

LEGAL MAILBAG – MARCH 19, 2026



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The “Legal Mailbag Question of the Week” is a regular feature of the CAS Weekly NewsBlast. We invite readers to submit short, law-related questions of practical concern to school administrators. Each week, we will select a question and publish an answer. While these answers cannot be considered formal legal advice, they may be of help to you and your colleagues. We may edit your questions, and we will not identify the authors. Please submit your questions to: legalmailbag@casciac.org.

Dear Legal Mailbag,

We have a student whose dad has sole custody. The courts recently granted mom the following update to the custody agreement: “The father will add the mother onto the contact list at child's school.” That's all it says.

Dad told us that he does not want us speaking to mom and providing updates on his son.

So, what does “contact” mean? What rights come along with being a “contact”? We had our School Resource Officer reach out to the court where the update was added, but they were not helpful (to say the least). I’m hoping that Legal Mailbag can help us sort this out.

What legal rights is the mom actually entitled to other than having her name appear in PowerSchool?

Signed,
Education is Not a “Contact” Sport!

Dear Sport:

Legal Mailbag cannot divine exactly what the court intended by ordering that the mother be added as a “contact.” However, it is clear that the court was not limiting the mother’s rights under statute. Given that fact, the mother is entitled to access to school records, as explained below.

Conn. Gen. Stat. § 10-15b provides that parents or legal guardians of students are entitled to knowledge of and access to “all educational, medical, or similar records maintained in such student’s cumulative record,” except as such records may be privileged under Conn. Gen. Stat. § 10-154a. Moreover, FERPA provides that parents are entitled to access to “education records,” *i.e.*, records that are “directly related to a student; and . . . [m]aintained by an educational agency . . .” 34 C.F.R. § 99.3.

The exception related to Conn. Gen. Stat. § 10-154a is rarely applicable, because the prohibition against access to educational records under that statute relates only to “professional communications,” *i.e.*, a communication made privately and in confidence by a student to a professional employee of such student's school in the course of the latter's employment. Moreover, the prohibition against sharing such information obtained through a professional communication applies only “when such information concerns alcohol or drug abuse or any alcoholic or drug problem of such student.”

The statutes extend this right of access to educational records to non-custodial parents except when there is a court order to the contrary. Conn. Gen. Stat. § 46b-56(g) provides:

(g) A parent not granted custody of a minor child shall not be denied the right of access to the academic, medical, hospital or other health records of such minor child, unless otherwise ordered by the court for good cause shown.

By ordering that the mother be added as a contact, the court was certainly not limiting her rights under this statute.

Given the court’s order that she should be added as a “contact,” this mother retains another right that the statutes in Connecticut confer upon non-custodial parents. Conn. Gen. Stat. § 10-15b(b) provides that a parent with whom the student does not primarily reside is entitled upon request to receive copies of all “school notices” at the same time they are mailed to the parent with whom the student does reside. The statute further provides that any such request is valid for the time the student is at that school.

Legal Mailbag notes your comment that “Dad told us that he does not want us speaking to mom and providing updates on his son.” However, unless and until the father can convince the court to restrict the mother’s statutory rights, school officials must respond to reasonable requests from the mother for an explanation of the school records related to her child (though, of course, under these circumstances the mother may not make any educational decisions as to the child).

Legal Mailbag bases this conclusion on two provisions in the FERPA regulations.

First, 34 C.F.R. § 99.4 provides:

An educational agency or institution shall give full rights under the Act to either parent, unless the agency or institution has been provided with evidence that there is a court order, State statute, or legally binding document relating to such matters as divorce, separation, or custody that specifically revokes these rights.

Clearly, adding the mother as a “contact” does not operate to revoke the mother’s rights under FERPA. Second, 34 C.F.R. § 99.10(c) imposes the following obligation on school officials:

The educational agency or institution, or SEA or its component shall respond to reasonable requests for explanations and interpretations of the records.

Given these provisions, the father cannot prohibit school officials from speaking to the mother if she requests an explanation of the student records to which she is entitled under FERPA and state law.

Finally, Legal Mailbag notes that conflicts between parents can put school officials in the middle, which can be challenging. In such situations, it is important that school officials communicate clearly with both parents. Accordingly, if one parent makes a claim about access to a student or the student’s records, school officials should share that claim with the other parent to give that parent an opportunity to respond so that school officials have all relevant information before making a decision. This practice is especially important as to court orders involving children. Such orders are based on the court’s view of the best interests of the child, and such orders are never permanent because the best interests of the child can change over time. By sharing information between both parents, school officials will be sure to obtain the most recent court order when there is a conflict between parents.