

Cheating the Children **By: Dr. Sue Skidmore**

“I would prefer even to fail with honor than to win by cheating,” Sophocles posited. Granted cheating has occurred in many arenas for over 1,000 years. It’s found in sports, in relationships, in advertising, and in sales. Some even cheat on income tax forms. Yet, one of the most heinous cheating scandals played out in Fulton County, Georgia last week.

Former Atlanta superintendent, Beverly Hall, and 34 others were indicted on racketeering and other charges for their alleged roles in cheating on state exams. In 2006, Hall was named the top urban education leader in the country by the Council of Great City Schools, and in 2009, she was awarded national superintendent of the year from the American Association of School Administrators. These high honors were bestowed for the steady, academic progress Atlanta schools had made during her 11 years of leadership. However, the grand jury noted the district, “had engaged in nearly a decade of systemic cheating on state tests.” Further, the grand jury recommended Hall’s bail be set at \$7.5 million.

In 2012, El Paso, Texas, former superintendent of schools, Lorenzo Garcia, was sentenced to three years in prison. Garcia pleaded guilty to multiple counts of fraud which included: “leading a complicated effort to manipulate students’ test scores on state exams.”

Now, some will argue: **Told you so.** People demanded to witness a return on all of the copious dollars spent on education. For far too long, schools had not been held accountable. The United States’ schools were failing in the world marketplace. In response to these outcries, extreme measures swept across America with little regard for students. Zealous emphasis on testing, dictated by the government, will result in cheating. The financial stakes are far too high for every school.

On the other hand, there is a serious oversight in this argument: the education of a child. Imagine when a parent proudly brags about the student’s performance on the state test and learns at parent conferences his/her son is failing math or reading. And while even parents with marginal education know whether their children can read, write, and/or cipher, they are quick to blame the teacher, the specialist, the tutor, et.al for the child’s poor grade on the report card. Most of us would never suspect nor accuse school officials of tinkering with state test answers.

Indeed it was a heinous crime. Drs. Hall and Garcia cheated thousands of students. Sadly, the children learned a fraction of what they could have mastered. They were mere pawns in a sick game to garner prestigious awards and/or money. Unfortunately, Hall and Garcia’s actions have raised questions about the integrity of all American school officials. One can only hope that Hall be sentenced to forty years in a cell filled with the writings of Sophocles.

Source: Maxwell, L. *Former Atlanta Schools Superintendent Indicted in Cheating Scandal.* **Education Week.** March 29, 2013.