

## Research Brief

### Cheating

**Question:** How widespread is academic dishonesty in high schools? How can cheating be curtailed?

#### Summary of Findings:

##### A Widespread Problem

“According to the Josephson Institute’s 2006 Report Card on the Ethics of American Youth, today’s young people reveal deeply entrenched habits of dishonesty. The report, released as part of National CHARACTER COUNTS! Week (October 15-21) reveals high rates of cheating, lying and theft. More than one in four (28%) of the 36,122 high school students surveyed admitted *stealing from a store within the past year* (32% males, 23% females). Twenty-three percent said they *stole something from a parent or other relative*; 81% confessed they *lied to a parent about something significant* and 39% said they *lied to save money* (47% males, 31% females).

Cheating in school continues to be rampant. A substantial majority (60%) **cheated on a test** during the past year (35% did so two or more times) and one in three (33%) said they used the Internet to plagiarize an assignment.” ([http://www.josephsoninstitute.org/pdf/ReportCard\\_press-release\\_2006-1015.pdf](http://www.josephsoninstitute.org/pdf/ReportCard_press-release_2006-1015.pdf))

As grim as these statistics appear to be, they are actually an improvement over earlier studies. According to Josephson Institute research, in the decade from 1992 to 2002 the number of high school students who admitted that they cheated on an exam increased significantly from 61% to 74%. In 2000, 71% admitted to cheating. (*The Ethics of American Youth*, <http://www.josephsoninstitute.org/Survey2002/survey2002-pressrelease.htm>.) A

In other research, The results of the 29<sup>th</sup> (1998) *Who's Who Among American High School Students Poll* of 3,123 high-achieving 16- to 18-year olds (students with A or B averages who plan to attend college) showed

- 80% of the country's best students cheated to get to the top of their class.
- More than half the students surveyed said that they don't think cheating is a big deal.
- 95% of cheaters say they were not caught.
- 40% cheated on a quiz or a test
- 67% copied someone else's homework

##### ETS Research

Three studies commissioned by Educational Testing Service articulate the motivations, reasons and beliefs of students who cheat on academic tasks.

- The general perception is that cheating is widespread. Students believe that cheating is more prevalent and accepted today. They see it in every facet of life: politics, business, home, and school.
- The perception is also that cheating is changing. Cheating on tests given in school is widespread.
- Collaborative academic (team) environments like the Internet are making the definition of cheating even murkier.
- 56% of educators and 31% of the public, students and parents say that they hear about cheating incidents. However, only 35% of educators and 41% of the public, students, and parents agree that there is a problem with cheating on tests.
- 73% of all test takers, including prospective graduate students and teachers agree that most students do cheat at some point; 86% of high school students agreed.
- Many who have engaged in cheating cite the following as rationales: It's a victimless crime; It's o.k. to many if you don't get caught; it has it's own language (using shortcuts, whatever it takes, everybody does it, part of life); it makes up for unfair tests or lack of opportunity.
- High school students are less likely than younger test takers to report cheaters, because it would be "tattling" or "ratting out a friend."
- Fewer college officials (35%) believe cheating is a problem in this country than do members of the public (41%).

This excellent set of research studies clearly documents several major conclusions of major importance to school leaders and faculty. According to ETS, "Our research clearly demonstrates the influence of pressure on the incidence of cheating. We know that cheating behaviors are well-established by high school; the stakes of a test may influence the probability of cheating; and parents and educators may unintentionally aggravate the problem with pressure for results over learning. " Academic Cheating Background, Educational Testing Service/Ad Council, <http://www.glass-castle.com/clients/www-nocheating-org/adCouncil/research/cheatingbackgrounder.html>.)

### Curbing Academic Cheating

There are hundreds of specific practices that can be used to detect and punish cheating, including websites where teachers can upload student papers to check for pirated text. However, most educators agree that the best way to deal with cheating is to prevent it if at all possible. Some of these preventive practices include:

1. Give original and unique assignments that cannot be plagiarized or snagged off of a website...or borrowed from a student doing exactly the same work. The extent to which assignments can be individualized helps to curtail inappropriate sharing of student work.
2. Discuss academic ethics early and often, and make clear what the penalties for cheating will be. As a faculty, agree on the penalties and the process that will be used to implement them. Involve parents in the discussion at the outset of the policy formation; no one wants to see their child disadvantaged by the dishonest behavior of another student.
3. Reinforce quality performance by showcasing student work and conducting conferences with students about their assignments so that teachers can ascertain how familiar a student is with the concepts presented in the assignment or on the test.

