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Education NEW YORK

National Opt-Out Campaign Informs Parents How to Protect the Privacy of their Children's School Records

Parents have rights under the Family Educational Rights Privacy Act to restrict access to their children's personal information.

New York, N.Y. (09/06/2011) -- As cases of identity theft, database hacking, and the sale of personal information increase daily, the need to protect children's privacy becomes even more urgent. Schools are a rich source of personal information about children that can be legally and illegally accessed by third parties. That's why Education New York's National Opt-out Campaign is alerting parents to their rights under the federal Family Educational Rights Privacy Act (FERPA) to restrict third-party access to their children's information and encouraging them to review their school's annual FERPA notification at the beginning of the school year.

Parents concerned about their children's privacy should be aware of how easily personally identifiable information can be bought and sold by marketers as well as by identity thieves. The Federal Trade Commission recently issued a Consumer Alert to parents warning of the risk of children's identity theft and urging parents to safeguard their children's school records and directory information.

<http://www.ftc.gov/bcp/edu/pubs/consumer/alerts/alt056.shtm>

FERPA was enacted in 1974 to protect the privacy of education records and directory information -- which can include name, address, phone number, date of birth, and e-mail address, among other personally identifiable information. However, under FERPA, directory information can be disclosed without parental consent.

Parents should be aware that FERPA protects the privacy of the *record* and not the *child*. Kathleen Styles, the Chief Privacy Officer at the U.S. Department of Education, which oversees FERPA, said: "One thing that's important to remember about FERPA is that it's not a confidentiality statute for information about children -- it's a confidentiality statute for information in education records."

http://www.educationnewyork.com/files/071211_sess3.pdf

As the new school year gets under way across the country, parents have an opportunity to become proactive by finding out who has access to their children's personal information and "opt out" of allowing the school to share any or all of that information with third parties.

With the Opt Out Campaign, Education New York is informing parents of their rights under FERPA as well as the gaps in the law that have resulted in numerous information privacy breaches around the country and a robust market in children's personal information.

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Parents and others interested in children's privacy are encouraged to visit <http://www.educationnewyork.com/optout> to learn more about:

- The growing problem of child identity theft.
- Current law and legislation protecting children's privacy.
- Who's illegally accessing your children's personal information.
- How opt-out forms can be adapted to give parents more options to protect information.
- What some states are doing to further restrict access to student information.

Education New York is an independent source of education news from around the nation. Education New York was founded in 1995 by Sheila Kaplan, an education and information policy expert and researcher.

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