



## Department of Education's Orwellian Plans

The U.S. Department of Education does not serve any clear purpose. The Constitution leaves education to state governments as a residual power. In our history, that did not mean states had to provide education to children at taxpayer expense, although that was the rule throughout the states, at least to a certain age.

Only very gradually did the policy of mandatory education spread across the nation, and during those decades in the latter part of the 19th century when education through public grade school became compulsory, it was recognized that parents had the right to choose instead to educate their children at home, or in private or religious schools.

Religious education has always been a crucial part of the education of the young. Learning in the Middle Ages was preserved through clerics — members of religious orders, which we have come to think of as the “clerks” of today. Universities in Europe were all religious. The first people to have universal male literacy were the Jews, and the reason had little to do with secular learning. All Jewish boys were expected to be able to read the Torah. The first nation on earth that had universal literacy for boys and girls and for rich and poor was Scotland, and the reason was utterly theological: Scottish Calvinists believed it was a sacred duty to teach all children to read the Bible. Although the responsibility for that teaching fell upon the community, it fell primarily upon the churches.

The idea of having the federal government stick its nose into the education of America's children is relatively new. It would surprise many chic collectivists to know what group was one of the earliest proponents of: (1) mandatory public, rather than private, education; (2) standardized education for these children; and (3) a federal Department of Education. Who demanded that in the 1920s? The [Ku Klux Klan](#) did. The homogenization of American life, particularly the closing of parochial schools and yeshivas, was near and dear to the heart of the Klan.

Education during a great deal of America's early history was always a way for people to keep the values of their children a matter of home and community, not government — and especially not the federal government. But for many years now the U.S. Department of Education has been relentlessly pushing for more control over the lives of American citizens, through control of the education of their children. And that control has recently reached a [dangerous point](#) with Secretary of Education Arne Duncan. Title I funding was used by many school systems to avoid reduction over the last few years. Now Secretary Duncan, through his “Common Core Curriculum” program, is requiring states to comply with new federal standards as a condition of continuing to receive these funds. At first the new data required by the Department of Education included innocent-sounding statistics: test scores, demographic characteristics, district size, and so forth.





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Now, however, the Orwellian bureaucrats of the Obama Education Department have begun to mine for much more personal information — facts which appears to have no real connection to education, such as eye color, gestation size at birth, hair color, blood type, birth marks, blood test results, and bus arrival times. At the present time it is not mandatory to submit this information, but these are elements of the National Education Data Model, which is itself the standard for the collection and manipulation of education data that the Department of Education will use. Just as troubling, the data sets for this system are already coded: the responses allowed are being defined by the system. That strongly suggests that the mandatory nature of this data collection at the local level for the Department of Education will grow more emphatic over time.

Moreover, some of this data, such as “blood test” results, can be used in biometric databases to identify particular specific individuals out of a national population by drilling down into DNA. The data “pipeline,” as it is called, is not intended simply to follow children through their public school life. Illinois calls it the P-20 Pipeline, and its avowed purpose, as the name suggests, is to track Americans from kindergarten through age 20. The Illinois Longitudinal Data System (ILDS) is intended to be part of a national system to identify suitable workers and employers, as well as educators and community leaders. The notional purpose, to “encourage economic development and high-growth opportunities” — like the names of almost all collectivist programs — sounds fine on paper.

This data collection also appears to be a way for state school systems to circumvent local school boards by “signing on” to the system without the approval of the local boards. If a national curriculum is developed, then the role of state and local school boards in development of standards and areas of instruction would be made irrelevant. The standardization of education for all children in America, a statist’s dream, could become a reality.

The collection of the sort of data which is in the National Education Data Model could also endanger students. Who, besides bureaucrats, might want to know “bus arrival times,” for example? Sexual predators might. Drug dealers might. Most parents would feel very uncomfortable if a stranger began asking them when their children left for school in the morning and when they got home in the afternoon, or what birthmarks they had or what their hair color and eye color were. If the questioning delved into blood test results, many of them might be ready to call the police.

What additional information might seem likely to be requested in the future? How about fingerprints? Automated fingerprint systems are available in nearly every major law enforcement agency in the nation. How about email addresses of students — and of parents? What about retinal scans? This information is collected by indifferent bureaucrats, but who might be able to access this information? How many Republican politicians in Wisconsin, say, would be happy to allow public school administrators to have vast amounts of highly personal information about their children right now? Most parents have heard of certain types of male school teachers who they would hope did not know everything about their daughters, but Fox News has also reported many predatory female teachers who engage in statutory rape with young male students.

There are no databases that cannot be hacked, and this would be particularly true of ones into which hundred of thousands of school staff entered data — and, presumably, accessed information as well. One of the most abiding aspects of personal liberty is personal privacy. Once, parents would look askance at revealing even to a teacher at a religious school the sort of information that federal education bureaucrats now will be demanding as a matter of course.

More and more, it looks as if the federal government is collecting information simply as a source of



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power.



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