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PASCO Coalition Demands School District End Illegal Surveillance Program

PASCO COUNTY, Fla. – The People Against the Surveillance of Children and Over-policing (PASCO) Coalition sent an [11-page letter](#) today urging the Pasco County School District to immediately end all student data-sharing agreements used by the Pasco County Sheriff's Office to surveil and harass students and families.

The letter describes how the district's practice of sharing confidential student information, such as grades, GPAs, credits, attendance records and discipline referrals, under the predictive-policing program violates the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), the federal student privacy law, and other federal laws that prohibit discrimination on basis of race, national origin, disability status and other protected groups.

The nefarious activities of the program were exposed in a series of [investigative articles](#) published last year by the *Tampa Bay Times*. The basis of the program is also detailed in the [Pasco Sheriff's Office Intelligence-Led Policing \(ILP\) Manual](#), which states that school resource officers must "identify any priority offenders who attend [their] school and look to collect information about their activities and associates in school," as well as "plan home visits for the most at-risk students to engage parents and identify additional risk factors for offending."

The 30-member coalition is made up of local, state and national organizations, including Greater Tampa Chapter of the ACLU of Florida, the Florida State Conference of the NAACP, the Council on the American-Islamic Relations, Florida, the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF) and the Southern Poverty Law Center, that are fighting to end the illegal policing and surveilling of children in violation of their rights.

"Among our concerns, the district's data-sharing policy jeopardizes the safety of vulnerable student populations and may violate the rights held by students and parents," the letter states. "For these and other reasons described in detail below, we call on Superintendent Kurt Browning and the Pasco County School Board to immediately terminate the student data-sharing arrangement for any collaboration, involvement, or participation in school-based predictive policing operated by the Pasco County Sheriff's Office."

FERPA prohibits school officials from disclosing student education records to any third-party individual or organization without prior parental consent or a statutory exemption, which the school district does not appear to be following, the letter states. The ILP manual also reveals that the district allows law enforcement officials to routinely assess confidential student records wholly unrelated to any "legitimate educational interest," in violation of the law.

In addition to ending the data-sharing agreements with the Sheriff's Office, the groups are demanding that the school district permanently eliminate any database currently or previously used to identify or label students at-risk by local police and to notify every parent or guardian, in writing, if their student has ever been flagged as "at-risk," "off-track," "on-track," "critical," or any other designation used under the predictive-policing program to monitor their child.

The letter also expressed concern that the program's reliance on racially biased data, such as the district's school discipline rates, discriminates against children of color under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. According to the letter, students of color are significantly overrepresented in several data sets and criteria that are used to score youth as "at-risk" which could result in illegal surveillance and harassment of students and their parents or guardians under the program.

The letter proposes seven steps the district should take to protect student privacy and advance racial equity for Pasco County students and families. To read the full letter, visit: https://www.splcenter.org/sites/default/files/2021-05-03_pasco_coalition_open_letter_final_with_logos_formatting_vs_lj.pdf. Members of the community can contact the PASCO Coalition at (727) 371-6199 or thePASCOcoalition@gmail.com, if they believe their child has been targeted by the predictive policing program. They are also invited to attend a [virtual community forum](#) hosted by the coalition on May 8, 2021, at 4:00 p.m.