



## Could my Child be a Victim of Identity Theft?

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Recent articles in the Venice Gondolier and the Sarasota Herald Tribune have brought to light an ongoing security breach of school children's records in Sarasota County. The Princeton Review, an educational testing company, had a flaw on its website that exposed the personal data of Sarasota County and Fairfax County, VA school children. There was one file that reportedly contained information about 34,000 Sarasota students and another contained names and birth dates of 74,000 students. Not only were names and birth dates exposed, other confidential information including students' sex, ethnicity, disabilities, and standardized test scores were readily available.

Names and birth dates are considered Personally Identifiable Information or PII. Personally Identifiable Information plays a vital role in our communities. Government offices use PII to identify citizens for collecting tax and to issue identification such as a passport or driver's license. Financial institutions use PII to open savings accounts, credit cards, and student loans. Schools use PII for student attendance, grades, as well as reporting high school accomplishments to potential colleges.

Our school children's personal and confidential information was widely available on the Internet for two months before the security flaw was fixed last Monday. Two months on the Internet can be an eternity when highly personal information is easily copied

and sold to mass marketers; criminals specializing in identify theft, and worse yet, criminals who exploit children. This is a very serious issue that can have long term impacts on our school children and their families.

Parents need to be aware of what types of information are being gathered about their children, who is gathering the data, and how the information will be used.

### **Top Ten Questions that Sarasota County parents should be asking;**

1. What information about my children does Sarasota County School District collect?
2. Who else has Sarasota County given our school children's personal information to? Parents did you know that Princeton Review had a copy of your child's information?
3. What other organizations collect information about my children? Do youth sports teams, church youth groups, day care or after school programs collect information?
4. Why are these organizations collecting this information?
5. Does the organization really need confidential information to fulfill its mission?
6. Can parents opt out of providing confidential information?
7. How do these organizations protect information about children? Is the data stored securely? It is encrypted?

## Securing our Digital Future

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8. Where is the data stored? How long is it stored for?

9. Who can read that information about my child? Is the coach or the pastor the only one who will access to that information, or can any person read that information?

10. Can I as a parent have a copy of the information that you have collected on my children?

Personally Identifiable Information is basically our electronic DNA. We need to protect our identities in a ever increasing electronic world.

We expect our children to become good citizen and adults by participating in local communities, by obtaining a driver's license, and eventually holding a job and paying taxes. All of these milestones to becoming an adult require our children to prove that they are who they say they are. We need to protect our children's electronic DNA, especially birth dates and Social Security numbers now or they may have even more challenges ahead of them than the FCAT exam.

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