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WHY PUPIL PRIVACY NEEDS TO BE PROTECTED

A good example of why public school children and their parents need strong statutes and regulations to protect themselves against the invasion of their privacy is shown by a recent controversy in the Seattle area. Pupils in the Greenwood (WA) Elementary School were given an amazing questionnaire.

Here is a sampling of the intimate questions given to primary school children which raised the ire of their parents: "Can you get your mommy or daddy to do what you want to do, instead of what they want to do?"

"Does whether or not mommy or daddy like you depend on how you act?" "Should your mommy or daddy decide what you should do?"

It's no wonder the parents were upset, and many of the teachers who gave the survey were upset, too. The executive director of the Seattle Teachers Union said that his union thinks the questions were "completely inappropriate" and put the teachers "in a very difficult position."

Various versions of this survey were given to all first- through eleventh-grade pupils. The school did not notify the parents ahead of time or give them the chance to refuse consent for this type of testing; the children were just treated like guinea pigs in a laboratory and ordered to answer the questions.

The questionnaire came to light when one second grader brought a copy home to her mother. Most of the children didn't do that and, obviously, the "social engineers" who designed this impertinent study of parent-child relationships hadn't counted on that.

These probing questions were not created by some curious teacher in an isolated public school; they are national monstrosities that could be in any school in the country and for which the teacher is just as much a pawn as the pupil. The survey for the first three grades is the Nowiki-Strickland Internal-External Control Scale. The survey for the 4th through eleventh grades is called Survey of Academic Responsibility (SOAR) and was developed by David Ryckman, a psychology professor at the University of Washington.

In the storm that erupted after the questionnaire was discovered, Superintendent Robert Nelson assured the parents that a letter would be sent to all parents of primary school children explaining the survey purposes and giving parents a chance to withdraw their child's tests by telephoning the district office. He also assured them that student-identification numbers would be removed from the tests.

The superintendent says that the next time a similar survey comes around, he will let parents know in advance. However, most parents don't think all this is good enough; the test results should be destroyed and clear regulations should be posted so that everyone clearly understands the procedures and the penalties for violating them.

The Protection of Pupil Rights Act (sometimes known as the Hatch Amendment), which was passed in 1978, was supposed to prohibit exactly the sort of thing that happened in Greenwood School. The reason why it didn't is that it was only on February 22 of this year that the Department of Education got around to announcing in the Federal Register that it is thinking about issuing regulations to enforce the statute.

The seven days of hearings in March on these proposed regulations provided a mountain of evidence for the urgent need for these regulations. But the Department of Education is still playing games with this statute and is trying to exclude from its effect the National Institute of Education and the National Center for Education Statistics, which are the fountainhead of most of the federal programs to which parents object.

The National Education Association opposes all Hatch Amendment regulations because (according to the April 16 NEA Newsletter) they "would mandate that <u>all</u> instructional material — including teachers' manuals, films, and tapes — must be made available for parental inspection." The NEA "alert" to its members can best be described as an organizational tantrum.

Why shouldn't all teaching materials be available for parental inspection? Who do the NEA members think they are that they can deny parents the opportunity to inspect the materials being used on their children?

It's no wonder that President Reagan has received some 1,800 letters in support of immediate, strong regulations to enforce the Protection of Pupil Rights Act. Such regulations should be issued immediately so they can be printed and on display in every public school before schools open in late August.