



How Schools Can Reduce Cheating

An Interview with Don McCabe

to two-thirds of its previous level. A sample student comment: "Students look down on cheating now."

Don McCabe is a Rutgers University professor of management and global business, one of the nation's leading researchers on academic dishonesty, and the founding president of the Center for Academic Integrity (www.academicintegrity.org/). We interviewed him about his research.

What have your studies found to be the extent of cheating in U.S. high schools?

DM: Cheating is out of control and has been for a long time. In the past six years I've surveyed over 28,000 students at 77 high schools—24 public, 18 parochial, and 35 private. (See *Academic Integrity Survey*, p. 5.) The percentages of students admitting to "serious" cheating in the past year are:

	Public	Parochial	Private
Test/Exam	72%	66%	46%
Plagiarism	57%	61%	43%

Less cheating in private high schools is probably due to their smaller size and the presence of an honor code at many of them.

If you ask students whether they've cheated at any point during their high school career—as opposed to "during the past year"—and include homework copying, the percentage of students admitting to cheating rises to 95%.

Has cheating increased?

DM: From the 60s to 80s, studies suggested that cheating increased fairly strongly. After that, the numbers suggest relative stability at the high school level. The college data are less clear. It's hard to decide across different studies which measures of cheating are comparable.

Have student attitudes toward cheating changed?

DM: Yes, in two ways. First, students often see cheating as a time-management tool that allows them to achieve their desired goal—typically admission into a "good" university—with the minimum hassle. It helps them get around teachers who expect them to memorize material, which most of today's students have little use for because they can easily access such material on the Internet. They see they can get good grades with reduced effort, which frees up time for

working after school, socializing, texting, etc. And Mom and Dad are happy because they're getting good grades.

Second, students are much more willing to blame their cheating on everyone else—parents who put pressure on them for good grades, teachers who don't teach well or place unreasonable demands on them, other students who cheat and almost require that they do the same to remain competitive, and poor societal role models like Bernie Madoff. Many students buy into the message that everyone cheats to get ahead, and school is a good place to hone this skill.

What reduces cheating?

DM: My research shows that honor codes make a difference. But a school must convince students that integrity really matters, that the code benefits all, and that they need to accept responsibility for following it and encouraging others to do so. Students must play a major role in the development, running, and maintenance of the code.

Some schools have been reluctant to turn much of this responsibility over to students, and the honor codes they have introduced have not fared well.

Of the schools you've worked with, are there any standout examples of creating a culture of integrity?

DM: The three strongest colleges I've worked with are ones with long-standing honor codes, where students run the system and most respect the system. My 1990, 1995, and 2005 surveys of honor-code colleges vs. a sample of comparable no-code colleges, showed these same three colleges rising to the top each time. Each school works very hard to maintain its code.

Student comments at these colleges suggest that a major factor motivating students not to cheat is the fear of being socially embarrassed—taking advantage of your peers by cheating when they are not, and then being found out.

My best high school example is a large Catholic school in the Midwest which had me survey their students shortly before implementing a new emphasis on integrity, although not an honor code. Two years later, test cheating among 10th-graders was down

What kind of professional development do faculty need?

DM: Have students conduct a session for faculty—students who are willing to say what's really going on in the school, and aren't afraid to point out how teachers sometimes enable or contribute to student cheating.

What advice would you give a principal?

DM: A principal must involve students in developing a culture of academic integrity. (See p. 6 for how one principal did this.) Principals also need to implement meaningful discipline, not just a slap on the wrist. In my surveys many, many students say that nothing meaningful ever really happens to students who are caught cheating.

We also need broader parental support for making cheating more costly to students. (See article, p. 7.) Currently, many high school students don't worry about penalties because they believe their parents will defend them against any accusations of cheating.

Sadly, many schools are reluctant to admit they have a cheating problem because they're afraid of the bad publicity. But I think it is our failure to act sooner on this issue that has contributed to the deterioration. There's no easy solution, but it's imperative that we take a stand before it gets any worse. ■

"Cheating Damages Our Relationship"

Iwant my students to know that if they do something dishonest, it's bad for our relationship. This frames how I address cheating. I begin with a little bit of humor, acting out all the ways I know students cheat. They laugh.

But then I get serious and let them know why cheating really bothers me. I tell them, "You might recover fairly quickly from the zero you'll get if you're caught cheating. But it takes a long time to make up for an act of dishonesty. It creates a lack of trust between us. It damages our relationship."

—HIGH SCHOOL SCIENCE TEACHER