

## **Students Lie, Cheat, Steal, but Say They're Good**

By DAVID CRARY, AP National Writer, Nov. 30, 2008

NEW YORK – In the past year, 30 percent of U.S. high school students have stolen from a store and 64 percent have cheated on a test, according to a new, large-scale survey suggesting that Americans are too apathetic about ethical standards.

Educators reacting to the findings questioned any suggestion that today's young people are less honest than previous generations, but several agreed that intensified pressures are prompting many students to cut corners.

"The competition is greater, the pressures on kids have increased dramatically," said Mel Riddle of the National Association of Secondary School Principals. "They have opportunities their predecessors didn't have (to cheat). The temptation is greater."

The Josephson Institute, a Los Angeles-based ethics institute, surveyed 29,760 students at 100 randomly selected high schools nationwide, both public and private. All students in the selected schools were given the survey in class; their anonymity was assured.

Michael Josephson, the institute's founder and president, said he was most dismayed by the findings about theft. The survey found that 35 percent of boys and 26 percent of girls — 30 percent overall — acknowledged stealing from a store within the past year. One-fifth said they stole something from a friend; 23 percent said they stole something from a parent or other relative.

"What is the social cost of that — not to mention the implication for the next generation of mortgage brokers?" Josephson remarked in an interview. "In a society drenched with cynicism, young people can look at it and say 'Why shouldn't we? Everyone else does it.'"

Other findings from the survey:

- Cheating in school is rampant and getting worse. Sixty-four percent of students cheated on a test in the past year and 38 percent did so two or more times, up from 60 percent and 35 percent in a 2006 survey.
- Thirty-six percent said they used the Internet to plagiarize an assignment, up from 33 percent in 2004.
- Forty-two percent said they sometimes lie to save money — 49 percent of the boys and 36 percent of the girls.

Despite such responses, 93 percent of the students said they were satisfied with their personal ethics and character, and 77 percent affirmed that "when it comes to doing what is right, I am better than most people I know."

Nijmie Dzurinko, executive director of the Philadelphia Student Union, said the findings were not at all reflective of the inner-city students she works with as an advocate for better curriculum and school funding.

"A lot of people like to blame society's problems on young people, without recognizing that young people aren't making the decisions about what's happening in society," said Dzurinko, 32. "They're very easy to scapegoat."

Peter Anderson, principal of Andover High School in Andover, Mass., said he and his colleagues had detected very little cheating on tests or Internet-based plagiarism. He has, however, noticed an uptick in students sharing homework in unauthorized ways.

"This generation is leading incredibly busy lives — involved in athletics, clubs, so many with part-time jobs, and — for seniors — an incredibly demanding and anxiety-

producing college search," he offered as an explanation.

Riddle, who for four decades was a high school teacher and principal in northern Virginia, agreed that more pressure could lead to more cheating, yet spoke in defense of today's students.

"I would take these students over other generations," he said. "I found them to be more responsive, more rewarding to work with, more appreciative of support that adults give them.

"We have to create situations where it's easy for kids to do the right things," he added. "We need to create classrooms where learning takes on more importance than having the right answer."

On Long Island, an alliance of school superintendents and college presidents recently embarked on a campaign to draw attention to academic integrity problems and to crack down on plagiarism and cheating.

Roberta Gerold, superintendent of the Middle Country School District and a leader of the campaign, said parents and school officials need to be more diligent — for example, emphasizing to students the distinctions between original and borrowed work. "You can reinforce the character trait of integrity," she said. "We overload kids these days, and they look for ways to survive. ... It's a flaw in our system that whatever we are doing as educators allows this to continue."

Josephson contended that most Americans are too blase about ethical shortcomings among young people and in society at large. "Adults are not taking this very seriously," he said. "The schools are not doing even the most moderate thing. ... They don't want to know. There's a pervasive apathy."

Josephson also addressed the argument that today's youth are no less honest than their predecessors. "In the end, the question is not whether things are worse, but whether they are bad enough to mobilize concern and concerted action," he said.

"What we need to learn from these survey results is that our moral infrastructure is unsound and in serious need of repair. This is not a time to lament and whine but to take thoughtful, positive actions."

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***Pd.***

- *Annotate – show evidence of close reading (see “article annotation” handout for expectations)*
- Define the following without the use of a dictionary:

On the whole, do you think this article is biased? One-sided? Or, rather, do you feel the article is somewhat evenhanded in the way it discusses *you* – current high school students. Citing evidence from the article and properly and smoothly working passages from the article in your response, briefly discuss the article’s treatment of today’s youth. . I suggest you use the other side of this paper to outline/sketch out your response. **100-125 words**

[illegible]

**Your letter should be between 100 to 150 words**

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