

The Honorable Margaret Spellings  
Secretary of Education  
400 Maryland Avenue, SW  
Washington, DC 20202

Dear Madam Secretary:

The U.S. Department of Education has been requiring hundreds of education researchers to undergo an intrusive “security clearance” process. This process involves collecting fingerprints, social security numbers, dates of birth, answers to a lengthy list of very personal questions, as well as authorization for government investigators to gather information that “may include, but is not limited to ... academic, residential, achievement, performance, attendance, disciplinary, employment history, criminal history record information, and financial and credit information.” The Department also requires authorization to release medical information to government investigators.

These requirements are far beyond bounds of reason, necessity, and decency. There are ample provisions in law, contract language, and regulations to protect the privacy of any personally identifiable data gathered by researchers (e.g., student test scores) and to address other reasonable concerns. Researchers have no knowledge of who will see any private information about themselves that they submit to the government, by what criteria it will be judged, where it will be kept, for how long, and how safe it is from loss or abuse.

We believe that Americans’ civil liberties are very important and that the Department is abusing its authority. We urge you to quickly overturn this policy and end the unnecessary, widespread collection of private information about contractor employees.