



FERPA 101

WISE Data Conference 2024

Ross Lemke

Director, Privacy Technical Assistance
Center

United States Department of Education
Student Privacy Policy Office
Privacy Technical Assistance Center



Disclaimer

This content was produced by the U.S. Department of Education's Student Privacy Policy Office through its Privacy Technical Assistance Center for the purposes of this presentation. This presentation is provided for informational purposes only. Nothing in this presentation constitutes official policy or guidance from the U.S. Department of Education. Official policy and guidance can be found on our website at <https://studentprivacy.ed.gov/>.



What is FERPA?

A federal privacy law that affords parents and eligible students the right to:

- have **access** to their children's **education records**,
- seek to have the records **amended**, and
- **consent** to the **disclosure** of **personally identifiable information** from education records, **except** as provided by law.



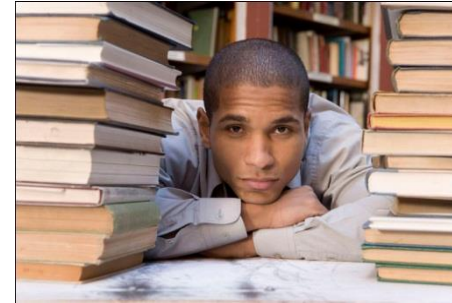
To which educational agencies and institutions does FERPA apply?



Elementary



Secondary



Postsecondary



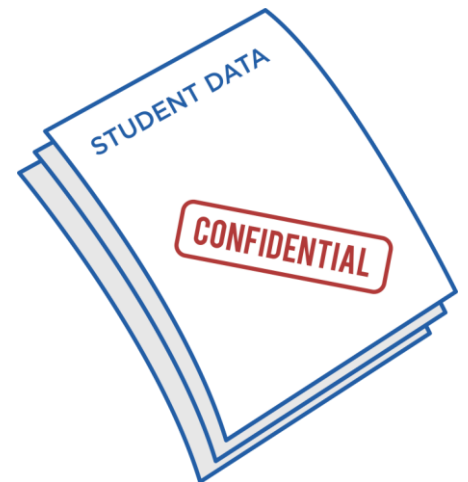
U.S. Department of Education Funding



Just what is an education record?

“Education records” are records that are:

1. directly related to a student; and
2. maintained by an educational agency or institution or by a party acting for the agency or institution.



Education records exemptions

Exemptions to “education records” include, but are not limited to:

- Sole possession records used as a personal memory aid;
- Law enforcement unit records;
- Peer-graded papers before they are collected and recorded by teacher;

What about the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA)?

Records that are subject to FERPA are not subject to the HIPAA Privacy Rule (see page 82483, *Federal Register*, Vol. 65, No. 250, December 28, 2000).

- Health records on students, including immunization records, maintained by an educational agency or institution subject to FERPA are “education records.”

Law enforcement units & records

“Law enforcement unit” means any individual, office, department, division, or other component of a school that is officially authorized or designated by the school to:

- Enforce any local, state, or federal law, or refer to appropriate authorities a matter for enforcement of any law against any individual or organization other than the school itself; or
- Maintain the physical security and safety of the school.

Law enforcement units & records

Examples include:

- Unit of commissioned police officers
- Unit of non-commissioned security guards
- Fully equipped police units
- Smaller security office
- Vice-principal or other school official
- Local off-duty police officer
- School Resource Officer

Law enforcement units & records (cont.)

- Law enforcement unit records means those records, files, documents, and other materials that are:
 - Created by a law enforcement unit;
 - Created for a law enforcement purpose; and
 - Maintained by the law enforcement unit.

Are photos and videos education records?



Think back to the definition!

When is a video or photo an “education record”?

As with any other education record, a photo or video of a student is an education record when it is: (1) directly related to the student; and (2) maintained by the school or party acting for school.

