



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

January 2, 2008

Mr. L. Stanton Lowry
Boyle & Lowry
4201 Wingren, Suite 108
Irving, Texas 75062-2763

OR2008-00011

Dear Mr. Lowry:

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# 298588.

The Town of Westlake (the "town"), which you represent, received a request for information related to the Westlake Academy (the "Academy"), a charter school owned by the town. You indicate that some of the requested information has been provided to the requestor. You claim that some of the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act ("FERPA"), 20 U.S.C. § 1232(a). We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed the submitted representative sample of information.¹

We note that the United States Department of Education Family Policy Compliance Office 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

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.

ruling process under the Act.² Consequently, state and local educational authorities that receive a request for education records from a member of the public under the Act must not submit education records to this office in unredacted form, that is, in a form in which “personally identifiable information” is disclosed. *See* 34 C.F.R. § 99.3 (defining “personally identifiable information”). You state that a portion of the submitted information consists of student identifying education records that are protected under FERPA. As you submitted a redacted copy of the information to our office, it appears you have already determined the information that must be redacted in accordance with FERPA. Because our office is prohibited from reviewing these education records to determine whether appropriate redactions under FERPA have been made, we will not address the applicability of FERPA to any of this information. Such determinations under FERPA must be made by the educational authority in possession of the education records.³ As you raise no other exceptions against disclosure, the submitted 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 file suit in Travis County within 30 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.324(b). In order to get the full benefit of such a challenge, 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

²A copy of this letter may be found on the Office of the Attorney General’s website: http://www.oag.state.tx.us/opinopen/og_resources.shtml.

³In the future, if the town does obtain parental consent to submit unredacted education records and the town seeks a ruling from this office on the proper redaction of those education records in compliance with FERPA, we will rule accordingly.

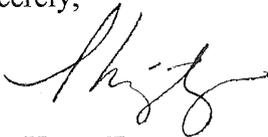
free, at (877) 673-6839. The requestor may also file a complaint with the district or county attorney. *Id.* § 552.3215(e).

If this ruling requires or permits the governmental body to withhold all or some of the requested information, the requestor can challenge 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,



Loan Hong-Turney
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

LH/eeg

Ref: ID# 298588

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Mr. Jeesamy Brown
Fort Worth Star Telegram
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(w/o enclosures)