

On Cheating

Our students are in the midst of high stakes testing right now--AP exams, SAT's, ACT's—with final papers and exams already on the horizon. Despite Staples' commitment to academic integrity, we recognize that the temptation for students to cheat is very real. **Challenge Success--an organization affiliated with the Stanford Graduate School of Education--works with schools and families to improve student wellbeing. They recently released a white paper about cheating in schools that sheds light on the reasons why students cheat and some successful preventive strategies.** Some of their findings:

- 95% of 11/12th graders admitted cheating at least once during high school.
- One in three teenagers admitted having used the internet to plagiarize an assignment.
- 35% of teens who had cell phones reported having used them to cheat at least once; 52% of students surveyed reported that they had cheated using the internet
- **Adolescents report several reasons why they cheat, including fear of failure, parents demanding good grades, wanting to keep up with others, wanting to get a good grade, and feeling that the teacher is unfair**

It is not only the students who might be struggling with a subject who cheat. **Cheating is just as common amongst high achieving students**, and its prevalence increases as students progress from kindergarten through high school. Teens report cheating for many reasons: they think that everyone else is doing it, they have too much work to do and not enough time to do it, or they feel pressure to attain a specific grade. **However, they are much less likely to cheat if they believe that their families and their schools value real mastery of a subject, as opposed to rote memorization or high test scores.** Here's what Challenge Success suggests that parents can do:

- **Model integrity and maintain high standards for honesty.** Discuss with your child the importance of integrity. Emphasize that your family values honest and ethical behavior and that cheating will not be tolerated.
- **Watch how you talk about grades.** Many students know that cheating is wrong, but they don't want to let their parents down by bring home a low grade. Instead of asking "How did you do on the test?" ask if they felt prepared for the exam and if it accurately measured their understanding. This opens up discussion about what the student might do differently next time. **Emphasize and praise effort and persistence.** Resist the urge to compare your child's grades and test scores with others.
- **Avoid using external rewards for schoolwork.** This may reinforce the importance of grades without an emphasis on mastery and effort. A **focus on intrinsic motivation**—doing something to satisfy curiosity, find enjoyment, and a feeling of pride after exerting effort—typically yields better results and fewer incidents of cheating.
- **Encourage positive school identity/belonging**
- **Respond appropriately if your child is accused of cheating.** Resist the urge to take a side or lose your temper. Talk to your child and his/her teacher and seek consensus about what occurred and the appropriate steps to be taken. Emphasize that you will not tolerate cheating, and try to brainstorm more positive coping strategies with your child. Throughout the process, remind your child that you love him/her no matter what, and use the incident as an important learning moment.

The Staples Resilience Project is an ongoing endeavor by the Staples Guidance Department aimed to promote the well-being of our students and foster a positive, inclusive school community.

shs.westportps.org/departments/guidance/staples-resilience-project