

***Southeastern Legal Foundation (SLF) Requests State Investigation
of Student Privacy Violations***

SLF Represents Parents Concerned About Illegal Student Surveys

JEFFERSON CITY, MISSOURI (May 2, 2022): Southeastern Legal Foundation ([SLF](#)), on behalf of a group of concerned parents in Webster Groves, Missouri, requested that the Missouri Attorney General open an investigation into violations of student privacy laws resulting from student surveys administered by the Webster Groves School District (WGSD).

America's public schools are requiring students to take surveys with questions about deeply personal topics and legally protected information at an alarming rate. Through these surveys, school districts and third parties collect data on topics ranging from students' political beliefs and those of their parents, to their gender and sexual orientation, to their mental health status. Not only are the student surveys intrusive, but in many situations, they are created and administered by outside companies such as Panorama Education and Project Wayfinder.

Both federal and state privacy laws prohibit schools from asking students about many of these topics at all or without parental consent, including (1) political affiliations or beliefs of the students or the students' parents, (2) mental or psychological problems of the students or the students' families, and (3) sex behavior or attitudes. Under Missouri law, the Attorney General has full authority to investigate violations of these laws, including subpoenaing witnesses, compelling their attendance and testimony under oath, as well as the production of documents. Violations are punished by civil fines of up to \$10,000 for repeated violations.

In a letter sent today, SLF alerted the Missouri Attorney General to widespread violations by WGSD of student privacy laws and asked for an investigation. According to SLF, concerned parents have produced evidence that WGSD is requiring students to take surveys that "determine your political party preference," and include questions about gay marriage, immigration, abortion, school prayer, and the death penalty. Students are also given surveys and asked about their views on government funding of Planned Parenthood, abortion, and health insurance coverage for birth control.

In addition to the political surveys, WGSD requires students to take surveys about their personal sexuality and gender identity that specifically ask if they are transgender or non-binary. Students as young as second grade are required to fill out a "My Identity Journal" where they are asked about their racial identity and comfort level with persons of other races. And WGSD requires high school students to take an advisory class where they take weekly surveys on their own mental health and that of their families. Sample survey questions include, "I am aware of and comfortable with my cultural, racial, and personal identity," "My family supports me in my academic and personal life," and "I feel supported by my family."

SLF requested that the Attorney General investigate WGSD, the state education entities, and companies to whom the school district outsourced these surveys, notably Panorama Education and Project Wayfinder. Panorama Education was co-founded by the son-in-law of Attorney General Merrick Garland, the same official who [instructed](#) the FBI to investigate parents at

school board meetings. Panorama has [pledged](#) its commitment to “dismantling systemic racism” and “spreading anti-racist practices.” Project Wayfinder openly [promotes](#) its student surveys as an “antidote[] to the mental health crisis.” The company itself brags that its Waypoints questions, mandatory in Webster Groves High School, are a “mental health dashboard,” that gives teachers and principals “accurate up-to-the-minute insights into the mental health of their students.”

[Kimberly Hermann](#), SLF General Counsel, said, “Parents are done sitting on the sidelines as America’s public schools violate our children’s privacy rights and collect personal information about them and our families. Schools need to get back to teaching math and how to read, not asking about gender identity or Planned Parenthood. These are conversations for parents to have with their children at an appropriate age. Schools shouldn’t be asking these questions in the first place. It is outrageous that they are doing it and not even telling parents.”

[Braden H. Boucek](#), the Director of Litigation for SLF and former federal prosecutor, added, “When politically driven companies are given free rein to harvest personal data about children, it holds a troublesome potential for abuse. It’s time to bring these invasive surveys out of the dark. We have no idea what these companies are doing with the data that they compile about America’s children and their parents. We hope for a full and transparent investigation into these grave allegations and betrayals of parental trust.”