



## Cheating Scandals in the Public Schools

One of the purposes of No Child Left Behind, the education reform program promoted by President George W. Bush and Senator Ted Kennedy of Massachusetts, was to set high standards for American public schools so that American students would excel in their studies. Testing was to be used as the means to see if the schools were meeting those new standards.



The theory was that if you set higher academic standards, the schools would have to revise their curricula and teach subject matter and academic skills that would help the students achieve academic success. But how was this to be done since the curricula had been deliberately devised to dumb-down the students? Were the professors of education and curriculum developers willing to give up their progressive goals to turn the students into little academically challenged socialists?

If the schools could not show academic improvement, they would lose federal funds. So the schools did what they considered to be the only way to meet the federal standards: cheat. Phyllis Schlafly writes in her August 2011 report:

A national scandal hit the news when Georgia Governor Nathan Deal released a 413-page report describing how hundreds of Atlanta public school teachers and principals had been cheating during the past ten years on standardized tests in order to falsely report that their schools were doing a good job and the kids were improving.

Incredible as this may seem, the cheating had been going on for ten years on a district-wide scale, and only now is being exposed. Schlafly continues:

A total of 178 teachers and principals (38 were principals), 82 of whom have already confessed, had fraudulently raised test scores so their schools would meet test targets set by the district and thereby qualify for federal funds.

It took 60 investigators and 2,100 interviews to expose this cheating fraud. Principals and teachers in 56 schools confessed that this cheating had been going on since 2001. They raised the test scores by erasing wrong answers and inserting correct answers. The result was that Superintendent Beverly L. Hall was able to collect \$600,000 in performance bonuses over 10 years to supplement her \$400,000 annual salary. Schlafly writes:

According to the report, Dr. Hall and her top staff “created a culture of fear, intimidation and retaliation,” concealed by “a conspiracy of silence and deniability,” that allowed “cheating — at all



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levels—to go unchecked for years. “ Those who dared to report concerns about cheating “were held in contempt and punished,” sometimes by termination.

Is Atlanta the only school district where this wholesale cheating was going on? *USA Today* reported on September 13, 2011:

Fewer than half the states routinely analyze suspicious numbers of erasures on standardized school tests, a key method of detecting cheating by teachers or their bosses.... This means nearly 45 percent of the annual reading and math exams this year were scored without analyzing erasures.

Pennsylvania’s secretary of education, Ron Tomalis, is investigating 89 schools flagged for high erasures in 2009. The department is also analyzing erasure reports for 2010 and 2011. Naturally, money is the key factor underwriting all of this cheating. Salaries, bonuses and jobs are tied to test scores. If the schools cannot show improvement in test scores, they will be penalized by the federal program. *USA Today* states:

U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan says schools’ contracts with testing companies should require statistical study that can detect cheating.... A *USA Today* investigation in March in Washington, DC, found 103 public schools — more than half — had unusually high rates of wrong answers changed to right ones from 2008 through 2010.

Perhaps the most useful function of the testing requirements of No Child Left Behind is that it has exposed the corruption and fraud that goes on in the nation’s public schools with the complicity of teachers, principals, and even superintendents. It is one more indication that federal control of the schools has not improved education but only made matters worse. The only way to restore academic sanity to America’s schools is to get government out of education and make public education totally private.

This can be done if the will is there. We’ve had very successful private schools in this country from its very beginning. The well-known prestigious private prep schools have been educating the elite for over two centuries. The private Catholic parochial schools still exist and are generally known for their high academic standards. Other church schools are educating thousands of students across the nation. And, of course, the growth of the homeschool movement proves that parents can do a better job of educating their children than the public schools.

Even Obama attended a very prestigious private school in Hawaii, Punahou Academy, which he described in his autobiography as an “incubator for island elites.” That private education made it possible for him to become a member of the political elite, a senator, and then President.

Why can’t all American children get the kind of education that Obama got at Punahou Academy? Indeed, every public school can be turned into a private academy not subject to the dumbing-down curriculum that now pervades America’s public schools.

The failure of the public schools is now so generally acknowledged by just about everyone in America that it has sparked the creation of charter schools, state-funded schools that are free from union control and forced curriculum regulation. But charter schools are still public schools, paid for by the taxpayer. And potential educators cannot get a charter unless they agree not to wander too far off the government reservation.

This writer is familiar with how charters are distributed to those who apply for them. A group of conservative parents in a Boston suburb wanted to create a charter school with a conservative



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curriculum. I was asked to plan that conservative curriculum with a strong program in the basic primary subjects. They were denied the charter.

In other words, as long as the government is in the education business, it will put the interests of the public education establishment and the teachers' unions above the interests of the students and their parents. And since so many state and federal legislators are beholden to union support, they are unlikely to vote for the privatization of the public schools.

That is why over a million parents have chosen to homeschool their children. They know that the dumbing-down curriculum, which creates thousands of functional illiterates, will not be changed in the foreseeable future.

But a movement for the privatization of the public schools is long overdue. Conservatives, who believe in the free-market and free enterprise, should start such a movement. A free-market in education will produce better education at lower cost. And if poor parents can't afford to pay the tuition in a private school, a community fund can pay the tuitions of those poor children. Thus, every American child will have access to a good private education. Is that not a goal worth working for?



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