

Glossary

Some terms that are used interchangeably in conversation have very specific, and distinctive, meanings as they are used in the data ethics canons.

Personally Identifiable Information: Data that can be used to identify a person, or that can be used in conjunction with other information (e.g., by linking records) to identify a person. This includes a student's name; the name of the student's parent or other family member; the address of the student; a personal identifier, such as the social security number or student number; a list of personal characteristics that would make the student's identity traceable; or any other information that would make the student's identity traceable.

Private Information: Data that are classified as uniquely personal and, therefore, neither available for public release nor accessible without a verified "need to know" for the purposes of providing approved educational services. Private information in a school record often includes course selection, academic performance, aptitude scores, health information, and discipline data.

Confidential Information: Data that have been guaranteed to be maintained confidentially (i.e., that will not be released), regardless of their nature (as private or sensitive).

Sensitive Information: Those data that are confidential and/or vital to an organization as it carries out its mission. For example, data about class assignments are both confidential (data about student course selection are private) and vital to the school's core instructional mission (principals should know where students need to be at every moment of the day).

General Information: Those data that are generally helpful, but not confidential and/or vital, to an organization as it carries out its mission. For example, a data file with "help" instructions for website users is a "general" support component within a data system. While the files are important to users facing a web problem, the data are not vital to running a school or school system; nor are they private in nature or otherwise subject to confidentiality restrictions.