Chances are you've come across a link to an online "educational" website in the school's newsletter or a note from the teacher recommending a particular website for further study for your child. You may even have been "billed" on the invoice at the start of the school year for access to such private online business. This is a classic case of unregulated private businesses infiltrating into the public education system.

Examples are trendy programmes and online services often in the areas of literacy and numeracy that masquerade as pedagogically sound but are in fact commercially driven or motivated. These programmes often have an extensive marketing force (and budget) behind them, have a cool interface with bells and whistles or integrate a digital summary report of online activities and chances are they have a country-specific web address for the same content e.g. .co.nz, .com, .br, .co.uk, etc.[1)]So to give the illusion that they are a local business As a marketing ploy they also often claim that using their services makes the teacher's job easier. Some seem to be free[2)]Nothing is free! Unless they are a legitimate non-profit organization, the email address you provide and the statistics they gather from your online activity is a sought after commodity in the online world for a limited access and charge fees for expanded access, some feed users various advertising and some simply charge per student or per school on a regular basis.

While most of these businesses at first glance appear to have a novel idea and seem to engage children with their built-in games or reward system, in reality they often provide minimal or no value to students and teachers while costing schools and parents dearly. With millions of paid subscribers [3)]in many cases schools pass on the fees to parents and staggering revenues [4)]Do your own calculation: Assuming the questionable online business has a global reach and just for our demonstration purposes has infiltrated 10% of all public schools at primary and secondary level (in US alone there are 50.4 million students – Source: National Center for Education Statistics nces.ed.gov) and charges $20 per student per year. What is the annual income just from the US?, the level of services they provide are either mediocre or unacceptable. Why do we even bother with them?

As parents we clearly have a choice to boycott these types of practices and at the school level we must be extremely careful not to fall

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victim to trends of any kind much less to cave in to commercial interests.

On the other hand Principals and School Boards, as trusted guardians, have the heightened responsibility in making sure that educational practices within their school retain integrity in face of external influences. Fortunately the Education Act gives school boards wide powers and rights and discretion to control the management of schools. By exercising these rights and powers School Boards can, and have the responsibility to make the necessary assessment via feedback from parents and teachers and decide whether to include or exclude these types of commercial online businesses.

References & Footnotes [+]

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