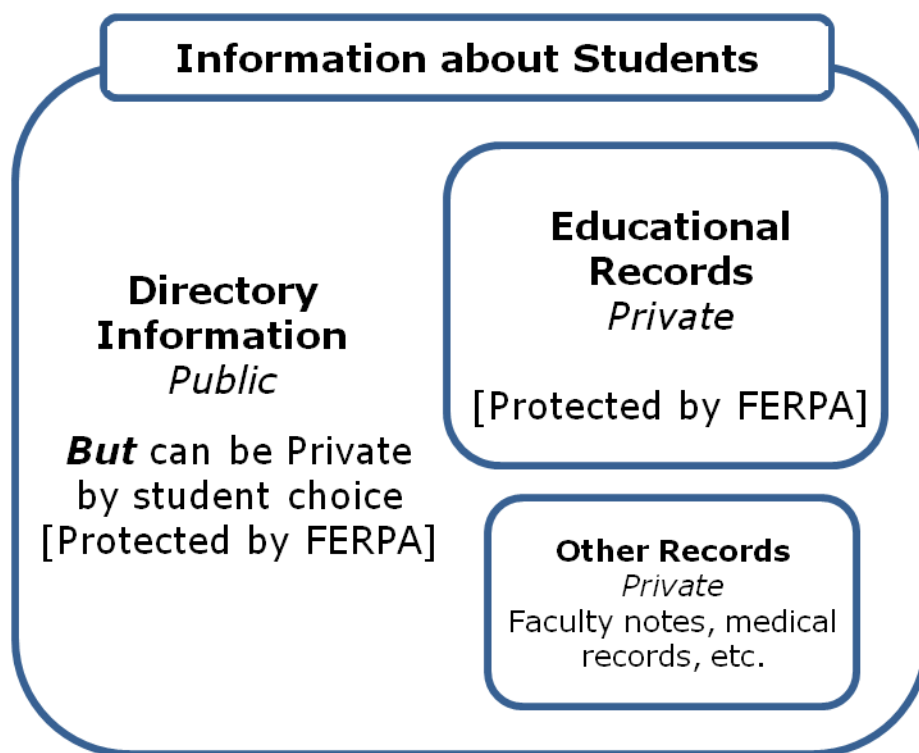


FERPA and Ethics Principles FAQ

What is FERPA? FERPA stands for the *Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act*. This federal law has been around since 1974. It is administered by a compliance office in the U.S. Department of Education. As stated in the *WISD Student Code of Conduct*, WISD follows the guidelines provided by FERPA. **FERPA's purpose** is to *protect students' private educational records*.



What is an Educational Record? "Educational Records" include any records about the student that the District maintains. (All forms of records are counted, from handwritten notes to e-mails to grade reports.) Parents have a right to see these items but they must request them--and the District must be assured that release is being made to the right person. That requires a check on the person's identity.

Examples of confidential records requiring parent request or permission to release:

- Transcript
- Grade reports for a course

There are specific allowances for the District to use this information. For example, for audit or accreditation processes, the District does not have to secure the student's permission.

What is not an educational record?

- **Sole possession documents** –Those documents include a faculty member's notes about a student's progress as long as those notes are used only by the faculty member or that person's teaching assistant
- **Medical records**
- **Law enforcement records**
- **Employee records** (unless employment is part of the student status, as it might be for a teaching assistant)
- **Alumni records**

What is Directory Information? *These are records that we often think of as "public."* These are the items that might be published in a student directory.

FERPA gives parents and students an extra protection regarding that information: the right to make it private. In WISD, Directory Information is protected absolutely if the parent has elected to protect it. The District also is very conservative about all student data, even if the parent has not directed us to protect directory information.

