grant access to information subject to section 261.201 of the Family Code. We further note that section 261.201 of the Family Code has its own access provisions authorizing release of information. Generally, if confidentiality provisions or another statute specifically authorize release of information under certain circumstances or to particular entities, then the information may only be released or transferred in accordance therewith. *See* Attorney General Opinions GA-0055 (2003) at 3-4 (SBEC not entitled to access teacher appraisals made confidential by section 21.355 of the Education Code where section 21.353 of the Education Code expressly authorizes limited release of appraisals to other school districts in connection with teachers' employment applications), DM-353 (1995) at 4-5 n.6 (detailed provisions in state law for disclosure of records would not permit disclosure "to other governmental entities and officials . . . without violating the record's confidentiality"), JM-590 (1986) at 5 ("express mention or enumeration of one person, thing, consequence, or class is tantamount to an express exclusion of all others"). We also note that an interagency transfer of this information is not permissible where, the applicable statutes enumerate the specific entities to which information encompassed by the statute may be disclosed, and the enumerated entities do not include the requesting governmental body. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 655 at 8-9 (1997), 516 at 4-5 (1989), 490 at 2 (1988); *see also* Attorney General Opinion GA-0055.

Furthermore, where general and specific statutes are in irreconcilable conflict, the specific provision typically prevails as an exception to the general provision unless the general provision was enacted later and there is clear evidence that the legislature intended the general provision to prevail. *See* Gov't Code § 311.026(b); *City of Lake Dallas v. Lake Cities Mun. Util. Auth.*, 555 S.W.2d 163, 168 (Tex. Civ. App.—Fort Worth 1977, writ ref'd n.r.e.). Although section 249.14 generally allows TEA access to information relating to suspected misconduct on the part of an educator, section 261.201 of the Family Code specifically protects child abuse or neglect reports or investigative information. This section specifically permits release to certain parties and in certain circumstances that do not include TEA's request in this instance. We therefore conclude that section 249.14 of the Texas Administrative Code does not provide the requestor access to information subject to section 261.201 of the Family Code. *See* Open Records Decision No. 629 (1994) (provision of Bingo Enabling Act that specifically provided for non-disclosure of information obtained

in connection with examination of books and records of applicant or licensee prevailed over provision that generally provided for public access to applications, returns, reports, statements and audits submitted to or conducted by Texas Alcoholic Beverage Commission). We therefore conclude that, notwithstanding the provisions of section 249.14, the district must withhold from TEA the information you have marked under section 552.101 in conjunction with section 261.201 of the Family Code.

This letter ruling is limited to the particular information 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 information or any other circumstances.

This ruling triggers important deadlines regarding the rights and responsibilities of the governmental body and of the requestor. For more information concerning those rights and responsibilities, please visit our website at [http://www.oag.state.tx.us/open/index\\_orl.php](http://www.oag.state.tx.us/open/index_orl.php), or call the Office of the Attorney General's Open Government Hotline, toll free, at (877) 673-6839. Questions concerning the allowable charges for providing public information under the Act must be directed to the Cost Rules Administrator of the Office of the Attorney General, toll free at (888) 672-6787.

Sincerely,



Vanessa Burgess  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

VB/jb

Ref: ID#378789

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor  
(w/o enclosures)