4. Require that students show all work, including initial references, notes, drafts and subsequent revisions. Make sure that they understand that a “completed” assignment contains all of these elements of the task; credit will not be given for a final product only.
5. Use essays that test students thinking and communication as well as their mastery of information. If students suffer from very poor writing skills, allow them to dictate their work if it is being assessed primarily for content mastery.

Beyond the ideas listed above, there are other excellent sources that help school leaders explore issues of academic dishonesty and develop a plan for curtailing cheating and building strong ethical cultures in their schools. Among the best are the following.

### Online Resources:

Cheating is a Personal Foul

<http://www.glass-castle.com/clients/www-nocheating-org/adCouncil/research/cheatingbackgrounder.html>

This synopsis of research from ETS and the Ad Council Campaign to Discourage Academic Cheating outlines the major findings about the extent of cheating in high school and student attitudes toward the practice. This succinct article is a great discussion starter for students, parents or faculty about this persistent problem in high schools.

Josephson Institute

<http://www.josephsoninstitute.org/>

The mission of the Josephson Institute is “to improve the ethical quality of society by changing personal and organizational decision making and behavior.” They produce high quality research, training materials and policy documents to support school leaders.

Character Counts

<http://www.charactercounts.org/>

The most widely implemented approach to character education — embraced by thousands of schools, communities, public agencies and nonprofits — Character Counts promotes the [Six Pillars of Character](#): trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, citizenship. The national office develops and supports local activists with training programs, special projects, materials and consulting.

Academic Dishonesty: Putting a Stop to Cheating in Your School.

<http://www.isminc.com/pdfs/cheating.pdf>

This excellent resource from Independent School Management gives concrete guidance on how to discourage cheating in schools and help to build an ethical academic culture, especially in competitive environments.

Cheating’s Never Been Easier

<http://www.wired.com/culture/education/news/2001/09/45803>

This article by Kendra Mayfield from *Wired* magazine examines how the Internet and other technologies contribute to student cheating.

Justice or Just Us? What To Do About Cheating

<http://www.carnegiefoundation.org/perspectives/sub.asp?key=245&subkey=577>

<http://www.educationpartnerships.org/>

This article by Jason Stephens from the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching identifies some of nuances of reasoning students use when they cheat and offers suggestions to curb cheating.

#### Tips for Handling Technology Enhanced Cheating

<http://tlt.suny.edu/originaldocumentation/library/cm/cheat.htm>

From the State University of New York, this resource shows how to curtail technology-based academic cheating. It is also an excellent gateway to other stop-cheating sites on the Internet.

#### School Cheating Scandal Tests a Town's Values

<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?sec=technology&res=9F06E1DE143FF937A25751C0A9649C8B63>

This is a new account of how one town responded to a large-scale cheating incident among students at their high school.

#### High Tech Cheaters Keep Educators on Their Toes

<http://www.eschoolnews.com/news/showstory.cfm?ArticleID=1327>

This excellent article from eSchool News shows how students use computer technology to cheat in an astonishing and inventive variety of ways. It is a great resource for school leaders attempting to end cyber-cheating.

#### Cheating Goes High Tech with Commonplace Tools

[http://www.usatoday.com/tech/columnist/andrewkantor/2004-05-21-kantor\\_x.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/tech/columnist/andrewkantor/2004-05-21-kantor_x.htm)

Andrew Kantor's Cyber Speak column from USA Today shows how students use ubiquitous, commonly available devices to get unauthorized assistance and information from one another and the Internet.

#### What We Can Do to Curb Academic Cheating

[http://www.educationworld.com/a\\_admin/admin/admin375.shtml/](http://www.educationworld.com/a_admin/admin/admin375.shtml/)

A great article from *Education World* that provides helpful tips to administrators who want to begin an 'anti-cheating' discussion in their school.

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