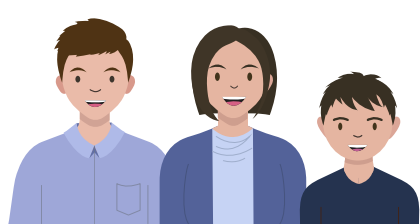


Understanding FERPA Blocks

You may have heard postsecondary data outcomes users discuss a “FERPA block”—when student information does not appear in data released from sources such as the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC), making it difficult to calculate student-level data such as enrollment and persistence. But what does “FERPA block” actually mean, and why does it happen?



First, we need to understand the **Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)**. FERPA governs the privacy of student educational records, access to these records, and the disclosure of information from them.



Under FERPA, postsecondary students have several rights, including

- the right to have access to the education records;
- to seek to have the records amended; and
- the right to consent to the disclosure of personally identifiable information from education records, except as provided by law



Unless permitted by an applicable FERPA exception, any educational agency or institution that receives funds under a program administered by the Secretary of Education must abide by FERPA’s requirements.



One of these exceptions is information that the agency or institution designates as “directory information,” information contained in a student’s education records that would generally not be considered harmful or an invasion of privacy if disclosed (such as name, address, or dates of attendance). FERPA allows students to restrict access to this information by notifying their IHE.



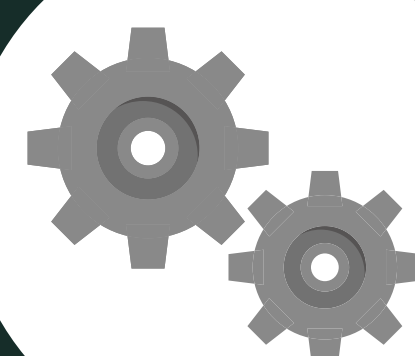
Some IHEs have also discontinued the release of public directory information institution-wide, either by specific data elements or by certain reporting functions.



So what is a “FERPA block?” Simply put, it’s that the student has exercised their right to block the release of their directory information data elements.



Data from these students and institutions that opt out cannot be included when NSC provides student-level data back to K-12 agencies or in some types of aggregate reports. In their public reports, NCS cannot even share that students are missing as this information alone may be used to identify students.



Options when faced with FERPA blocks:

- Work with IHEs directly to obtain the information they need, whether under a different exception to FERPA’s general consent or through direct consent from the student.
- Educate IHEs on the impact to postsecondary outcomes data and encourage them to eliminate institution-wide blocks at the IHE.

Want to continue this conversation with other data professionals? Join the K12 Community of Practice Forum (www.k12usingpsdata.com) to share strategies and resources around using postsecondary outcomes data to improve student outcomes.

