



National Campaign Urges Parents to “Opt Out” to Protect their Children’s Privacy

Campaign informs parents of rights under federal law to restrict access to their children’s personal information in school records

New York, N.Y. – As a new school year gets under way across the country, the annual [National Opt Out Campaign](#) is informing parents of their rights under federal law to restrict third-party access to their children’s information. Under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), schools must notify parents and guardians at the beginning of each school year of their right to inspect their child’s school records and “opt out” of directory information.

“Parents today are very concerned about their children’s privacy in school and online – and rightly so,” said Sheila Kaplan, founder of [Education New York](#), who launched the National Opt Out Campaign in 2011. “Becoming informed about their right to opt-out of directory information is a concrete step they can take right now to protect their children.”

Kaplan pointed out that under federal law, when parents do not opt out of directory information they are consenting to their child’s directory information, which can include address, phone number and date and place of birth, being disclosed or sold to third parties for commercial or other uses, compromising the privacy, and possibly the safety, of their child.

“Officials from the U.S. Department of Education have emphasized that FERPA protects the privacy of the education record and not the child,” said Kaplan. “Parents should keep that fact in mind and seriously consider their right to opt out and ask their schools how they are protecting student privacy.”

Database breaches and unauthorized sale of a student's directory information put children at risk, Kaplan said. "Parents should be aware of how easily directory information can be bought and sold by marketers as well as by identity thieves – or even used to create fake social media accounts," she said. "And with mobile devices being used more in schools for curriculum and assessment, the risks of data leaks and breaches have become even greater."

With the growing threats to information and data security in schools, states have been taking measures to help protect students' privacy. "People across the country have become increasingly frustrated with the failure of FERPA and federal education officials to address the complex challenges presented by the collection, use and sharing of student and school data by government agencies and private companies," Kaplan said.

This year, with Kaplan's advocacy and model bill, New York legislated a new [Chief Privacy Officer for Education](#), who will advise students, parents and others about how they can protect the privacy and security of personal information; make recommendations on privacy and security to the governor, state legislatures and agencies, schools, parents and students; and conduct oversight of privacy and security activities of organizations handling and storing student data. Kaplan, who serves on the Board of Directors of the Washington, D.C.-based Electronic Privacy Information Center, continues to work with stakeholders in other states interested in creating a CPO for education. She also drafted a model state-level [Student Privacy Protection Act](#) that grants additional protections to student privacy.

Kaplan offers Opt Out merchandise free of charge to parents concerned about student privacy.

"The Opt-Out Campaign has been gaining traction since the initiative launched three years ago," Kaplan said. "I'm thrilled that with greater awareness of the issues, more parents have been joining the fight for students' privacy rights."

For more information about the National Opt-Out Campaign, visit <http://www.opt-out-now.info/>