

Student data lost on stolen laptop

Local mom says board was 'cowardly' for leaving parents with nowhere to voice their concerns

A laptop containing thousands of Halton students' names, numbers and birthdates— even their standardized test scores— was recently stolen, prompting the board to warn all parents of a possible privacy breach.

"While we don't believe data contained on the laptop to be damaging or harmful to student safety, we wanted to alert you of the issue," education director David Euale said in an email sent recently, adding the laptop was stolen from an employee between Jan. 23 and 27.

"The electronic files that may have been compromised due to the theft of the laptop contained student names, student Ontario Education Numbers, birthdates, and data relating to the EQAO testing results for schools within Halton."

The Halton District School Board has about 54,400 students. The laptop contains information on all students who have written a provincial EQAO test over the past five years,

meaning anyone from grades 4 to 12.

Associate director Jeff Blackwell said the computer was password-protected and police believe this "was a crime of opportunity" rather than someone deliberately seeking personal information, as other electronics were also taken.

While most data was encrypted, Blackwell said the board could not confirm if the EQAO testing data was.

The laptop was stolen away from board property.

Georgetown mother Gwen Miron was upset the board sent the email from a "no reply" address, leaving parents with nowhere to direct their questions or concerns.

"They way they did it was cowardly," she said, adding that parents are always telling their children to be careful about sharing personal information "in real life or over the Internet . . . then to have the school board turn around and do exactly that, it really ticked me off— how irresponsible."

Miron also wondered why employees are allowed to download such information on a laptop and take it home, rather than keeping it secure on a board server.

—Torstar News Service

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