

Charter school district needs to respect local student privacy

How would you want Germantown Municipal School District to react if a failing charter school district was demanding student contact information -

and the state was backing the district by implementing an arbitrary deadline for the release of student information?

Recently, Shelby County Schools sent home an opt-out form so parents could choose to not release our child(ren)’s information to third parties—specifically, charter schools who were seeking contact information, including emails, addresses and phone numbers—for marketing purposes.

The information didn’t necessarily stop at information, SCS informed us. It could include student grades, attendance records and more. This is all because a new state law says once a chartering agency “approved to operate in the district” requests the info, “a local education agency [in this case, SCS] must provide ‘a list of student names, ages, addresses, dates of attendance, and grade levels completed.’”

SCS chair Chris Caldwell and Metro Nashville Public Schools chair Anna Shepherd jointly wrote a crushing letter to the editor to the USA Today Network in which they decried Tennessee Education Commissioner Candice McQueen’s arbitrary deadline on the districts to release the information.

In the letter, Caldwell and Shepherd wrote: “The failing state-run Achievement School District is on life support. Now, the Haslam administration is trying to extend the ASD’s life with an overreaching demand that would violate the privacy of students and families in Memphis and Nashville.”

Clearly, the Memphis-based Achievement School District is far from achieving. The district is currently under federal investigation following allegations of sexual violence at a Memphis charter school. Superintendent Malika Anderson resigned two weeks ago, leaving the district lacking a leader and facing more questions of how its very existence will be sustained.

Since school enrollment is falling, the school district is struggling to fund itself. But McQueen believes that the release of the information would aid the failing charter school districts in Memphis and Nashville in its marketing efforts, which would, in the end, redirect taxpayer funds to the charter schools at the expense of SCS and MNPS.

The new state law gives districts time to deny the request “temporarily,” per the attorney general’s opinion. The “temporary” denial is to allow parents the choice to opt out, but I’m still not clear: Does the parental opt out supercede the law, or vice versa?

Smaller municipal school districts are not being asked for this data yet - as far as I know, nor are private school districts. I wonder why. Do the



Rebekah Yearout

charter schools know they are failing so badly that they couldn’t attract students from more prestigious, smaller districts?

As a local private school alum, I feel pretty sure that no parents would have taken their kids out of such a high-achieving school to test the waters in a troubled charter district. As a parent today, my first priority is my child and his achievement. The charter schools have been the example of failure, at least with ASD. I would never choose to pull my son from the public school where he’s excelling to put him in a district that can’t retain its own leadership.

The SCS school board has agreed to back the MNPS if it decides to file a lawsuit against the state. Last month, SCS sent a letter to the Nashville district outlining its arguments supporting such a potential court case.

This could get ugly. And to be clear, this is not an indictment on charter schools in general. In Colorado, Denver-based University Prep was the only charter school to receive a \$1.4 million U.S. Department of Education grant to support successful charters. This is a charter school that deserves recognition. In last spring’s state math assessments, University Prep Steele Street students posted the highest growth scores in Colorado.

But how would GMDS parents react if a charter district attempted to get their children’s information so it could market itself to YOU as a better choice? From what I can tell, parents are overwhelmingly happy with GMDS. It earned the highest high school test scores in the state in every subject—“In both High School English and High School Math, Germantown Municipal students scored higher than 100% of districts in Tennessee,” reads a press release on the GMDS website. The Commercial Appeal also reported on the district’s TNReady success.

I think that such a well-performing district wouldn’t be worried about charter schools, but this new law really throws a wrench in the federal Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). The word “temporarily” in the AG opinion worries me.

In the meantime, if you’re a Germantown resident whose child(ren) attend one of the three SCS schools in the city, then you already know the issue SCS is battling, and that battle is for us and our kids.

If you’re successful at what you do, it’s not at the expense of others around you—and that’s not the case with the local charter school district. It’s trying to build success by using the state to obtain private information.

I’m all for school choice. I hope a better leader comes to ASD, or a better district opens its doors. Until then, I stand with SCS in its decision to take our privacy rights all the way to court, if that’s what it takes.

VIEWPOINT



HEALTHCARE

Americans don’t get enough nutrients. Here’s a solution.

By Steve Mister

Nearly nine in ten Americans don’t get enough vitamins and minerals.

Many nutritionists think this is a simple dietary challenge. Americans just need to eat more fresh produce, lean protein, and whole grains.

That’s easier said than done. Many people, particularly the poor, live in communities that lack healthy food options. And the economics don’t help. Nutrient-rich foods tend to be expensive, while calorie-dense, nutrient-poor foods tend to be cheap.

Fortunately, solving America’s dietary shortfalls is possible with the help of nutritional supplements like daily multivitamins. They’re no substitute for healthy eating, but they’re a realistic way to plug the gaps in our diets.

Many Americans living in remote rural areas, or inner cities without supermarkets, struggle to access fresh, healthy foods. In Minneapolis, nearly four in 10 corner stores don’t sell

fresh produce. For most Detroit residents, the nearest grocery store is twice as far as the closest fast-food joint. Half a million Houstonians live in neighborhoods so far from grocery stores they’re called “food deserts.”

