

## Privacy Technical Assistance Center – U.S. Department of Education

Extract from <http://ptac.ed.gov/About>

The U.S. Department of Education (ED) established the Privacy Technical Assistance Center (PTAC) as a “one-stop” resource for education stakeholders to learn about data privacy, confidentiality, and security practices related to student-level longitudinal data systems and other uses of student data. PTAC provides timely information and updated guidance on privacy, confidentiality, and security practices through a variety of resources, including training materials and opportunities to receive direct assistance with privacy, security, and confidentiality of student data systems.

### PTAC Background

Recent legislation that increased the use of individual-level data as well as linkages between data across federal agencies prompted the need for ED to set standards to protect individual privacy while maintaining data quality.

PTAC is designed to provide education stakeholders with:

- A set of tools, resources, and opportunities to receive assistance to improve the privacy, security, and confidentiality of student-level longitudinal data systems;
- A means for states to share their best practices, documents, and other relevant resources in the areas of privacy, security, and confidentiality;
- A focal point for queries and responses to the privacy-related needs of State educational agencies, local educational agencies, and institutions of higher education in a confidential, safe environment; and
- A set of resources to promote compliance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and other best practices for ensuring the confidentiality and security of personally identifiable information.

### Governance

PTAC, supported through a government contract, provides technical assistance to education stakeholders through a range of materials and activities. The Department's contractor is working under the guidance of the Chief Privacy Officer and in close collaboration with the FERPA Working Group, which consists of representatives of the Office of Management, the Family Policy Compliance Office, and the Office of General Counsel, to produce and review privacy technical assistance products. PTAC also regularly consults with the Department's Privacy Advisory Committee, whose members include Chief Statistician of NCES, SLDS program officer, and representatives from the office of Federal Student Aid, the Office of Civil Rights, and the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, among others, on the privacy issues of broad importance.

## PTAC Approach

PTAC engages national experts from a variety of industries and federal agencies with experience on technological issues regarding data security; legal issues regarding data sharing, access, and use; policy issues regarding data governance processes; and statistical issues regarding the reporting and publishing of aggregate performance data.

## PTAC Resources and Services

PTAC provides timely information and updated guidance on privacy, confidentiality, and security practices through a variety of resources, including training materials and opportunities to receive direct assistance with improving the privacy, security, and confidentiality of longitudinal data systems. PTAC resources provide best practices for ensuring the confidentiality and security of personally identifiable information and promoting FERPA compliance:

- A Privacy Toolkit that serves as a centralized depository for the most up-to-date information to guide stakeholders looking to improve the security, confidentiality, and privacy of education data. Toolkit resources include Technical Briefs, Issue Briefs, Checklists, Webinar presentations, and many other materials. All resources are organized according to the following topics:
  - Data Sharing/Dissemination
  - Disclosure Avoidance
  - Data Security
  - Data Governance
- Legal References (FERPA and Cross-Agency)
- Technical Assistance site visits to State and local educational agencies to provide hands-on support for establishing and reviewing security policy, data governance, FERPA compliance, staff training, and related topics.
- Regional meetings and lessons learned forums for education stakeholders.
- Support center, including an interactive Help Desk, offering assistance via phone or email.