Look who's Data-Mining Your Toddlers

By Michelle Malkin
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Attention, parents: Have your little ones been subjected to "TS Gold" in school yet? If you care about student privacy, data mining and classroom intrusions, you might want to start asking questions and protecting your children now before it's too late.

What's happening here in Colorado with this onerous testing regime is happening everywhere. Informed families and teachers from all parts of the political spectrum agree: It's a Big Government/Big Business "gold" rush you don't want to join.

"TS Gold" stands for Teaching Strategies Gold. This "school readiness assessment system" was mandated in our state several years ago. It has already permeated private day-care centers and preschools; pilot testing in publicly funded preschools and kindergartens is currently taking place. More than 42,000 kids in Colorado alone have been subjected to the assessments.

Most parents have no idea the scheme is on track for full implementation by the 2015-2016 school year. The company already plans to expand assessments to cover children from birth through third grade. Competitors include California's "Desired Results Developmental Profile" system and the "HighScope Child Observation Record."

TS Gold's creators describe the testing vehicle as "an early childhood assessment system" that purportedly measures the "whole child." What that means is that the tests are not only for "literacy, mathematics, science and technology, social studies and the arts," but also for "developmental domains including social emotional, physical, language and cognitive development."

Aligned to the federal Common Core standards, which were designed and copyrighted by a small cadre of Beltway educrats, TS Gold received $30 million in federal Race to the Top subsidies in 2012. The assessors have 38 "objectives" arranged under nine topics of academic learning, psychomotor data and social-emotional development. Students are rated and recorded on their ability to do things like "respond to emotional cues," "interact cooperatively" and "cooperate and share ideas and materials in socially acceptable ways."

TS Gold directs teachers to document student behaviors with videos, audio files, journals and photos — which are then uploaded to a central database cloud. Already overwhelmed by myriad testing burdens, teachers must undergo intensive training that takes scarce time away from actual instruction. Educators must gather disturbingly intimate and personal data every school day, collate and upload it, and then file lengthy "checkpoint ratings" on each child every 10 to 12 weeks.

Creeped out yet? This is just the tip of the data-mining iceberg. Last spring, parent Lauren Coker discovered that TS Gold assessors in her son's Aurora, Colo., public preschool had recorded information about his trips to the bathroom, his hand-washing habits and his ability to pull up his pants.

"When I asked if we could opt out of the system," Coker told me, school officials told her no. She pulled her son out of the school and still doesn't know whether or how the data can be removed.

Sunny Flynn, a mom with kids in Jefferson County, Colo., started raising pointed questions to her school officials about TS Gold last year. "Where exactly is this powerful, predictive and personal data on our children being stored?" she asked. "What security measures are being used to protect …