



Data Mining Students Through Common Core

Awareness is growing rapidly about the recent initiative to bring Common Core Standards to schools across America. Although the standards were supposedly proposed by the National Governors Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) — giving the illusion that the agenda is “[state-led](#),” it was the federal government that [endorsed the plan](#) by offering \$4 billion in grant money through Obama’s Race to the Top program to cooperating states. Representative Blaine Luetkemeyer (R-Mo.) recently decided to take action and write a [letter](#) to U.S. Department of Education Secretary Arne Duncan and is currently seeking co-signers from congressional colleagues. Congressman Luetkemeyer addressed several issues of concern with Common Core — and in the last half of his letter he emphasized the crux of the problem: data mining.



“We understand that as a condition of applying for [Race to the Top] grant funding, states obligated themselves to implement a State Longitudinal Database System (SLDS) used to track students by obtaining personally identifiable information,” Luetkemeyer said. “We formally request a detailed description of each change to student privacy policy that has been made under your leadership, including the need and intended purpose for such changes.”

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Parents might reasonably assume that the “personally identifiable information” collected for the database will include students’ test scores and perhaps other measures of academic proficiency. But they would be much less likely to imagine that the federal government envisions something far more extensive and invasive than merely tracking academic performance. According to the Department of Education’s February 2013 [report](#) *Promoting Grit, Tenacity, and Perseverance: Critical Factors for Success in the 21st Century*, “Researchers are exploring how to gather *complex affective data* and generate meaningful and usable information to feed back to learners, teachers, researchers, and the technology itself. Connections to neuroscience are also beginning to emerge.” (Emphasis added.)

So far, nine states across the country have already [agreed to adopt the data mining process](#), with parents having no say in this decision. Schools in New York, Delaware, Colorado, Massachusetts, Kentucky, Illinois, Louisiana, Georgia, and North Carolina have committed to “pilot testing” and information dissemination via sending students’ personal information to a database managed by inBloom, Inc., a private organization funded largely by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.



Written by [Mallory Sauer](#) on April 25, 2013

This digital warehouse boasts on its [website](#) that it “partners with education technology companies, content providers and developers to support the creation of products compatible with this infrastructure.” Presumably this means information sharing. On the [“faq” page](#) of the website, one of the questions is: “Will inBloom give away or sell confidential student and teacher data to private companies or organizations?” Revealingly, though the first word of inBloom’s paragraph-long answer is “No,” the rest of the answer indicates otherwise by acknowledging that “districts who use inBloom in conjunction with commercial applications and services may choose to disclose certain student information to those third-party providers.” In other words, as long as the school districts consent, inBloom can share student data with whichever companies they choose.

The fact that Common Core Standards require children’s personal information to be provided to a database that can be expected to sell or share the data to unspecified companies is worrisome to many parents and educators. “It leads to total control and total tracking of the child,” said Mary Black, curriculum director for Freedom Project Education, an organization that provides classical K-12 online schooling. “It completely strips the child of his or her own privacy.”

Schools will not only collect objective facts about students but gain a more intimate knowledge as well — even profiles of students’ attitudes and predictions of their futures that could then be used by the schools to shape outcomes. The DOE released a [brief](#) in October 2012 entitled “Enhancing, Teaching and Learning Through Educational Data Mining and Learning Analytics,” in which the following was stated about data mining procedures:

A student learning database (or other big data repository) stores time-stamped student input and behaviors captured as students work within the system. A predictive model combines demographic data (from an external student information system) and learning/behavior data from the student learning database to track a student’s progress and make predictions about his or her future behaviors or performance, such as future course outcomes and dropouts.

Within the [February report](#), the DOE displayed photographs of the actual technology that will be used on students, if the department’s plan is fully implemented. What they call the “four parallel streams of affective sensors” will be employed to effectively “measure” each child. The “facial expression camera,” for instance, “is a device that can be used to detect emotion.... The camera captures facial expressions, and software on the laptop extracts geometric properties on faces.” Other devices, such as the “posture analysis seat,” “pressure mouse,” and “wireless skin conductance sensor,” which looks like a wide, black bracelet strapped to a child’s wrist, are all designed to collect “physiological response data from a biofeedback apparatus that measures blood volume, pulse, and galvanic skin response to examine student frustration.”

In an attempt to assuage such fears regarding students’ privacy, the February report stated the following:

Privacy is always a concern, especially when leveraging data available in the “cloud” that users may or may not be aware is being mined. However, another emergent concern is the consequences of using new types of personal data in new ways. Learners and educators have the potential to get forms of feedback about their behaviors, emotions, physiological responses, and cognitive processes that have never been available before. Measurement developers must carefully consider the impacts of releasing such data, sometimes of a sensitive nature.

Even when using their most eloquent language to sell us the product, the DOE’s explanation is more



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disturbing than comforting. They openly admit that students under Common Core will be poked and prodded for information of a “sensitive nature.” But what specifically is this information?

In 2010, the National Center for Education Statistics released a [technical brief](#) about “Guidance for Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems (SLDS),” which formulated a detailed plan for “data stewardship” in education. The SLDS created a [grant program](#) in 2005, each grant lasting three to five years at up to \$20 million per grantee. In 2012, a combination of [24 states and territories](#) struck a deal to implement data mining to receive grants. “Personally Identifiable Information” will be extracted from each student, which will include the following data: parents’ names, address, Social Security Number, date of birth, place of birth, mother’s maiden name, etc. On the other hand, according to the SLDS brief, “Sensitive Information” will also be extracted, which delves into the intimate details of students’ lives:

1. Political affiliations or beliefs of the student or parent;
2. Mental and psychological problems of the student or the student’s family;
3. Sex behavior or attitudes;
4. Illegal, anti-social, self-incriminating, and demeaning behavior;
5. Critical appraisals of other individuals with whom respondents have close family relationships;
6. Legally recognized privileged or analogous relationships, such as those of lawyers, physicians, and ministers;
7. Religious practices, affiliations, or beliefs of the student or the student’s parent; or
8. Income (other than that required by law to determine eligibility for participation in a program or for receiving financial assistance under such program).

It is unclear whether students will be required to answer the aforementioned questions while being analyzed by the four kinds of “sensors” promoted by the DOE report, but all students will be subjected to questioning. Although the SLDS claims that this particular information “requires written parental consent” before a minor is forced to disclose it, loopholes still exist that could circumvent parental authority. “I think they would get around parental consent through testing,” Black explained. She warned *The New American* that academic exams — regardless of the subject — could potentially be utilized to extract this information without parents knowing. Black asserted that, even if parents could truly opt out and save their children from having to answer such personal questions, the children might be “branded” — permanently placing them into a different category from the other students.

Armed with knowledge, citizens are beginning to see the red flags within the wordy explanations from the authorities on Common Core. If Americans want freedom for their children and grandchildren, they must take a stand before it is too late. By the [2014-2015 school year](#), all schools will start testing at the national level, using Common Core Standards. “We need to be working with our state legislators and fight it at the state level,” Black said. “This is about something most near and dear to people — their children.” They are worth the fight!□



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