

District 207 FOIA/Student Record Guidelines

MOST IMPORTANT INFORMATION

- Email, chats and text messages related to school business (even on your personal phone) are subject to FOIA and student record law.
- Write all email, chats and texts as if they were going to be reported by the newspaper or read by the parents of the student(s) you are discussing.
- Hold face-to-face or phone meetings regarding sensitive topics rather than put that information in writing.

FOIA OVERVIEW

Maine Township High School District 207, along with all public entities in Illinois, are subject to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). FOIA covers all manner of records, reports, communications and database information maintained by the school district. FOIA is in place to ensure honest and open government and District 207 believes strongly in those principles. Any FOIA request received by a District 207 staff member should be directed to the District's FOIA officer Brett Clark at bclark@maine207.org as there are strict rules on the amount of time a public body has to respond to a FOIA request.

Many staff assume that FOIA only relates to documents housed at the central office or just by administrators. *That is incorrect.* FOIA law includes emails, letters, photos and notes kept by any employee. That includes any text messages that deal with public business, even if those text messages are on your personal phone. Discussions through the chat function on email are also subject to FOIA. While there are some items that are exempt (personal phone and address, social security number), most information is subject to FOIA requests.

STUDENT RECORD OVERVIEW

According to Illinois law, a student record means any writing or other recorded information concerning a student by which a student may be individually identified, maintained by a school or at its direction or by an employee of a school, regardless of how or where the information is stored.

For example, if two teachers are complaining about the actions of a student over email or chat, that is a student record and could be shared with the parent if requested.

FOIA and STUDENT RECORD TIPS AND BEST PRACTICES

A general rule of thumb with relation to FOIA: Write all email, chats and texts as if they were going to be reported by the newspaper.

A general rule of thumb with relation to student records: Write all email, chats and text messages about students as if they were going to be read by the student and/or the parent.

Staff should think carefully before putting information about sensitive topics in writing (email or otherwise). Consider instead holding face-to-face meetings with colleagues to discuss sensitive topics or calling on the phone.