



Orwellian Nightmare: Data-mining Your Kids

One of the most troubling aspects of the “education reforms” currently being advanced by the Obama administration and its allies is the unprecedented monitoring and tracking of students — invasions of privacy so pervasive George Orwell might blush. Everything from biometric data to information on children’s beliefs and families is already being vacuumed up. Opponents of the “reform” agenda have highlighted the cradle-to-grave accumulation of private and intimate data as among the most compelling reasons to kill the whole process.



Aside from data produced by the looming Common Core-aligned national testing regime, most of the data-mining schemes are not technically direct components of the plot to nationalize education standards. However, the vast collection of personal information and the accompanying data-mining are intricately linked to the federally backed standards in multiple ways, not to mention myriad other federal schemes. Despite protestations to the contrary, the new standards and the data collection go together hand in hand.

Efforts to portray the data gathering via Common Core-aligned testing as a “state-led” plot notwithstanding, the Obama administration is reportedly considering raising phone taxes by executive decree to help subsidize the necessary technology. Why federal tax increases would be needed to pay for education and data-mining schemes that the federal government is supposedly not involved in has not been explained by officials, but experts and analysts say the reason is obvious.

Implementing Intrusions

Already, there are numerous systems being used and deployed across America aimed at compiling unprecedented amounts of data on students. Some are run by private organizations with government assistance; others are operated by authorities directly. All of them are extremely controversial, however, with parents and privacy advocates outraged.

Among the data schemes that have received a great deal of attention in recent months is “inBloom.” As with the new national education standards called Common Core, it is also funded by Bill Gates and the Carnegie Corporation. With at least nine states participating in the \$100 million program already, the non-profit entity, which shares data with whomever authorities choose, is quickly gobbling up vast quantities of information.

Respected experts such as attorney Michael Farris, president of ParentalRights.org, pointed out that the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child committee has repeatedly pressured governments to create similar national databases on children, albeit using different pretexts. Even liberals have expressed opposition. “Turning massive amounts of personal data about public school students to a private corporation without any public input is profoundly disturbing and irresponsible,” said New York Civil Liberties Union Executive Director Donna Lieberman, slamming authorities for



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failing to disclose the scheme or offer parents an opt-out.

In conjunction with inBloom, other systems are being funded and largely directed by the federal government itself. Using the same unconstitutional process as the one used to foist Common Core on state governments — a combination of federal bribes, waivers, and more — the Obama administration all but forced cash-strapped states to start monitoring and tracking student information, or to expand their existing systems.

Previous administrations and U.S. lawmakers also contributed to the problem, with the foundations having been laid decades ago. Before Obama, the Bush-era No Child Left Behind Act, for instance, among myriad other demands, called on states seeking federal funds to create “unique statewide identifiers” for each student. Under Obama, the process has accelerated at an unprecedented rate.

The stimulus-funded “Race to the Top,” a so-called school improvement scheme demanded by Obama, only distributed taxpayer funds to states that agreed to build and expand data systems, with the secretary of education specifically requesting interoperable databases to facilitate the collection and transfer of data. Massive bribes to states from the \$50 billion “State Fiscal Stabilization Fund” conditioned on acceptance of Common Core and expanded data tracking, also part of the “stimulus” package, were critical in advancing the plot as well.

Boasting about the “stimulus”-funded coercion of state governments on data regimes during a speech to UNESCO, the deeply controversial UN “education” agency, Education Secretary Arne Duncan lauded the program.

“More robust data systems and a new generation of assessments can assist teachers and principals to improve their practices and tailor their instruction in ways that were largely unthinkable in the past,” Duncan continued. “We have advanced data systems that we are constantly improving.” Duncan wants other governments and the UN to follow the Obama administration’s lead on data gathering, he explained.

The administration helped pay for expanding “state” systems with an eye toward integrating them. Some \$315 million in federal grants, for example, were used to bribe state governments and help them comply. However, the specific grant scheme, known as the Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems (SLDS) program, actually began handing out taxpayer money in 2005.

