



**Student Records and Retention for  
Christian Schools**

**This document is intended to assist schools in thinking through the retention of various documents; however, it should not be considered legal counsel or ACSI policy. Individual state/local laws may vary, and schools should know and follow applicable laws for their area.**

Educational records include a variety of documents that a school keeps regarding a student in order to better accomplish the instructional purposes for that student over the course of their educational career. These documents are held in confidence and shared with professionals on a need-to-know basis. The law for public schools requires that parents have access to those records when necessary, according to the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). Though this law only pertains to institutions that accept federal monies, most Christian schools look to state laws when developing records disclosure policies. Schools should check their state laws to see if there are guidelines for private schools in their area. For more specific information, seek legal counsel. A school is not responsible to keep all items in the file permanently nor send all of those on to the next school, should the student transfer. Each school should develop a policy that helps them identify what to keep and what to clear out of the files periodically. Once a policy is developed, it is important to follow it carefully. Designate an official records custodian who is responsible for the maintenance, care, and security of all school student records. Information contained in a student's file should be limited to that which is of clear relevance to the education of the student.

1. **Transcripts:** Keep transcripts for all past and current students **indefinitely**. Because an adult may have several career changes throughout their lifespan, they may need to acquire an official high school transcript 10, 20, or even 30 years after high school graduation. Information typically contains:
  - a. Basic identifying information including the student's name, address, birthdate and place, gender, and names and addresses of parents.
  - b. Academic transcript including grades, course list, credits issued, graduation date, grade level achieved, and possibly college entrance exam scores.
2. **Permanent File:** Mark the cumulative folder with a **50-year** notation if it contains any of the following items:
  - a. Honors and awards received and information concerning participation in school-sponsored activities, athletics, or offices held in school-sponsored clubs.
  - b. Scores received on all state assessment tests administered at the high school level
3. **Temporary File:** Following withdrawal or graduation, the following records will be retained in the student's cumulative file (or registrar's office) for **seven to ten years**:
  - a. Standardized test scores administered at the elementary grade levels
  - b. Report cards
  - c. Medical records including a student's immunization and/or medical physical
  - d. Special health records if deemed necessary by Health Services Coordinator
  - e. Attendance records
  - f. Application cover (front, inside, back, inside back)
  - g. Any biometric information collected in accordance with policy
  - h. Miscellaneous forms or other notes thought to be of extreme importance
  - i. Intelligence and aptitude test scores, psychological evaluations
  - j. Teacher anecdotal records
  - k. Any verified reports or information from non-educational persons, agencies, or organizations of clear relevance to the education of the student.

- I. Anything that has potential to bring future litigation
    - i. Harassment
    - ii. Serious injury
    - iii. Violence, serious threats
    - iv. Police report and/or involvement
    - v. Weapons
    - vi. Accident reports
    - vii. Court orders, custody papers, misc. legal documents
    - viii. If a student is diagnosed with a disability, those documents are kept in a separate file. Seek legal counsel for how to store those files.
4. **Temporary File:** Mark the cumulative folder with a **10-year** notation if it contains any of the following items:
  - a. Serious discipline records
  - b. Anything a police or court might want to pursue later
  - c. Anything in the expulsion category
  - d. Report cards (or other documents verifying attendance records) especially for students for whom there is no HS transcript (check state laws to see if they require actual report cards).
  - e. Health records will be cleaned out by the Health Services Coordinator at the end of a student's tenure at the school. All important records, including immunization charts and accident reports, will be transferred to and stored in the student's cumulative file. Anything that could be needed for future reference should be marked for 10 years. Anything that could be needed for legal purposes such as an accident report for possible litigation should be marked 50 years.
5. Special education reports, accommodation records, incident reports, specific diagnosis of a disability, and notes on Department Human Services reports are to be kept separately from a student's cumulative file. Review state/local law and seek legal counsel for appropriate storage of these files. When student records are requested by another school, these files should be evaluated by the principal to see if they should be included with records sent or kept at the school.
6. All field trip permission forms must be kept for at least 5 years electronically. These are kept as a group, not individual files.
7. Each year's electronic files should be backed up and saved off-site in the event of fire or theft. Student records on campus should be kept in a fireproof location when possible. **If the physical copy is the only copy, a fireproof location is a requirement for accreditation.**
8. The school must have a written plan in place for the transfer of student records to an appropriate accredited school, association, or local school district in the event of closure.
9. Some schools print physical records at the end of each year and keep them for quick reference for the next seven years (to be kept locked in the principal's office, not individual files, as a convenience for the principal):
  - a. Student names, dates of birth, parents' names, addresses, and phone numbers
  - b. Discipline records
  - c. Attendance records
  - d. Grades

10. This document primarily applies to high school student records. For schools that provide up to 8<sup>th</sup> grade (or below), we recommend keeping all records until the time the student should have graduated high school. After that time, the transcript is the only item the school needs to keep indefinitely.
11. In addition to the items kept in the files, a school should develop policies on:
  - a. When parents have access to student files and who supervises that access
  - b. What files may be copied from the file by parents
  - c. What parents should do if they challenge the contents of the file and/or seek to add contents
  - d. Release of records, especially in the case of an unpaid balance and students transferring to another school (review state/local laws and seek legal counsel regarding which records the school is required to pass along and which records the school can withhold)
  - e. Non-custodial parents' rights to access educational records
  - f. Students' access to their own records once they turn 18
  - g. Restrictions to student files even for staff (on a need-to-know basis through place of storage, locked cabinets, and password protection)
  - h. Destruction of records that have become out of date.

#### Reference

Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) U.S. Department of Education (1974) retrieved October 26, 2008 from <http://www.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/fpco/ferpa/index.html>.