See FAQs on Photos and Videos under FERPA – <https://studentprivacy.ed.gov/faq/faqs-photos-and-videos-under-ferpa>

Personally Identifiable Information (PII)

- **Direct Identifiers**

- e.g., Name, SSN, Student ID Number, etc.
(1:1 relationship to student)

- **Indirect Identifiers**

- e.g., Birthdate, Demographic Information
(1:Many relationship to student)

- ***“Other information*** that, alone or in combination, is linked or linkable to a specific student that would allow a reasonable person in the school community, who does not have personal knowledge of the relevant circumstances, to identify the student with reasonable certainty.” (§ 99.3)

PII is:

Personal Information



PII is:

Personally
Identifiable
Information

*A one-handed
pirate, with an
irrational fear of
crocodiles and
ticking clocks*

PII is:

Personally
Identifiable
Information



What John pulls from his SIS

Name	Race/Ethnicity	Gender	Pirate Status	# of Hooks	GPA
	W	M	Y	1	2.0
	A	F	N	0	3.5
	B	M	N	0	3.8
	W	F	N	0	2.0
	H	M	N	0	3.3



What rights do parents and eligible students have?

- Right to inspect and review education records;
- Right to request amendment of education records;
- Right to consent to disclosures, with certain exceptions; and
- Right to file a complaint with U.S. Department of Education regarding an alleged violation of FERPA.



Definition of “parent”

- Under FERPA:
 - “Parent” means a parent of a student and includes a natural parent, a guardian, or an individual acting as a parent in the absence of a parent or guardian.
 - Includes custodial and noncustodial parents.

Rights of parents (custodial and noncustodial)

FERPA affords full rights to a parent, unless the school has been provided with evidence that there is a court order or state law that specifically revokes these rights.



Transfer of rights under FERPA

When a student turns 18 years old or attends a postsecondary institution at any age they become an “eligible student” and the rights under FERPA transfer from the parents to them.

Requirements for the inspection and review of education records



What rights exist for a parent or eligible student to inspect and review education records?

- School must comply with request within 45 days.
- Schools are generally required to give copies, or make other arrangements for access, if failure to do so would effectively deny access – example would be a parent or student who does not live within commuting distance.
- School may not destroy records if request for access is pending.

Inspection and Review (cont.)

§ 99.11 May an educational agency or institution charge a fee for copies of education records?

- Yes – unless imposing a fee effectively prevents a parent or eligible student from exercising his or her right to inspect and review education records.

§ 99.12 What limitations exist on the right to inspect and review education records?

- If the records contain information on more than one student, the requesting parent or eligible student may inspect, review, or be informed of only the specific information about his or her child's records.

What are the procedures for amending education records?

- Parent or eligible student should identify the portion of the record believed to contain inaccurate or misleading information.
- School must decide within reasonable period of time whether to amend as requested.
- If school decides not to amend, must inform parent or eligible student of right to a hearing.
- After a hearing, if decision is still not to amend, parent or eligible student has a right to insert a statement in the record.

Can parents or eligible students use amendment to challenge a grade??

A: No. A school is not required by FERPA to afford a student or parent the right to seek to change substantive decisions made by school officials, such as grades or other evaluations of a student.

FERPA was intended to require only that educational agencies and institutions conform to fair recordkeeping practices. It was not intended to override the accepted standards and procedures for making academic assessments, disciplinary rulings, or placement determinations.

Prior written consent requirement

In order for a school to disclose education records, a parent or eligible student provide a signed and dated written consent. The consent must:

- Specify records that may be disclosed;
- State purpose of disclosure; and
- Identify party or class of parties to whom disclosure may be made.

What are some of the exceptions to the general consent requirement?

- Directory information*
- To school officials with legitimate educational interests (defined in annual notification);
- To schools in which a student seeks or intends to enroll*
- To authorized representatives of specific federal agencies and state and local educational authorities conducting an audit, evaluation, or enforcement of federally- or state-supported education programs
- To organizations conducting studies for specific purposes on behalf of educational agency or institution;

*Subject to certain conditions (explained in more detail later on)



What are some of the exceptions to the general consent requirement? (cont.)

- In connection with a health or safety emergency*
- To accrediting organizations to carry out their accrediting functions;
- To parents of a dependent student;
- To comply with a judicial order or subpoena (generally requires reasonable effort to notify parent or eligible student at last known address);

*Subject to certain conditions (Explained in more detail later on)



What are some of exceptions to the general consent requirement? (cont.)

- To child welfare agency or tribal organization for those children in foster care, in order to address the student's education needs*
- To state and local officials pursuant to a state statute in connection with serving the student under the juvenile justice system*

*Subject to certain conditions (Explained in more detail later on)



Exception: Directory information



Information in a student's education records that would not generally be considered harmful or an invasion of privacy if disclosed.

