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Elementary school nixes electronic IDs

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An elementary school in the rural town of Sutter, Calif., has pulled the plug on a new student surveillance system after the technology came under fire by parents and privacy groups.

Brittan Elementary School [<http://www.brittan.k12.ca.us>], located about 40 miles north of state capital Sacramento, is shutting off the high-tech student-tracking system because the company supplying it backed out of the deal, the school said Tuesday.

"It treats children like livestock or shipment pallets, thereby breaching their right to dignity and privacy they have as human beings."

--Cedric Laurant

Electronic Privacy Information Center

The company, called **InCom** [<http://www.incomcorporation.com>], put a kibosh on the project after some parents and a representative of the American Civil Liberties Union aired complaints at a school board meeting last week. Their protests became the subject of numerous media reports.

Parents and privacy advocates were concerned that student badges containing tiny radio devices would infringe on kids' privacy--and that the radio waves could pose a health risk.

"Monitoring children with radio frequency identification (RFID) tags is a very bad idea," **Cedric Laurant** [<http://www.epic.org/epic/staff/laurant>], policy counsel at the Electronic Privacy Information Center, said in a statement.

"It treats children like livestock or shipment pallets," he said, "thereby breaching their right to dignity and privacy they have as human beings. Any small gain in administrative efficiency and security is not worth the money spent and the privacy and dignity lost."

A profit-sharing agreement between the school and InCom, also located in Sutter, further fueled the anxieties of parents and privacy groups. InCom charged the school nothing for its services and equipment. In fact, the school was set to gain a share of the company's revenue from sales to other schools. In addition, one of InCom's founders is a contract network administrator for the school.

InCom representatives did not immediately return calls for comment. The company is pitching its wares this week at the **American Association of School Administrators Conference** [<http://www.aasa.org/nce>] in San Antonio, Texas.

All 160 Brittan Elementary students who were issued badges returned them on Wednesday. Principal Earnie Graham said he regrets the demise of the program. "It's a tremendous loss," Graham said. "We had the opportunity to be on the cutting edge."

The school introduced the badges to seventh- and eighth-graders about a month ago as part of a "wireless attendance program." Students wore the badges around their necks and scanned them upon entering class. The school hoped the technology would reduce attendance tracking errors and be a timesaver for teachers and administrators.

The system could also record students' location and monitor their arrival and departures for "enhanced security," according to InCom's Web site.

The student badges employ **the same technology** [http://www.cnet.com/With-RFID%2C-corporate-might-makes-right/2100-1012_3-5385128.html] used in building access badges that companies commonly issue to employees for security purposes.

Drivers who sign up for quick-pay toll programs use similar devices to quickly cruise by toll booths. RFID technology has recently found its way into chain stores, passports, casinos and libraries.



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