



THE SECRETARY OF EDUCATION
WASHINGTON, DC 20202

November 2007

Dear College or University President:

Following the heartbreaking event at Virginia Tech in April of this year, President Bush asked former Attorney General Alberto Gonzales, Secretary of Health and Human Services Mike Leavitt, and me to lead a national dialogue regarding steps the nation can take to prevent such tragedies in the future. We toured the country talking to state and local leaders, educators, mental health experts, parents, students, and law enforcement officials about issues affecting the safety and well-being of students, faculty, and staff. There were several recurring themes heard across the country. These included the need for additional guidance on the *Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)*, the federal law that protects the privacy of students' education records, as well as information on resources that are available to help institutions of higher education plan for, respond to, and recover from a serious incident.

In response to these comments, I am pleased to provide you with the enclosed brochures on *FERPA* as a timely refresher to help you appropriately balance student privacy and school safety, as well as a handout summarizing key emergency management resources available to you.

The *FERPA* brochures for higher education officials include contact information for obtaining additional guidance and assistance. Understanding the law can empower officials to act quickly and decisively when problems arise. Also included is a separate brochure for parents. We have enclosed five copies of each to share with campus offices that handle student privacy-related issues (e.g., student records/registrar, student affairs, campus security, and health/counseling centers). A copy of the brochures may also be found on the Department's Web site at: <http://www.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/fpco/ferpa/safeschools/index.html>.

The handout on emergency management resources includes a variety of materials developed by the U.S. Department of Education and our partners in the federal sector. Although it is not a comprehensive list of all available resources, it is a summary of key resources that will assist you in the development of an emergency management plan for your campus community. I encourage you to consider the enclosed information and to include it on your institution's Web site.

Nothing is more important to Americans than the safety of their children. *FERPA* is not intended to be an obstacle in achieving that goal. I hope that the brochures and handout will be of help to you in safeguarding the students for whom you are responsible. May our tribute to those we lost in Virginia be our commitment to forestall tragedies such as the one that took their lives.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Margaret Spellings".

Margaret Spellings