



School-Based Marketing Threats to Children's Well-Being Intensify

As data privacy issues multiply

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BOULDER, CO (September 9, 2015) – Corporate sponsorship in schools is now commonplace. Corporate ads blanket schools from hallways and classrooms to sports fields. Corporate sponsorships and “partnerships” with schools promote the belief that schools and corporations share a common purpose.

In *[Sold Out: How Marketing in School Threatens Children's Well-Being and Undermines their Education](#)*, Alex Molnar and Faith Boninger of the National Education Policy Center (NEPC) take a hard look at corporate marketing activities in today's schools. Examining the reality obscured by the rosy language of “school-business partnership,” “win-win situation,” “giving back to the community,” and the like, they find example after example of the exploitation of children for financial gain.

Molnar and Boninger point out that the goal of corporate advertising is to “brand” students and thereby to ensure that those children will be customers for life. Molnar noted, “Teaching children that consumption is the primary means for achieving happiness, success and fulfillment, while central to ensuring corporate profits, is harmful to children's emotional, intellectual, and physical well-being.”

“Money is tight,” said Boninger, “and schools are stretched to the limit. So everyone is looking for money. School-based corporate marketing, however, provides little if any revenue while at the same time taking time and attention away from the academic program.”

Marketing activities have only intensified as students are increasingly encouraged or required to use various forms of education technology and digital applications. *Sold Out* explores the nature of threats to children posed by digital access to them, and points to the weaknesses of national and state policy designed to protect student privacy.

According to Molnar and Boninger, the “bottom line” for policymakers is that schools should be declared ad-free zones that are off limits to advertisers.

Molnar and Boninger's work on school commercialism includes three books, annual reports on trends in school-



house commercialism, and policy briefs and studies spanning twenty-five years. Molnar is a Research Professor at the University of Colorado Boulder, where he serves as Publications Director of the NEPC and Director of the Commercialism in Education Research Unit (CERU). Boninger is a Research Associate at NEPC and CERU.

CERU is the only national academic research unit dedicated to publishing research and analyses on topics related to school commercialism. CERU is guided by the belief that mixing commercial activities with public education raises fundamental issues of public policy, curriculum content, the proper relationship of educators to the students entrusted to them, and the values that the schools embody.

The mission of the **National Education Policy Center** is to produce and disseminate high-quality, peer-reviewed research to inform education policy discussions. We are guided by the belief that the democratic governance of public education is strengthened when policies are based on sound evidence. For more information on NEPC, please visit <http://nepc.colorado.edu/>