

[Lesson Planning](#)[Professional Development](#)[Administrator's Desk](#)[Technology Integration](#)[Advanced Search](#) | [Browse Topics](#)
 
 EdWorld  Internet Topics


**Unlimited 1-on-1 LIVE Tutoring**  
 Personal Programs that suit your needs for most Subjects & Grade Levels  
**100% Money-Back Guarantee**

[Home](#) > [School Issues Center](#) > [Archives](#) > [Improvement/ Safety](#) > **School Issues Article**

## SCHOOL ISSUES ARTICLE

### What Can We Do to Curb Student Cheating?

***A 1998 national survey found that four out of five top students admitted cheating at some point. In another nationwide study, nine out of ten high school teachers acknowledged cheating is a problem in their school. Is cheating a problem in your school? Has the Internet added some new dimensions to the problem? This week, Education World explores the problem of cheating. Included: Ways in which teachers combat cheating!***

The science students were working diligently on a tough test about the human circulatory system. As they worked, the teacher grew suspicious of one student who repeatedly examined her hands. Sure enough, when the teacher checked the student's hands, he found a diagram of the heart inked on one palm and test answers written on the other. The teacher confiscated the girl's test paper and wrote "0" on it. After the other students had handed in their tests, he took the girl to the office and photocopied her palms as evidence. The student claimed she had written the information on her palms just to study for the test and then forgot to wash it off. Later, the teacher called her parents to tell them what had happened. "My daughter only wrote the answers on her hands to study for the test," the father responded, "and, anyway, I think you're making too big a deal out of this." The teacher is left feeling frustrated and angry that the student will probably learn very little from the experience.

The situation described by a teacher in the above scenario is not unusual, nor is the reaction of the parents. That teacher told Education World that when he catches students cheating and brings it to their parents' attention, about two out of three parents support him. The others, he said, "either refuse to believe their child cheated or minimize the incident, saying their child didn't mean to

cheat."

Cheating concerns teachers, but few want to speak for publication about specific incidents of dishonesty. "I don't want my name appearing in an article," one teacher explained. "It wouldn't look good for me or my school."

Many trend watchers think cheating is epidemic, usually beginning in middle school and extending through college. A 1998 national report by [Who's Who Among American High School Students](#) showed four of five top students admitted cheating at some point. In another nationwide study, nine out of ten high school teachers surveyed by the American School Board Journal (ASBJ) and the Education Writers Association acknowledged that cheating is a problem in their school.

According to a *Los Angeles Times* survey of 600 adults in Orange County, California -- a poll that touched on a number of moral and ethical issues -- people held conflicting views of what constitutes cheating. "Nearly two-thirds of those surveyed said it is acceptable for parents to help a child with a class project that is supposed to be done by the child alone," the *Los Angeles Times* reported. "Younger respondents were especially tolerant. Among adults 18 to 34 years old, 70 percent found such assistance acceptable, compared with 57 percent among people older than 35.

"Yet overall," the article continued, "four of five drew the line at students' obtaining test questions or copying another student's work."

## **THE INTERNET: A NEW TWIST ON OLD-FASHIONED CHEATING**

Many students who cheat do it the old-fashioned way: by copying from an encyclopedia or reference book, "borrowing" a term paper or homework from a friend, or obtaining test answers from a student who has already taken the exam. The proliferation of sophisticated electronic technology, however, has added a new dimension to cheating. Internet sites such as [School Sucks](#) and [The Evil House of Cheat](#) brazenly hawk essays to students. (Some Internet term-paper mills charge fees; others offer their product free and make money from advertising.)

Some of the sites run disclaimers, like the one from School Sucks, which says, "School Sucks is 100 percent against plagiarism." Simultaneously, School Sucks offers "custom essays," "prewritten essays," and "book reports." But Kenny Sahr, who founded the Web site three and a half years ago, says it is "a stupid place to plagiarize from. Students can't be sure it's accurate, and we don't grade the papers for quality." The site is better used, Sahr told Education World, as a place for students to "read different papers to get an idea of how they can research a paper themselves."

Sahr says teachers are partly to blame for student cheating. "What worries me is that educators are worried about School Sucks. A teacher who's giving original and creative assignments, who's reading the students' writing and knows what it's like, has nothing to fear from School Sucks."

There is hope for instructors who despair at the number of Web sites they would have to survey to nab a student who has plagiarized a term paper or an essay or "cut and pasted" different sections from various works to create one term paper. John Barrie, a doctoral candidate at the University of California at

Berkeley, invented [Plagiarism.org](http://Plagiarism.org) to help teachers quickly detect intellectual theft.

