

The EducationS Review, a fictional company, is hit with a data breach that is making headlines. The Olianas-based educational service and test preparation provider inadvertently exposed files of at least 100,000 students in various parts of the country through its Web site. News of the breach was made public on Tuesday morning by a report in the local newspaper.

The files were exposed after the company switched the Internet service providers earlier this year. The sensitive information, which included personal data such as names, birth dates, ethnicities, and learning disabilities, as well as test performance, were easily accessed through a simple Web search and were available for at least seven weeks, according to the report. None of the information was password protected and was intended only to be viewed by EducationS authors.

EducationS officials told the local newspaper that access to the information was immediately shut down as soon as the company was informed about the problem. "This brings up two big questions," said Alex Graham, a senior technology consultant with information technology (IT) security and control firm Lizos. "Are companies doing enough to protect their data? Also, do companies really need to keep all this kind of data?" A competing test preparation firm discovered the flaw. The competitor contacted the local newspaper with the story, according to Alex, who said the play-out points to the high stakes were now involved with a data breach. If companies have not heard this before, it is a huge reminder that security is important not just for the company's customers, but for the company's reputation as well.

While the publishing of birth dates may not seem like a massive leak, Alex said the information is a good stepping-stone for someone who is attempting to steal an identity. This is the second time in a month a public breach has involved birth dates. A glitch in a test version of social networking site, Facebook, inadvertently exposed the birthdays of its 80 million members last month. Alex discovered the bug while checking Facebook's new design. He noticed that the birth dates of some of his privacy-obsessed acquaintances were popping up when they should have been hidden. The fact that the people affected by this latest breach were children adds to the general background radiation about security, or lack thereof, of peoples' data on the Web.