As of 2009, the latest year for which figures are available on the Department of Education’s website, 41 states and Washington, D.C. had been awarded federal SLDS grants to expand their data systems on students. Experts say all 50 states now maintain or are capable of maintaining huge databases on the vast majority of American kids.

According to the Department of Education, the goal of the SLDS grants is to have states “expand their data systems to track students’ achievement from preschool through college.” The Education Department’s National Center for Education Statistics offers slightly more detail about the SLDS scheme online: “Through grants and a growing range of services and resources, the program has helped propel the successful design, development, implementation, and expansion of K12 and P-20W (early learning through the workforce) longitudinal data systems,” it explains. “These systems are intended to enhance the ability of States to efficiently and accurately manage, analyze, and use education data, including individual student records.”

Cradle to Career Data Collection



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Of course, all of the data collected must be shared with the U.S. Department of Education and other entities within and outside the federal government. Acting unilaterally, U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan even purported to overrule federal privacy laws by promulgating new “regulations” gutting the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). Some lawmakers expressed outrage, but the process continues.

“As part of what you described as a ‘cradle to career agenda,’ the Department of Education is aggressively moving to expand data systems that collect information on our nation’s students,” wrote Rep. John Kline (R-Minn.), now chairman of the House Education and Workforce Committee, in an early 2010 letter to Duncan. “The Department’s effort to shepherd states toward the creation of a *de facto* national student database raises serious legal and prudential questions.”

As Kline points out in the letter, there is good reason to believe that the administration is again flouting federal law. “Congress has never authorized the Department of Education to facilitate the creation of a national student database,” he explained. “To the contrary, Congress explicitly prohibited the ‘development of a nationwide database of personally identifiable information’ ... and barred the ‘development, implementation, or maintenance of a Federal database.” Despite no mention of the Constitution, multiple federal statutes are cited in the correspondence.

Apparently, the administration does not take kindly to having its alleged violations of the law exposed. While it couldn’t fire Rep. Kline, the Education Department did reportedly dismiss its top privacy official, then-Family Policy Compliance Office chief Paul Gammill. According to a 2010 report in *Inside Higher Ed*, Gammill was fired after he “argued in internal meetings and documents that the department’s approach to prodding states to expand their longitudinal student data systems violated the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act.” The Education Department refused to comment on the case, though it openly admits that one of the long-term goals of the SLDS program is to “make education data transparent through Federal and public reporting.”

According to the Department of Education, grants awarded to states under the program are aimed at supporting the creation and implementation of systems “that have the capacity to link individual student data across time and across databases” and “promote the linking of data collected or held by various institutions, agencies, and States.” Among the data to be included are the yearly test records of individual students mandated under the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act. “States are encouraged to include additional information in their longitudinal data systems,” the department continued.

In another Education Department document offering “guidance” on the SLDS schemes, further insight is offered into what sort of information authorities are seeking and collecting. Among the “Personally Identifiable Information” outlined in the report: name, parents’ names, address, Social Security number, date of birth, place of birth, mother’s maiden name, and more.

Other private and protected data that might be collected, the document suggests, include the “political affiliations or beliefs of the student or parent; mental and psychological problems of the student or the student’s family, sex behavior or attitudes; illegal, anti-social, self-incriminating, and demeaning behavior; critical appraisals of other individuals with whom respondents have close family relationships; legally recognized privileged or analogous relationships, such as those of lawyers, physicians, and ministers; religious practices, affiliations, or beliefs of the student or the student’s parent; or income.” While the collection of such data in surveys and questionnaires funded by *federal* tax dollars requires parental consent under federal law, state-level collection does not. Plus, experts say there are numerous



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other potential loopholes as well.