Plagiarism.org works simply: A teacher uploads a term paper to the site, and the paper is digitally "finger-printed." Then the paper is checked against a database of texts of other works on the Internet. Dubious sections, paragraphs, and sentences are cited for lack of originality. Other anti-cheating sites, such as [IntegriGuard](http://IntegriGuard) and [The Essay Verification Engine \(EVE\)](http://The Essay Verification Engine (EVE)), check the text of a submitted paper against the text of the papers in their databases. According to its Web site, IntegriGuard "compares passages of the text against all writings that have ever been submitted to it," and then "creates a report from the submission containing the passages it checked along with the surrounding context, and e-mails the results of the test to the instructor." EVE "accepts essays in plain text format and returns links to Web pages from which a student may have plagiarized," says the EVE site.

Plagiarism.org has been negotiating with colleges and universities for contracts to check every term paper submitted in, for example, the spring of a given year.

## BATTLING INTERNET RIP-OFFS

Cheating in school may be epidemic, but also widespread and intense are teachers' efforts to stop cheating. Teachers' anti-cheating strategies range from talking with students about their mistakes to giving cheaters zeros to simply structuring assignments so cheating becomes extremely difficult.

Ted Nellen, an English teacher at Murry Bergtraum High School of Business Careers in New York City, takes the last approach. He believes the Internet is a wonderful but often misused source. So Nellen helps stifle the temptation to steal from the Internet by assigning students to research on the Net and then requiring "Webfolios" from each student.

A Webfolio includes all the research a student has gleaned from the Internet and the student's own work. Each student-created Webfolio goes on the student's Web site and is checked by other students -- whom Nellen refers to as "scholars" -- in a process of peer review that makes each student's work public. Nellen designed this process to help students grow as scholars, not primarily to discourage cheating. But the stages of creating a Webfolio help curb cheating and also make it easier to catch someone who does cheat.

In one instance, for example, Nellen said, "One student pointed out how a second student had taken a Web site and put it on the second student's Web page [without attribution]. I wasn't aware [of the cheating]. It took a scholar to point this out since that scholar was so much closer to it."

What are the consequences for copying from the Internet without attribution in Nellen's class? "[We] expose it, have the scholar fix it, and move on. No big deal," Nellen said. "We try to make this a learning experience and not punitive."

## HOW CAN YOU PREVENT CHEATING?

Teachers point out that their definition of cheating may differ greatly from a student's. Some students, for example, believe copying test answers or having another student write a paper for them is cheating but think letting

another student copy their homework is simply helping a friend.

"I try to prevent cheating in my classes from the very beginning of the school year by ... discussing personal integrity and then going over expectations and logical consequences for failure to abide by class policy concerning cheating," said LeRon Ware, who teaches science at South Sevier Middle School in Monroe, Utah.

"Defining cheating to students needs to be done with great care," Ware explained. "If an activity is a cooperative group effort, answers by group consensus might be encouraged. I try to inform my students beforehand what is expected -- group work or totally individual work."

"Require each stage of a research project to be completed on schedule and handed in," another teacher advised. For example, a list of references that will be cited for the project is due first, along with brief notes on each reference in the student's handwriting. Next, a handwritten outline is submitted. Then students hand in a rough draft, which the teacher edits for content and grammar. Last, the final project is due. Completed projects submitted without the preceding work are not accepted.

Many teachers recommend using the essay form whenever possible in tests and homework assignments. Make it clear to students that they are to write their essays without consulting other students, they say. Clearly, assignments in areas such as language arts and social studies lend themselves to the essay form more readily than do subjects such as math. But even in math, requiring students to explain how they figured out their answers makes it more difficult to cheat on a test.

## **CHEATERS ARE LIARS!**

Tell students caught cheating that they are liars. That's what teacher David Summergard recommended in "Calling It What It Is," an essay that appeared in *Education Week*. Students tend to shrug off cheating by saying, "It's no big deal -- everyone does it!" said Summergard.

"Connecting cheating with lying unmasks the 'sleight of mind' that allows students to think of cheating as a justifiable way to act," Summergard writes. "While not a perfect solution, the notion of 'cheating as lying' helps cast the moral argument more clearly. Students get it. Calling someone a liar may seem harsh, but that's precisely the point. For students to acknowledge that cheating is a problem, they must feel it as something which is truly wrong."

