

Anderson Journal



To bail out
or not to bail
out? It's the
question.

business

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Not far
from here—
a winter
wonderland.

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TRUTH AND CONSEQUENCES

Cheating starts early, experts say.
One program aims to instill honesty in middle school students.

BY **ANNA B. MITCHELL**
staff writer

In one scenario, a student writes crib notes on his arm.
In another, a girl pressures her mother to finish her homework
and do her science project.

A third shows students sharing answers on homework.

All are real-life situations that students at McCants Middle School say have or could happen at their school. About 120 kids at the Anderson school collaborated with Clemson University this fall in the production of a DVD in which middle-school drama students acted out the scenarios – and their consequences.

McCants Middle School Principal Jacky Stamps said cheating is rare among middle-schoolers and virtually non-existent among elementary school kids – the key is keeping kids focused on learning and not on their grades.

“The older you get, the more pressure it is to cheat,” Stamps said. “We as adults have to relieve that pressure.”

The DVD, completed earlier this month and available to teachers as a lesson aid, is part of a larger project aimed at showing what may or may not be happening on middle school campuses – and ways to prevent it.

That project started with a campus-wide academic integrity survey administered to about 800 of McCants' 1,300 students in May 2008, said Dan Wueste, director of Clemson's Rutland Institute for Ethics.

Data from that survey, the first administered to a middle school in South Carolina, is being compiled by cheating expert

Don McCabe of Rutgers University for a first-of-its-kind look at cheating among this age group. A second campus-wide survey in five years will help administrators at McCants see if anti-cheating measures have been effective.

“They are self reporting,” Wueste said. “We ask whether they have ever engaged in certain behaviors and how often. We also ask whether they see certain behaviors as being serious wrongs.”

McCabe's research has revealed that 75 percent of college freshmen admit to having cheated once the previous year. Another study found that among high-school students, 47 percent didn't think or weren't sure if getting information before a test was cheating; 45 percent didn't think or weren't sure if submitting work completed by parents was cheating; and 44 percent didn't think or weren't sure if cutting and pasting sources from the Internet into term papers was cheating.

“It's not a very happy number,” Wueste said.

McCabe's research also has found honor codes – especially those that are student written and enforced – are among the most effective tools at preventing the practice. At the University of Virginia, for instance, upperclassmen have warned newcomers about the school's honor code from its earliest days.

“It doesn't work to have college administrators cook up a code and give it to students,” Wueste said. “When students come to UVA, they are told by other students, ‘This is the way we do things. This is the expectation. If you are prepared to live by this, you are welcome. If not, go somewhere else.’”

Christ Church Episcopal School in Greenville has a strict honor code that all middle- and high-school students must sign,
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CHEATING CONTINUED FROM COVER...

said Alice Baird, the school's director of communications.

"They sign it at chapel," Baird said. "That is a very integral part of our academic environment here."

A Christ Church student, the code says, "will not lie, will not steal, will not cheat and will not tolerate those who do."

A student-run honor council in the campus' upper school adjudicates what to do with students who are caught violating the code. They recommend to administrators what should be done.

"We've had this in place for years," she said.

Stamps said such codes of behavior help harness peer pressure - especially powerful at this age - to the good. McCants doesn't have a formal honor code, but the school started a program called Hornet Pride that recognizes up to 50 students a month for doing something nice. A sign in the cafeteria in bold black and yellow reminds students: "You know the right thing. Just do it."

"It's holding a door open for a teacher or picking trash up off the sidewalk," Stamps said.

Christ Church's middle school is in discussions with Clemson's Linda Gallicchio, the person who pulled together all the parties for the McCants project, to administer the academic integrity survey there. Gallicchio also is in discussions with Southwood Middle in Anderson.

As technology and teaching methods

have changed over the years, Gallicchio said, educators must continuously revisit questions about ethics so that students understand, for instance, that downloading a term paper from the Internet is just as bad as fudging lab results or looking at someone's paper during a test.

"It's not necessarily different morals, but different definitions of cheating," Gallicchio said.

Wueste said McCabe's research has found the most rampant instances of cheating consistently occur in MBA programs. The potential harm to society of unethical business practices has been shown most recently with the national collapse of the home mortgage market - buoyed for years by loans given to buyers who couldn't possibly pay them back. Short-term greed ultimately ruined the whole system.

"I like to point out to business students that there is a big difference between acting in one's self interest and acting selfishly," he said.

In the academic arena, he said, cheating may get you the grade - but it also means you don't know the material. And evidence suggests those who start cheating don't stop in graduate school.

"The prospects can be quite scary," Wueste said. "Students learning to be mechanical engineers cheating on exams are the ones making decisions on the design of automobiles or bridges. There are doctors who commit fraud in handling Medicare. It's enormously costly."

Gallicchio, who works primarily on business outreach for the Rutland

Institute's Center for Academic Integrity, said she views her work with middle schools and high schools as a question of workforce development.

"Honesty is always an issue in work places," she said. "Businesses lose more to internal theft than from customers coming through the door."

Stamps said he was happy with the results of the surveys at McCants - which he said he could not release to the media but revealed that cheating was uncommon on his campus.

"As an adult, I think it's important to teach kids the difference between right and wrong," Stamps said. "The survey gave us an insight as to what they were thinking and believing. I was pleasantly pleased with what we found."

Cheating scenarios McCants students volunteered in a follow-up, informal survey this fall included sharing test questions and answers, using technology such as cell phones to carry answers into a test or posting answers in advance on the Internet, not reporting cheating when it's witnessed for fear of retribution from teachers or fellow students, feeling pressure from parents to produce good grades, and - often by accident - not properly citing material used for papers that came from books, magazines or the Internet (i.e., plagiarism).

"There weren't any surprises, though some of the quotes the kids gave us were humorous," Stamps said.

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