So Much for Student Privacy

Much of the information vacuumed up at all levels of government already makes its way into a national Department of Education scheme known as “EDFacts.” The department describes it online: “EDFacts is a U.S. Department of Education (ED) initiative to collect, analyze, report on and promote the use of high-quality, kindergarten through grade 12 (K-12) performance data.... EDFacts centralizes data provided by state education agencies, local education agencies and schools.” Under EDFacts, state education agencies submit some 180 data groups. The federal National Center for Education Statistics, meanwhile, describes over 400 data points to be collected.

The U.S. Department of Labor, separately, admits that it is working to “integrate workforce data and create linkages to education data.” According to the department’s “Workforce Data Quality Initiative,” the SLDS will “enable workforce data to be matched with education data to ultimately create longitudinal data systems with individual-level information beginning with pre-kindergarten through post-secondary schooling all the way through entry and sustained participation in the workforce and employment services system.” When combined with information from the IRS, ObamaCare, the NSA, and countless other federal data-collection schemes, the picture that emerges has critics very nervous.

As technology advances, the federal government’s Orwellian data gathering will — without action to stop it — almost certainly expand beyond most people’s wildest nightmares. In fact, it already has. Consider, for example, a February 2013 report by the Department of Education dubbed *Promoting Grit, Tenacity, and Perseverance: Critical Factors for Success in the 21st Century*. Included in the 100-page report is information about technology already being used in an Education Department-funded tutoring program.

“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,” the report explains. “*Connections to neuroscience* are also beginning to emerge.” (Emphasis added.) The technological tools already being used by federally funded education schemes to probe students’ minds and “measure” the children include, as described in the report, “four parallel streams of affective sensors.”

Among the devices in use today through a federally funded tutoring scheme is a “facial expression camera” used to “detect emotion” and “capture facial expressions.” According to the report, the camera is linked to software that “extracts geometric properties on faces.” There is also a “posture analysis seat” and a “pressure mouse.” Finally, the report describes a “wireless skin conductance sensor” strapped to students’ wrists. The sensors collect “physiological response data from a biofeedback apparatus that measures blood volume, pulse, and galvanic skin response to examine student frustration.” Again, these systems are already being used in government-funded programs, and with technology racing ahead, developments are expected to become increasingly troubling.

Another Education Department report, entitled *Enhancing, Teaching and Learning Through Educational Data Mining and Learning Analytics*, acknowledges similarly alarming schemes. “A student learning database (or other big data repository) stores time-stamped student input and behaviors captured as students work within the system,” it notes. “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.”



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(Emphasis added.)

All across the country today, Big Brother-like technological developments in biometrics are also making schools increasingly Orwellian. Earlier this year in Polk County, Florida, for example, students' irises were scanned without parental consent. "It simply takes a picture of the iris, which is unique to every individual," wrote the school board's "senior director of support services" in a letter to parents. "With this program, we will be able to identify when and where a student gets on the bus, when they arrive at their school location, when and what bus the student boards and disembarks in the afternoon. This is an effort to further enhance the safety of our students. The EyeSwipe-Nano is an ideal replacement for the card based system since your child will not have to be responsible for carrying an identification card."

In San Antonio, Texas, meanwhile, a female student made national news — and exposed what was going on — when she got in a legal battle with school officials over her refusal to wear a mandatory radio-frequency identification (RFID) device. The same devices are already being implanted under people's skin in America and abroad — albeit voluntarily. Also in the biometric field, since at least 2007, children in states like Pennsylvania, West Virginia, and New Jersey have been fingerprinted at school under the guise of "school lunch" programs and other pretexts.

Despite fierce opposition, the trend toward using biometric data to identify and track students while collecting unimaginable amounts of information is accelerating. The federal government is helping lead the way toward abolishing any vestiges of privacy, and aside from NSA spying on virtually everyone, students appear to be among the primary targets. Without major resistance, experts predict that someday — perhaps even in the very near future — biometric identification will become ubiquitous. Combined with all of the other data being collected, the federal government may finally achieve what was sought by tyrants throughout history: detailed 24/7 information on everything, about everyone.

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