Among the other approaches to cheating that teachers have taken:

- Remove underlying factors that foster cheating in the first place. "Often cheating is an expression of other problems," LeRon Ware said. "For example, a student's reading level may not be high enough for comprehension of what is being asked [on a test]. When this is the situation, I make modifications, such as letting someone else read the test to them." Ware believes that encouraging students to ask questions or express their concerns if they don't understand material in class also cuts down on cheating.
- Give the student a zero for the assignment. The rationale for this consequence is that if students are motivated to cheat by an all-consuming desire for better grades, a zero on their work is, to them, the worst consequence of their deception.

- In addition to giving the student a zero, involve parents in the consequences. Some students will shrug off receiving a zero on an assignment but hate having their parents learn they have cheated. And although some parents refuse to believe their children have cheated or offer excuses, teachers find that many parents talk to their children about why cheating is morally wrong and follow through with added consequences at home.
- When a student is caught cheating on a test, throw the test away and have the student retake it at a time when at least one parent can come into the classroom to supervise. The teacher who advocates this method says it makes sense because the teaching of values is primarily the parents' responsibility.
- When high school seniors are caught cheating, give them a zero on their work, and tell them the school will withdraw college application references it has given or agreed to give if a second incidence of cheating occurs.

## ADS AGAINST CHEATING

Two groups joined forces to wage an all-out war on student cheating called "Cheating Is a Personal Foul." The Education Testing Service (ETS), the world's largest private testing and educational measurement organization, and the Advertising Council, a nonprofit organization of advertising professionals that does pro bono work, aimed that campaign at children 10 to 14 years old. The campaign featured television, radio, and print ads. The ads showed children tempted to cheat in everyday situations. A whistle blows, and out from a child's head pops an animated referee who says, "Cheating is a personal foul."

"With more than 50 years of experience in assessment ..., we felt ourselves to be the logical choice to spearhead a campaign against academic dishonesty - cheating that goes beyond standardized tests," said Kevin Gonzales of ETS. "In addition to raising awareness of the issue through [public service announcements], ETS also created a brochure filled with tips for parents and educators to help them discourage cheating." "The Time Has Come to Tackle Academic Cheating" contained tips on preventing and dealing with cheating.

Among the many tips offered in the brochure are these:

- **Focus on kids' sense of pride.** Encourage them to do work honestly so they can have the satisfaction of telling others, "I did that on my own."
- **Assure children that cheating is neither "normal" or acceptable.** Many kids believe that "everybody" cheats and that parents don't care if they cheat and/or don't want to know about it. Make it your business to disprove that fallacy.
- **Ask children to consider where the world would be today if everybody cheated.** How would they feel knowing that their doctor cheated on his or her medical exams or that one of their heroes (Sammy Sosa or Britney Spears, for example) cheated to get ahead?
- **Don't lose sight of the "education factor."** Young children love to learn, merely for learning's sake. Focus on fueling that interest and on encouraging strong efforts, rather than obsessing over grades and scores.

The ultimate goal of the campaign is to "persuade children not to cheat and to not accept cheating among their friends," said a news release from ETS. Ads are designed to convey "the message that doing what's right brings a feeling of pride and a sense of accomplishment."

## CAUTION TO TEACHERS

Parents and teachers interviewed for this article say that in teachers' zeal to expose and eliminate cheating, they must be careful to have proof and not just a suspicion of wrongdoing. "My daughter worked extra hard on a book report for school. She put a lot of effort into writing and rewriting," said one parent. "When her teacher read the report, he accused her of getting help from a parent. I knew the work was her own, and when I confronted the teacher, he backed down. But this experience left my daughter confused and frustrated. 'Why should I work hard?' she said to me. 'The teacher is only going to accuse me of cheating if I do my best.'"

Many teachers, like LeRon Ware, are sensitive to the possibility that students might be wrongfully accused. Ware says he invokes penalties only when he actually catches a student cheating, not when he thinks a student might have cheated.

In the end, no foolproof approach to preventing or exposing cheating exists. But teachers can structure assignments and classrooms to discourage cheating and ensure its negative consequences, always remaining careful to accuse only those students who have clearly done wrong.

### **ADDITIONAL 'CHEATING' RESOURCES ONLINE**

The following sites are among the many that students use to find instant term papers:

- [Cheater.com](#)
- [Cheat Factory](#)
- [Collegiate Care](#)
- [Thousands of Papers](#)
- [Research Assistance](#)
- [Research Papers Online A+](#)

Article by Sharon Cromwell  
Education World®  
Copyright © 2000 Education World

01/24/2000