



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

September 20, 2007

Ms. Leticia D. McGowan
School Attorney
Dallas Independent School District
3700 Ross Avenue
Dallas, Texas 75204-5491

OR2007-12259

Dear Ms. McGowan:

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# 294223.

The Dallas Independent School District (the "district") received a request for information relating to a named teacher and coach. You state that some of the information is being released. You claim that the remaining information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.101 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception you claim and have reviewed the information you submitted.¹

Section 552.101 excepts from disclosure "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision." Gov't Code § 552.101. This exception encompasses information made confidential by statute. You raise section 552.101 in conjunction with section 21.355 of the Education Code, which provides that "[a] document evaluating the performance of a teacher or administrator is confidential." Educ. Code § 21.355. This office has interpreted section 21.355 to apply to any document that evaluates, as that term is commonly understood, the performance of a teacher or an

¹This letter ruling assumes that the submitted representative samples of information are truly representative of the requested information as a whole. This ruling neither reaches nor authorizes the district to withhold any information that is substantially different from the submitted information. *See* Gov't Code §§ 552.301(e)(1)(D), .302; Open Records Decision Nos. 499 at 6 (1988), 497 at 4 (1988).

administrator. *See* Open Records Decision No. 643 (1996). In Open Records Decision No. 643, we determined that for purposes of section 21.355, the word “teacher” means a person who is required to and does in fact hold a teaching certificate under subchapter B of chapter 21 of the Education Code or a school district teaching permit under section 21.055 and who is engaged in the process of teaching, as that term is commonly defined, at the time of the evaluation. *See* ORD 643 at 4. Based on your representations and our review of the information at issue, we conclude that the information consists of evaluations of a teacher for the purposes of section 21.355. Therefore, the district must withhold the submitted information under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 21.355 of the Education Code.

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).

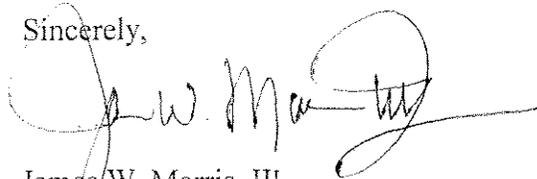
If this ruling requires or permits the governmental body to withhold all or some of the requested information, the requestor can appeal that decision by suing the governmental body. *Id.* § 552.321(a); *Texas Dep’t of Pub. Safety v. Gilbreath*, 842 S.W.2d 408, 411 (Tex. App.—Austin 1992, no writ).

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,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "James W. Morris, III". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

James W. Morris, III
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

JWM/ma

Ref: ID# 294223

Enc: Submitted documents

c: Ms. Holly Yan
Dallas Morning News
508 Young Street
Dallas, Texas 75202
(w/o enclosures)