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## Student Cheating on the Rise

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Cheating in the country's high schools is going from bad to worse. According to a national survey released this week by the Josephson Institute, 64 percent of high school students nationwide admit to cheating on a test in the last year -- an increase of 4 percent in just two years.

The report echoes the preliminary results of a study under way in Connecticut by the School for Ethical Education. David Wangaard, executive director of the Milford-based nonprofit organization, said they are in the midst of a study that reveals the problem to be a cultural one. "We need to realign our core values," said Wangaard.

The Josephson Institute, which is based in Los Angeles, surveyed nearly 30,000 students across the country, seeking their feedback on cheating, lying and stealing. Assured of their anonymity, 38 percent of the students admitted to cheating repeatedly and 36 percent admitted to using the Internet to plagiarize. The results were the same for boys and girls.

Teenage boys report lying more frequently than girls, 49 percent to 39 percent, a number that also reflects an increase since 2006. Boys also steal more often than girls, 36 percent versus 26 percent. According to news reports, students are using cell phones to text answers to each other and e-mail photos of test questions with answers to other students.

Despite these numbers, 77 percent of the students said they considered their own behavior to be better than most people they know and 93 percent said they were satisfied with their personal ethics and character.

The number one reason students cheat, Wangaard said, is the pressure they feel to get good grades. The second reason they give is insufficient time for school work. Funded by the Templeton Foundation, the School for Ethical Education's three-year study of Connecticut high schools reveals that students feel they need to "cheat or be cheated on." "We are hearing a cry among students to please do something," he said. "These kids are in pain."

Norwalk public school policies list cheating and stealing among the reasons a student can be suspended from school. School principals contacted by The Hour did not return calls seeking comment on the implementation of the local policy, but Wangaard said effective programs go beyond enforcing rules. He said schools can reduce cheating by 30 to 40 percent when they develop a culture that does not tolerate the practice.

"It is not a simple police action. A community needs to value integrity," he said.