Exception: Directory information

- May include:
 - ✓ name, address, phone number, and e-mail address
 - ✓ photograph
 - ✓ date and place of birth
 - ✓ most recent school attended
 - ✓ grade level and major field of study
 - ✓ dates of attendance (e.g., year or semester)
 - ✓ participation in officially recognized sports and activities
 - ✓ height and weight of athletes
 - ✓ degrees, honors, and awards received
- Can *never* include Social Security Number
- May not disclose non-directory information with directory information

Exception: Directory information (cont.)

- Public notice must be given to parents of students in attendance and eligible students in attendance
- Parents and eligible students may choose to “opt-out” of the disclosure of directory information
- Schools may adopt a limited directory information policy that allows for the disclosure of directory information to specific parties, for specific purposes, or for both.

Opt-outs have consequences

- Opting out of Directory Information may have consequences
 - Yearbook
 - Honor Roll
 - Degree Verification
 - Commencement program

Considerations for your school or district

- How are you tracking opt-outs?
- Have you seen your directory information policy?
- Have you verified that the only records you are releasing under the directory information exception are a part of your directory information policy?

Exception: School official

- Schools may disclose PII from education records without consent if the disclosure is to other school officials within the school, including teachers, whom the school has determined to have legitimate educational interest.
- Annual notification of FERPA rights must include criteria for determining who constitutes a school official and what constitutes a legitimate educational interest.

Exception: School official (cont.)

Outsourcing services under school official exception:

- Schools may outsource institutional services or functions that involve the disclosure of education records to contractors, consultants, volunteers, or other third parties provided certain conditions are met.
- If these outside parties meet the conditions for outsourcing, they may have access to education records.

Exception: School official (cont.)

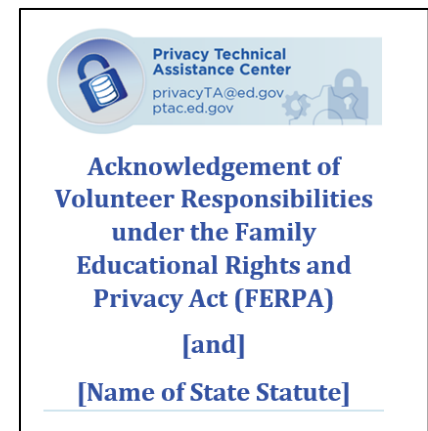
Conditions for outsourcing:

- Performs an institutional service or function for which the agency or institution would otherwise use its employees;
- Is under the direct control of the agency or institution with respect to the use and maintenance of education records;
- PII from education records may be used only for the purposes for which the disclosure was made, and may not be re-disclosed without the authorization of the educational agency or institution and in compliance with FERPA;
- Meets the criteria specified in the school, LEA, or institution's annual notification of FERPA rights for being a school official with a legitimate educational interest in the education records.

Do you use volunteers?



- Do they know the rules?
- Are they sharing information from education records at the bus stop?
- Provide them training with this [video](#).
- Use this brochure to explain the [rules](#).



Exception: Disclosure to officials of another school

- Consent is not required to disclose personally identifiable information from education records to officials of another school, school system, or institution of postsecondary education where the student seeks or intends to enroll, or where the student is already enrolled so long as the disclosure is for the purposes related to the student's enrollment or transfer.

Exception: Parents of a dependent student

- Consent is not required if the disclosure is to parents, as defined in § 99.3, of a dependent student, as defined in section 152 of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986.

Exception: Health or safety emergency

- Disclosure is necessary to protect the health or safety of the student or others.
- There is an articulable and significant threat to the health or safety of a student or other individuals.
- Appropriate parties typically means local, state, or federal law enforcement, trained medical personnel, public health officials, and parents.
- Must be related to an actual, impending, or imminent emergency.
- School makes determination on case-by-case basis.

Exception: Health or safety emergency (cont.)

- Department will not substitute its judgment if there is a rational basis for decision to disclose under health or safety emergency exception.
- Limited to period of time of the emergency.
- Must record pertinent information when it discloses PII.

Contact information

United States Department of Education,
Privacy Technical Assistance Center



(855) 249-3072
(202) 260-3887



privacyTA@ed.gov



<https://studentprivacy.ed.gov>

Thank you!



Thank you!

Please scan the QR code to provide us with your feedback!