

Disturbing Trend - School Districts Spying on Students

January 16, 2012 - Six years ago we told you about a school district in Northern California that had started tracking student movements by using RFID chips. The outcry from parents in that case was so loud that the school district was forced to abandon the practice. Now, some school districts are attempting to revise this type of student monitoring, but with a frightening twist. They are doing it under the guise of fighting obesity. But of course, they have not been talking to parents about the practice. It is an intrusive policy that could have long term impact on the students subjected to it, including limiting their ability to get medical insurance.

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})();
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The New York Post broke this particular story. They report that Bay Shore Schools on Long Island have ordered monitoring equipment that is to be used by students. The equipment monitors heart rate, activity levels, sleep patterns, detects motion and monitors where the students go. The data collected by the equipment is uploaded to the internet and made available to both the students and to educators.

The school district isn't talking about whether or not the stored data is encrypted or who specifically will have access to it. That alone is quite troubling.

The school's though process seems to be that if they find that a specific student stops every afternoon at Dunkin Donuts, they can intervene. But that same data could be used by a pedophile to target an individual student. If the data isn't protected, the chances of that happening increase exponentially.

There is really no telling who will eventually be able to gain access to the stored data. It is reasonable to believe that if

the school district does this for any length of time, insurance companies would eventually want access to it. This means that if the school data shows that certain students would be prone to long term health problems, they could find it impossible to gain access to medical insurance.

Marketers could also find the data useful. If patterns can be developed that show specific areas of interest for children after school, marketers could design advertising campaigns targeting those children.

One thing is very clear however. Local, state and the federal government agencies have all performed abysmally when it comes to protecting computerized, personally identifiable data. Some of the largest data breaches in the country have been caused by government agencies. This trend should worry everyone; and especially parents.

If you have a child in school, you should ask that child if he are she is being asked to wear any monitoring equipment; either at school or at home. If the answer is "yes", then you need to intervene with your school. School districts in South Orange, NJ and St. Louis, MO are also known to be using this type of tracking, and there may be others.

byJim Malmberg

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