Even Americans with access to healthy foods fail to get enough of the nearly three dozen nutrients for which the federal government has established recommended daily intakes. Vitamins A and D, magnesium, fiber and choline are among the shortfall nutrients in our diets.

Getting nutrients from food alone is difficult. Consuming the government-recommended 1,000 milligrams of calcium per day would take over 10 cups of cooked kale -- or more than 7 cups of cottage cheese. Meeting advised daily Vitamin D levels would necessitate chowing down nearly a dozen eggs or over 4 pounds of Swiss cheese. Folks would need to eat over three cups of black-eyed peas or nearly six cups of cooked broccoli to reach the recommended amount of folic acid.

Those deficiencies can lead to serious health problems. A lack of Vitamin A can leave people more prone to infections and eye problems. Vitamin D deficiencies can contribute to osteoporosis, depression, and cancer. A person who doesn’t get enough magnesium may develop high blood pressure, cardiovascular disease, and type 2 diabetes.

Given these risks, it’s no wonder that nutritionists urge people to eat nutrient-rich foods like quinoa, chia seeds, oysters, almonds, and black-eyed peas.

But this isn’t practical. The foods richest in nutrients are also some of the priciest. Quinoa, for example, costs \$6 per pound. That’s tough to justify when a bag of rice costs one-tenth as much. A small pack of chia seeds runs \$10.

It’s unrealistic to think that the 43 million Americans living in poverty would be able to afford these luxuries.

It’s certainly possible for people to get all of the nutrients they need from healthy eating. But for those

who struggle to maintain a perfect diet, multivitamins can help fill in the gaps for about a dime a day.

Research confirms that people who take multivitamins are healthier. One study tracked nearly 15,000 older men for over a decade. Those who took a multivitamin daily were less likely to develop cancer than those who did not. Another study discovered that women who took a multivitamin for at least three years were less likely to die from cardiovascular disease.

It would be wonderful if everyone had the time, money, and opportunity to eat a healthy diet daily. But until that day arrives, folks can help protect their health with a proven way to fill nutritional gaps -- a multivitamin.

Steve Mister is the president and CEO of the Council for Responsible Nutrition, the leading trade association for the dietary supplement and functional food industry.

Clearance backlog threatens national security

By Michael James Barton

Right now, more than 500,000 federal employees and government contractors are awaiting security clearances.

That poses a serious threat. The enormous backlog of clearance applications prevents talented analysts, engineers, and coders from working on today’s most critical national security challenges. Some applicants wait more than 350 days before starting their jobs. Unsurprisingly, many highly qualified and badly needed security officials take other employment due to the unreasonable delay.

The high-stakes waiting game leaves our nation needlessly short-handed and wastes taxpayer money. To keep America safe, the Trump administration should make ending the clearance backlog an urgent priority.

There are two main reasons for the current clearance build-up.

The first is the data breach that compromised the Office of Personnel Management in June of 2015. That hack

forced the agency to shut down its systems for about a month to improve safeguards, bringing all background investigations to a halt.

A few months later, the Defense Security Service, the agency that reviews clearance requests before passing them along to OPM, suffered budget cuts. As a result, DSS temporarily stopped processing almost all requests for government contractors.

In both cases, pending applications piled up quickly. In four weeks, DSS alone faced a backlog of 10,000 clearance applications. OPM is now working through roughly 500,000 requests.

The bureaucratic review process was already too slow -- and these two incidents only made things worse. While investigations for mid-level clearances were supposed to take only 74 days last year, the average wait was about double that. “Top Secret” clearances took over 200 days to process during the first quarter of 2016 and close to

400 days to clear during the first quarter of 2017.

With threats mounting each day, America can’t let qualified defense professionals sit idle.

Consider cyber-warfare, which nearly three in four Americans see as a critical threat. It’s easy to see why; hackers attempted to infiltrate both the Republican National Committee and Democratic National Committee last year, demonstrating how a cyber-attack could disrupt our institutions.

The current clearance system also wastes taxpayer money. Newly recruited defense professionals still get paid by their employers while their background checks are cleared.

One step to reduce the backlog? Eliminate application redundancy. Some agencies immediately grant applicants a certain clearance level if they’ve met requirements at a different agency. To minimize wasteful reapplications, federal regulators should make this policy -- called reciprocity -- mandatory across all agencies.

The Trump administration could also ask Congress for funding to help agencies bolster staff for clearance applications. The National Background Investigations Bureau, for example, took on 400 new investigators in 2016 and aims to enlist 200 more in 2017.

The clearance build-up is already hindering vital projects, squandering resources, and discouraging talented Americans from pursuing national security jobs. By enacting immediate, practical reforms, President Trump and his team can eliminate this backlog -- and make sure our nation remains safe.

Michael James Barton, a policy fellow at ARTIS International, served as deputy director of the Middle East Policy Office in the Office of the Secretary of Defense from 2006 to 2009. Earlier, he served on the Homeland Security Council at the White House. This piece originally ran in The Hill.

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