

High School Cheating On the Rise

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STATEN ISLAND, N.Y. - Most students may have copied answers or cheated on a test at one time or another, but studies are now showing that nine out of ten high schoolers admit they've cheated, not just in their life but in the last year of school.

Jenna and Alexandra, two students at Port Richmond High School in Staten Island, say they are two of the few who regularly restrain themselves. "The pressure is there, it's always gonna be there," Jenna explains. "No matter what grade level you're in and no matter what you're trying to go for, the pressure is there to do well in school and your future." Alexandra agrees, although she admits to cheating in the past. "I think all students have done that," she says. "In fifth grade I didn't really like Math so I copied the answer off of my friend."

Education expert Jason Stephens from the University of Connecticut, sheds some light on the subject. "Students, generally speaking believe that it's wrong, they recognize that it's wrong," Stephens explains, "but they do it anyway."

Tim Gannon, school principal at Port Richmond High School, says there is a lot of pressure on students to be successful. "I'm in education 28 years and it's always the strongest students," he says. "I think it goes back to... the challenge and the competition of getting into college and being compared to a 98 average when I'm a 97 average."

That competition is ever increasing as countless teens are now getting perfect SAT scores and straight A's, making the rest struggle to stand out. But just a handful of words and promises, designed by students, teachers and parents together, repeated on day one and throughout the year may make all the difference.

According to research a clear and enforced honor code helps students create an ongoing culture of integrity. Studies and results found by Stephens and fellow education expert Donald McCabe from Rutgers University, are reflected in the change in atmosphere at Port Richmond High in Staten Island.

"I now have three to four high schools where they ask me to come in ahead of time, they were implementing a code," McCabe says, "and I've seen cheating levels cut in half."

Richmond High's honor code is just three years old, implemented when senior Alexandra Russo was halfway through her freshman year. She says there is a clear difference between then and now. "There wasn't as much pressure and no one spoke about it and now I'm taking four A.P. classes and {the honor code} is on the back of every contract," she said. "Teachers want you to know that you have earned your position and that you need to keep that position."

Gannon wants students who graduate from his school to be proud of their achievements. "What does a Port Richmond diploma mean when they get it in their hands?" he asks. "Is it just 44 academic credits? Or can it say something about our school that makes it special."

See video at --

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[Dr. Stephens was interviewed as a result of a recent NY Times story regarding SEE's Academic Integrity project in Connecticut.]