

Policy Code: 5070/7350 Public Records – Retention, Release, and Disposition

The board is committed to providing access to public records and public information. All employees shall comply with the public records law and this policy.

A. Public Record Defined

1. Public Records Generally

Any record, in any form, that is made or received by the board or its employees in connection with the transaction of public business is a public record that must be made available to the public, unless such record is protected from disclosure by federal or state law or is otherwise exempted from the public records law, [G.S. 132-1 through 132-9](#). (See policy 5071/7351, Electronically Stored Information Retention, for specific information regarding public records in electronic form.)

2. School Improvement Plan

Though the school improvement plan is a public record, the school safety components of the plan are not public records subject to public records law. Schematic diagrams, as described in [G.S. 115C-105.53](#) and [-105.54](#), and emergency response information, as described in [G.S. 115C-47\(40\)](#) and [-105.54](#), are also not considered public records subject to public records law.

3. Student Records

The official records of students are not public records subject to inspection and examination. (For additional information regarding the release of information about students, see policy 4700, Student Records.) Further, any written material containing the identifiable scores of individual students on any test taken pursuant to the state testing program described in [Chapter 115C, Article 10A of the North Carolina General Statutes](#) is not a public record. Any test that is developed, adopted, or provided as part of the state testing program is not a public record until the State Board of Education designates that the test is released.

4. Teachers' and State Employees' Retirement System Reports

Any report received from the Teachers' and State Employees' Retirement System pursuant to [G.S. 135-8\(f\)\(2\)\(f\)](#) is not a public record and will be treated as confidential.

5. Personnel Information

Information in school system employee personnel files is protected from disclosure in accordance with [G.S. 115C-319](#), except that the following employee information is public record:

- a. name;
- b. age;
- c. the date of original employment or appointment;
- d. the terms of any past or current contract by which the employee is employed, whether written or oral, to the extent that the board has the written contract or a record of the oral contract in its possession;
- e. current position;
- f. title;
- g. current total compensation from all funding sources, including at least salary (including pay, benefits, incentives, supplements, bonuses, deferred compensation, and all other forms of compensation paid to the employee) and reimbursements and allowances (including travel-related reimbursements and allowances);
- h. the date and amount of each increase or decrease in total compensation with the board;
- i. the date and type of each promotion, demotion, transfer, suspension, separation, or other change in position classification with the board;
- j. the date and general description of the reasons for each promotion with the board;
- k. the date and type of each dismissal, suspension, or demotion for disciplinary reasons taken by the board, and if the disciplinary action was a dismissal, a copy of the written notice of the final decision of the board setting forth the specific acts or omissions that are the basis of the dismissal; and
- l. the office or station to which the employee is currently assigned.

The name of a participant in the North Carolina Address Confidentiality Program is not a public record and must be redacted from any records released. As necessary, school personnel may combine public and confidential records to meet the business needs of the system. However, if a record contains confidential information as well as public information, school officials must provide the requested public record with the confidential information removed or redacted.

B. Designation of Records Officer

The chief communications officer is the designated records officer for the school system.

1. Duties of the Records Officer

The duties of the records officer include the following:

- a. determining whether records are public or confidential by law, with assistance from the local board attorney as necessary;
- b. determining the most cost-effective means of storing and retrieving public records that include confidential information;
- c. providing training, consultation, and guidelines to school officials who are involved in public records requests;
- d. determining the actual cost of providing copies of public records in various forms, such as paper or electronic media, in which the school system is capable of providing the records;
- e. determining the cost of a request for copies of public records when a special service charge is applicable or when the school system is voluntarily creating or compiling a record as a service to the requester; and
- f. acknowledging public records requests within three business days by providing the information requested or providing a written response stating the reason for denial or delay of the request.

2. Duties Related to Electronic Data-Processing Systems

The chief communications officer, or other employee(s) as determined by the superintendent, shall review all electronic data-processing systems created by the school system or being considered for acquisition through lease, purchase, or other means, to ensure they are designed and maintained in a manner that:

- a. will not impede the school system's ability to permit public inspection and examination of public records; and
- b. provides a means of obtaining copies of such records.

C. Requests for Public Records

All requests for examining or obtaining copies of public records should be made in writing to the chief communications officer during regular business hours or recorded by school system personnel.

This policy, administrative guidelines, information on the actual cost of producing public records, information on how to reach the chief communications officer, information about how to appeal a denial of a public records request, and information regarding any computer database indexes must be made available to individuals requesting public records.

Public records must be released in accordance with the law. Any denial of a public records request must be made in writing and must include the basis for the denial. The superintendent or designee may issue additional guidelines consistent with this policy to further clarify the process for requesting public records.

D. Special Service Charges

The superintendent or designee may assess a special service charge for any public record requests that require the extensive use of information technology resources or extensive clerical or supervisory assistance by school system personnel. Any such special service charge shall be reasonable and based on the actual costs incurred for such extensive use of information technology resources and/or the actual labor costs of the personnel providing the services, not including any costs associated with the redaction of privileged or confidential information. For purposes of this policy, the board considers four (4) hours or more to be "extensive" clerical or supervisory assistance and will impose a special service charge for actual costs incurred in excess of four (4) hours. The school system will provide an estimate of any such special service charge before making the records available and will give the requester the option of paying the charge or narrowing the scope of the request.

E. Electronic Mail Lists

A school employee may be authorized by the superintendent or designee to maintain an electronic mail list of individual subscribers. Such a list may be used only: (1) for the purpose for which the subscribers subscribed to it; (2) to notify subscribers of an emergency to public health or public safety; or (3) in the event of deletion of the list, to notify subscribers of the existence of any similar lists. Although such electronic mail lists of individual subscribers shall be available for public inspection in either printed or electronic format to the extent permitted by law, school officials shall not provide anyone with copies of such lists. Release for public inspection of any subscriber list must be consistent with the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) if the list contains personally

identifiable information from student education records. See policy 4700, Student Records.

F. Destruction of Public Records

To the extent required by law, school personnel shall maintain public records in accordance with the applicable records retention and disposition schedule(s) issued by the North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources. The superintendent may establish regulations for the destruction of records in accordance with the approved schedules.

Legal References: Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, [20 U.S.C. 1232g](#); [G.S. 14-113.8\(6\)](#); [115C-47\(40\)](#), [-105.27\(a2\)](#), [-105.53](#), [-105.54](#), [-109.3](#), [-174.13](#), [-319 to -321, -402](#); [132-1 to -9](#); [135-8\(f\)\(2\)\(f\)](#); *Program Records Schedule: Local Public School Units*, N.C. Department of Natural and Cultural Resources (2021), available at <https://archives.ncdcr.gov/documents/local-education-agencies-schedule>; *General Records Schedule: Local Government Agencies*, N.C. Department of Natural and Cultural Resources (2021), available at <https://archives.ncdcr.gov/government/retention-schedules/local-government-schedules/general-records-schedule-local-government>

Cross References: Use of Personal Technology to Conduct School Business (policy 3228/7323), North Carolina Address Confidentiality Program (policy 4250/5075/7316), Student Records (policy 4700), Confidentiality of Personal Identifying Information (policy 4705/7825), News Media Relations (policy 5040), Electronically Stored Information Retention (policy 5071/7351), Personnel Files (policy 7820)

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New Hanover County Public Schools