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Students say using tech to cheat isn't cheating

New poll reveals students use cell phones, internet to cheat; parents are unaware

By Meris Stansbury, Associate Editor

Primary Topic Channel: [Research](#)

A new poll conducted by the nonprofit organization Common Sense Media suggests that students are using cell phones and the internet to cheat on school exams. What's surprising, however, is not just the alarming number of students who say they cheat, but also the number of students who think it's OK to do so.

Common Sense Media commissioned the research and consulting firm Benenson Strategy Group to conduct a poll of teenagers and parents on the use of digital media for cheating in school.

The Benenson Strategy Group conducted a total of 1,013 nationally representative online interviews with students in grades 7-12, and 1,002 online interviews with parents of seventh through 12th-grade students, between May 28 and June 5. The surveys included 846 teens with cell phones and 839 parents of teens who have cell phones.

Twenty-eight students and 27 parents also agreed to be interviewed more extensively.

According to the poll, more than a third of teens with cell phones (35 percent) admit to cheating at least once with them, and two-thirds of all teens (65 percent) say others in their school cheat with them.

Of the teens who admit to cheating with their cell phones, 26 percent say they store information on their phone to look at during a test, 25 percent text friends about answers during a test, 17 percent take pictures of the test to send to friends, and 20 percent search the internet for answers during tests using their phones.

Also, nearly half (48 percent) of teens with cell phones call or text their friends to warn them about pop quizzes.

What's more, just over half of students polled (52 percent) admitted to some form of cheating involving the internet.

Twenty-one percent of students say they've downloaded a paper or report from the internet to turn in, while 50 percent have seen or heard about others doing this; 38 percent have copied text from web sites and turned it in as their own work, while 60 percent have seen or heard this; and 32 percent have searched for teachers' manuals or publishers' solutions to problems in textbooks they are currently using; while 47 percent have seen or heard this.

Even more concerning is that many students do not consider this behavior as cheating. Only about half of students polled admit that cell phone use during tests is a serious cheating offense, and just 16 percent say calling or texting friends to warn them of a pop quiz is cheating; instead, they believe they're simply helping a friend.

Students who cheat using the internet generally view plagiarism as more serious an offense than other types of cheating, yet more than a third of teens (36 percent) said downloading a paper from the internet was not a serious

offense, and 42 percent said copying text from web sites was a either a minor offense or not cheating at all.

Student-parent disconnect

One reason so many teens are using technology to cheat during exams might be because most parents don't realize their child is engaged in such activity.

According to the poll, parents are ready to believe that cell phone cheating is widespread among teens; however, very few parents believe their own child is guilty.

While 92 percent of parents say some type of cell phone cheating happens at their child's school, just 3 percent of parents say their child has cheated using a cell phone.

Also, there is a disconnect between what parents say they are telling their children and what children are saying they hear from their parents: 80 percent of parents say they have addressed cheating with cell phones and the internet with their kids, but only 64 percent of teens say their parents have discussed this issue with them.

Finally, many parents say they purchase phones for their teens to coordinate schedules or to be able to reach them in an emergency, and only 23 percent of parents think their teens are using their cell phones in school. According to the poll, 65 percent of teens polled say they are using cell phones during school to communicate with friends.

School responsibility

According to the poll, cell phone policies in schools are "barely making a dent." A large majority of schools (69 percent as reported by teens) do not permit phones to be used during the school day. However, among teens with cell phones, 66 percent say they use their phones in schools where phones must remain off all day, and 57 percent use them in schools where phones must be stored during the day. Sixty-three percent use them in schools that ban cell phones altogether, and 72 percent use them in schools with no explicit cell phone acceptable-use policies (AUPs).

"Perhaps because they don't realize just how widespread cell phone use in schools is, parents aren't clamoring for stricter [AUPs] in schools," said Common Sense Media in its report.

Just 10 percent of parents say policies aren't strict enough, while 7 percent say they are too strict. Eighty-three percent say they are appropriate.

"The results of this poll show the huge need for a national discussion on the concept of digital ethics. Kids have always found ways to cheat in school, but the tools they now have at their disposal are more powerful than ever. Just as they need to be taught the rules of right and wrong in the offline world, kids should have a similar set of guidelines for good online behavior, and it's our responsibility as parents and leaders to start talking about them," said Common Sense Media.

Links:

[Common Sense Media](#)

[Benenson Strategy Group](#)

Note to readers:

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