

Southeastern Legal Foundation (SLF) Demand Results in Breakthrough for School Transparency

SLF Calls on Parents to Know Their Rights to Opt-Out of Invasive Surveys

(Sept. 6, 2022) Missouri: Southeastern Legal Foundation (SLF) today called on parents in the Webster Groves, MO school district to “know you have the right to opt-out of student surveys that illegally obtain sensitive information about their children. These surveys collect data about students’ sexual behavior and attitudes, political beliefs, mental health status, and even the beliefs and mental health status of students’ family members and friends. The surveys may violate federal law, including the [Family Educational Right and Privacy Act](#) (FERPA) and the [Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment](#) (PPRA).”

In May, SLF [sent a request](#) to Missouri Attorney General Eric Schmitt’s office to investigate Webster Groves School District, the State Board of Education, and the third parties who create and sell student surveys to the schools, based on parents’ complaints about student surveys being administered by the school district without parental knowledge or consent. Within weeks, Attorney General Schmitt’s office began a formal inquiry into both the surveys and the third parties pushing these into our schools.

In an important breakthrough, the school district last week began advertising that such surveys are “opt-out” for parents, affirming the transparency for which parents are entitled under law.

“The harvesting of data about America’s school children holds great potential for abuse. All along, we have said that parents have the right to know who is collecting personal data on their children, what they are doing with it, and be given the choice to opt out. These legal protections cannot be side-stepped by school administrators and third-party vendors who supply surveys and collect data from such surveys,” said Director of Litigation for SLF, Braden H. Boucek.

Notably, SLF’s demand for an investigation has led to the first meaningful actions to expose the truth behind the student data collection efforts of Panorama Education – a politically affiliated company co-founded by the son-in-law of Attorney General Merrick Garland, the same official who instructed the FBI to investigate parents speaking out at school board meetings.

“As we have said in parent training sessions across the country, parents must step forward and stay alert to public school activities, like student surveys administered without parental consent,” said Kimberly Hermann, SLF General Counsel. “Parents have legal rights that outweigh any interest the schools may have in collecting private data from students, among other efforts.”

Hermann continued, “Parents, you have the right to access any information your child sees, hears and reads in school.” “Federal law provides parents with the right to review all instructional materials, to access student records, and to keep student records private.”

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