PS for 8/I7/89 PRIVACY-INVADING SURVEY STIRS UP STORM IN CHAPEL HILL

Here we go again with another impertinent, obnoxious, privacy-invading questionnaire, devised by so-called education "experts" in a state university and administered to a captive audience in the public school classroom by personnel who apparently think they can experiment on children like guinea pigs. It contains more than 200 questions about feelings, health, sex, friends, and family.

This most recent survey to come to light was given in May to about 500 pupils in the Carrboro and Estes elementary schools in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. The original plan was to give it to all pupils in grades 4 through 8, but a storm of controversy caused it to be cancelled before it was given in the middle school.

Public school pupils were asked to respond to such downers as "I am sure that terrible things will happen to me," "I want to kill myself," "I am sad all the time," "Nothing is fun at all," "I feel like crying every day," "I hate myself," "I look ugly," "I do not have any friends," and "Nobody really loves me."

Another section asked the children to reveal "Do you have a boyfriend of girlfriend now?" and "Do you have a best friend now?" and to write his or her names. Then the child was asked 47 questions about the child's relationship with the named friends, including whether he/she hits the other, says mean things, is dependable, or shares secrets.

In another section, the pupils were given a list of all their classmates and required to check the three "you like the most" and the three "you like least." Then the child was told to check those who do "weird or strange things" and those who "think they are better than other kids." The students had to identify "all the kids you hang out with in school."

In the next section, the child had to answer 22 questions on how his parents react to good or bad grades on his report card. This was followed by another 22 questions on the parents' behavior toward the child when he is especially good or especially bad.

The survey listed 36 events and each pupil was told to check the "things that happened to me in the past year." These statements included, "I became pregnant or go someone pregnant," "A member of the family attempted suicide," "My parents divorced," "One of my parents remarried," and "A parent was arrested and went to jail."

Fourteen questions probed into the child's health, including "Have your breasts started to develop yet?", "Do you have body hair yet?", "Have you begun to menstruate?", and "How easy or hard would it be for you to get each of these things: Cigarettes, Pot (Marijuana), Beer or Wine, Hard Liquor, Other Drugs to Get High?".

A dozen questions inquired into private family matters that are none of the school's business such as "Who lives in your house?" and "How much do you think your parents like their work?". Other questions probed into the pupil's opinions such as "What would you like to change about your house?" and "What would you like to change about your neighborhood?".

The pupils were told they did not have to answer the survey, but they were also told that “we hope you’ll try and answer all the questions you can.” So, what would you do if you were an unsuspecting, obedient nine or ten-year-old? Of course, you’d do what the teach indicated she wanted you to do.

Here’s another strange part of the questionnaire. The pupils were instructed, “It is very important that you not talk to other kids about the questions while we’re in here or afterwards.”

The pupils were told that their answers would all be put on computer with ID numbers instead of their names. “After the information is in the computer, all these sheets of paper will be destroyed.” That sounds like a dishonest attempt to mislead children into believing that no one would have access to their answers.

This survey was designed by Dr. Janice Kupersmidt, an assistant professor at the University of North Carolina. It was administered by a team of researchers from the University after excluding regular teachers from the classroom.

Parents were notified in advance that the survey would be given, but of course they were not told what very personal information the survey would ask. The survey was administered to all children unless their parents sent written notice to the school requesting otherwise.

When the controversy erupted, the schools at first refused to release a copy of the survey. After **The Chapel Hill Newspaper** hired a lawyer who wrote an opinion stating that the survey is a matter of public record, the schools released it and the newspaper printed it in full. God bless our freedom of the press.