



Written by [Brian Koenig](#) on July 7, 2011

Report: Widespread Cheating in Atlanta Schools — by Teachers

A year-long investigation by former Georgia Gov. Sonny Perdue (R) produced a startling 800-page report just released by Gov. Nathan Deal (R, pictured left) that reveals rampant teacher cheating and unethical practices in the 55,000-student Atlanta public school system. Investigators conducted over 2,000 interviews and canvassed 800,000 documents in what is likely the most comprehensive and meticulous investigation of public-school cheating in U.S. history.



The award-winning “success” of Atlanta students is now being recognized as a sham, as 178 teachers and principals — 82 of whom confessed — were caught fixing answers on the Criterion-Referenced Competency Test (CRCT).

The Atlanta Journal Constitution has the [details](#):

Teachers and principals erased and corrected mistakes on students’ answer sheets.

Area superintendents silenced whistle-blowers and rewarded subordinates who met academic goals by any means possible.

Superintendent Beverly Hall and her top aides ignored, buried, destroyed or altered complaints about misconduct, claimed ignorance of wrongdoing and accused naysayers of failing to believe in poor children’s ability to learn.

Students in the Atlanta school system scored exceptionally high — or at least appeared to — on state curriculum tests over the years, so dramatically that they brought national acclaim to Atlanta’s schools, teachers, and administrators. Now it turns out it was all a sham.

It’s no wonder Superintendent Beverly Hall was named the 2009 National Superintendent of the Year, and it’s no wonder she retired on June 30, just days before the report’s release. Student test scores soared throughout her tenure, while she received hundreds of thousands of dollars in bonuses, along with local and national applause — because of so-called “improvements” in Atlanta student test scores.

[According to her lawyer](#), Hall “most definitely did not know of any widespread cheating.” But the report’s allegations appear conclusive. It stated,

In many ways, the community was duped by Dr. Hall. While the district had rampant cheating, community leaders were unaware of the misconduct in the district. She abused the trust they placed in her.

Hall became a subject of adoration and made herself the focus rather than the children ... Her



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image became more important than reality.

The Atlanta investigation uncovered the anxiety among teachers who were intimidated and threatened by principals and administrators. A third-grade teacher [confessed](#) to investigators, “There are ways that APS [Atlanta Public Schools] can get back at you [if you do not participate in cheating]. APS is run like a mob.” The report unearthed a “culture of fear, intimidation and retaliation” that coerced teachers into giving students the correct answers and changing wrong answers on standardized tests.

The scandal first came to light when the state found abnormal spikes in test scores and an excessive amount of erasure marks on students’ answer sheets. In one school, faculty even held weekend pizza parties specifically to correct students’ wrong answers. Though the teachers’ actions should not go unpunished, unyielding pressure from administrators and other teachers made the temptation to cheat difficult to resist. “We were told to get these scores by any means necessary,” [asserted](#) Sidnye Fells, a fourth grade teacher. “We were told our jobs were on the line.”

The *Christian Science Monitor* [added this from the report](#):

One of the most troubling aspects of the Atlanta cheating scandal, says the report, is that the district repeatedly refused to properly investigate or take responsibility for the cheating.

Moreover, the central office told some principals not to cooperate with investigators. In one case, an administrator instructed employees to tell investigators to “go to hell.” When teachers tried to alert authorities, they were labeled “disgruntled.” One principal opened an ethics investigation against a whistle-blower.

Investigations will continue over the next few months. As lawmakers and experts debate the issue, some believe that the progressive dependency on standardized testing — and its founding father, the No Child Left Behind Act — may wane.

This report has uncovered what may be the biggest education scandal in American history. Analysts make note of the fact that, even though teachers and administrators were the cheaters, in the end, the students are inevitably the losers.



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