Examples of **Directory Information** (these are listed on the back of the enrollment card also):

- Name, address, phone, e-mail address
- Date and place of birth, student ID number, enrollment status
- Grade level, dates of attendance, name of previous school attended
- Participation in officially recognized activities and sports,
- Weight and height of members of athletic teams
- Field of study, degrees, honors, awards
- Photograph

How does WISD handle data? *Conservatively.*

Legal, ethical, and safety concerns dictate District procedures with appreciation for the variety of needs across WISD. Faculty members may focus most on how they transmit grades (uploading to Skyward or a secure site), while a high school Attendance Clerk and Registrar may care most about the date that a student's information changes status once the student turns 18. Establishing the identity of a caller before releasing/sharing information is important. Typically a photo ID is required to release records. If there is a question regarding the release of information to someone other than the student's guardian, please call the Student Services office (ext. 3026) for further guidance.

How the does Marketing figure into FERPA?

Every part of the District contributes to the ethical treatment of student information. Marketing offers a prime example of how WISD protects student data. By FERPA standards, even a student's photograph is directory information or, loosely speaking, public. Our District is much more protective. We do not list students outside of District events (such as the Graduation program) and student environments unless this information is "public." If a requestor—Ex.: a photographer—wants the names and addresses of the students in the WHS junior class, our office will release the names of those students whose information is "public" as long as the requestor has made the formal request in the Student Services office.

Ethics Principles

Throughout District publications, our “values” or ethics statements appear. A review of some of them drives home how we relate ethics to everyday practices. These statements are guiding principles for policies, processes, and practices that reflect the WISD Mission, Vision, and Values (MVV). The Student Services office is committed to upholding standards that promote respect and human dignity in an environment fostering learning and professionalism. Two of our District values that speak to the way we will treat all people associated with our District include:

Value 1: We value and respect all students, employees, parents, partners, and our community.

- *An everyday application* relative to student records would be to maintain accurate records that reflect "what is."
- *Other example:* Using the correct date on records and protecting “private” information in those records.

Value 5: We practice ethical behavior and personal integrity.

- This value is our guiding principle for policies and processes concerning nondiscrimination, anti-harassment, and equal opportunity. As such, we will demonstrate professionalism with adults and students at all times.
- *Everyday application:* Treating everyone fairly
- *Everyday application:* Respecting everyone in the Weatherford community
- *Everyday application:* Remembering that no matter where we are, we represent WISD and “the Kangaroo Nation.”

At WISD, all academic records of students who enroll are kept in accordance with the provisions of The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).

- Our guiding principle for policies and processes is student privacy relative to the release of records.
- *Everyday application:* Keeping a student's grades and directory information private in District communications.
- *Example:* Directing the parent to the Skyward Family Access site or the Registrar's Office instead of e-mailing a requested grade.



E-mail is about as secure as a postcard.

More FAQs:

How can we keep grades private in communications?

- Faculty members can upload grades to Skyward.
- Log out of your computer when you leave the room for an extended period of time.

What if a parent wants grade information through email?

- Do not use e-mail to communicate grades to anyone. (E-mail is about as secure as a postcard.) Keep in mind that you cannot control who else besides the parent might see that e-mail.
- Direct the parent/student to his/her Skyward Family Access account to check for grades there.
- If a former student (18 years of age or older) insists on receiving grade information, the correct office to provide that is the Registrar's. Make a referral.

Can I give a student the grade information over the phone?

- Do not deliver grades by phone unless you are absolutely certain: 1) that you are speaking with the parent/guardian; and 2) that your conversation is private.

How can I keep student data secure?

- Set a password on your computer and mobile devices. If you open WISD e-mail on your cell phone, add a password to access it (or to access your phone).
- If you must use a shared computer, set a user profile that only you can open.
- Be aware of your surroundings. Working on a laptop at Starbucks or an airport can be very efficient, but carries a risk because of public *wifi* networks and even having a screen easily read by someone behind you. In public settings, limit yourself to non-confidential work.
- Do not share your password.

How can we keep up with all the rules about securing data?

- Watch for trainings in your department and participate.
- Make your own self-check by asking yourself, "*Would I mind if someone shared that information about me?*"