



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

September 23, 2022

Mr. W. Montgomery Meitler
Senior Counsel
Office of Legal Services
Texas Education Agency
1701 North Congress Avenue
Austin, Texas 78701-1494

OR2022-29445

Dear Mr. Meitler:

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# 971425 (ORR# 54345).

The Texas Education Agency ("TEA") received a request for information pertaining to a specified school district. TEA states it is withholding or releasing some of the requested information in accordance with Open Records Letter No. 2020-22648 (2020). *See* Gov't Code § 552.301(a); Open Records Decision No. 673 at 7-8 (2001). TEA states it has released some of the requested information, but claims the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101 and 552.116 of the Government Code. We have considered the claimed exceptions and reviewed the submitted representative sample of information.¹

Section 552.101 of the Government Code excepts from disclosure "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision." Gov't Code § 552.101. Section 552.101 encompasses section 39.004(e) of the Education Code which provides as follows:

(e) Unless otherwise provided by law, all evidence collected by [TEA] in connection with a special investigation, including witness statements and

¹ We assume 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 those records contain substantially different types of information than that submitted to this office.

videos of agency interviews, are confidential and not subject to disclosure under [the Act], except that evidence described by this section may be disclosed:

- (1) to a person with a legitimate interest in the investigation; or
- (2) in connection with an administrative or other legal proceeding brought under this title.

Educ. Code § 39.004(e). TEA states the information it has marked under section 39.004(e) was collected and prepared by its Division of Investigations in conjunction with pending special investigations. TEA also states the special investigations was authorized by section 39.003(a)(17) of the Education Code. *See id.* § 39.003 (listing circumstances in which the commissioner shall authorize investigations). Based on these representations, we find the information at issue constitutes evidence collected by TEA in connection with a special investigation. Accordingly, TEA must withhold the information it has marked under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 39.004(e) of the Education Code.

Section 552.116 of the Government Code provides,

(a) An audit working paper of an audit of the state auditor or the auditor of a state agency, an institution of higher education as defined by Section 61.003, Education Code, a county, a municipality, a school district, a hospital district, or a joint board operating under Section 22.074, Transportation Code, including any audit relating to the criminal history background check of a public school employee, is excepted from [required public disclosure]. If information in an audit working paper is also maintained in another record, that other record is not excepted from [public disclosure] by this section.

(b) In this section:

(1) “Audit” means an audit authorized or required by a statute of this state or the United States, the charter or an ordinance of a municipality, an order of the commissioners court of a county, the bylaws adopted by or other action of the governing board of a hospital district, a resolution or other action of a board of trustees of a school district, including an audit by the district relating to the criminal history background check of a public school employee, or a resolution or other action of a joint board described by Subsection (a) and includes an investigation.

(2) “Audit working paper” includes all information, documentary or otherwise, prepared or maintained in conducting an audit or preparing an audit report, including:

(A) intra-agency and interagency communications; and

(B) drafts of the audit report or portions of those drafts.

Gov't Code § 552.116. TEA asserts the remaining information consists of audit working papers prepared or maintained by its Division of Investigations. TEA states the audits were authorized by section 39.057(a) of the Education Code. *See* Educ. Code § 39.057 (listing circumstances in which TEA commissioner shall authorize investigations). Based on these representations, we agree the information at issue constitutes audit working papers. Accordingly, TEA may withhold the remaining information under section 552.116 of the Government Code.

In summary, the district must withhold the information that TEA has marked under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 39.004(e) of the Education Code on behalf of TEA. The district may withhold the remaining information under section 552.116 of the Government Code.

This letter ruling is limited to the particular information 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 information or any other circumstances.

This ruling triggers important deadlines regarding the rights and responsibilities of the governmental body and of the requestor. For more information concerning those rights and responsibilities, please visit our website at <https://www.texasattorneygeneral.gov/open-government/members-public/what-expect-after-ruling-issued> or call the OAG's Open Government Hotline, toll free, at (877) 673-6839. Questions concerning the allowable charges for providing public information under the Public Information Act may be directed to the Cost Rules Administrator of the OAG, toll free, at (888) 672-6787.

Sincerely,

James L. Coggeshall
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

JLC/mo

Ref: ID# 971425

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)