

Academic Integrity in our District: Parent Forum  
Ridge High & William Annin Middle School Joint PTO Meeting

Tuesday, December 2, 2014, 7 pm      RHS PAC

Introduction of speakers by Amy Jones, Ridge PTO Curriculum Representative

Kristin Fox - K-12 Social Studies Supervisor  
Barbara Dwyer - RHS Social Studies Teacher  
Jennifer Raphaels - RHS Social Studies Teacher  
Frank Howlett - RHS Principal  
(Karen Hudock - WAMS Principal was unable to attend)

Handouts provided:

- 2 pages from Annin code of conduct
- 1 page of Ridge Academic Integrity Policy
- Post it notes for questions from the audience

Power Point Presentation by Kristin Fox, K-12 Social Studies Supervisor  
<http://www.oucoursesystems.com/school/webpage/471443/1046072>

Goals of the presentation:

1. Share details on the development of the academic integrity policy
2. Illustrate the complexities of determining violations of the policy
3. Answer parent questions

Background of Ms. Fox:

- 7 years in our district
- 3 years developing the academic integrity program
- Serves on the school board in another district

Background on the issue of cheating

Cited 3 recent studies which indicate that academic dishonesty is on the rise nationally:

- Survey of High School Students 2012 (Ohio State University)
- Survey of College Teachers 2011 (Pew Survey of American Colleges)
- Survey of Students 2010 (Josephson Institute of Ethics)

Illustrated prevalence of plagiarism with recent examples in our society:

- in sports, Lance Armstrong
- in music, Led Zeppelin
- in journalism, Fareed Zakaria
- in educational institutions
  - Harvard University, 125 students cheated on a final exam
  - Stuyvesant High School, Regents exam cheating scandal

- University of North Carolina, football players receiving degrees without coursework

Observations about cheating at Ridge from 2012 Student Stressor Survey:

1. Incidence of cheating rises with age.
2. Copying homework is the most common offense.
3. Cheating in one manner leads to cheating in other ways.
4. Willingness to cheat stems from the belief that cheaters are more successful.

How to address cheating at Ridge:

What Ridge does not want to do is follow the example (shown in a video clip) of Kasetsart University in Thailand where students wore paper hats that shielded their view of adjacent students during testing. This solution, ridiculed on the internet, was, however, supported by the students themselves who desire to deter cheating.

Goals of our district academic integrity policy:

1. Teach students what plagiarism is.
2. Create incentives not to cheat.
3. Be consistent in enforcement of the consequences of cheating.

History of development of the district policy:

2011-2012 Began discussions in teacher professional learning communities

2012-2013 Developed policy and small scale trial of the policies

2013-2014 Implemented the policy district-wide

Our District's Academic Integrity Policy

- Uses a tiered approach for consequences of violations
- Is based on the Rutgers University Academic Integrity Policy

Why a tiered approach?

- Encourages teachers to report violations
- Gives students a chance to learn from their mistakes before consequences become severe

Goals of the policy:

- Implement a common language in our schools for discussion of violations
- Create levels such that the penalty correlates with the weighted value of the assignment
- Create a dialog between teachers and students

Complexities of Issues in Academic Integrity

Types of Academic Dishonesty:

1. Cheating
2. Fabricating
3. Plagiarism, defined as passing off other's ideas as one's own
4. Denying others access to information
5. Facilitating violations
6. Using unauthorized resources

Why do students cheat?

1. Fear of failure
2. Unable to complete task/assignment
3. Desire to succeed at all costs: “steroid rule,” example of Lance Armstrong, the competition all do
4. Stress, lack of time, overcommitted
5. Belief that an assignment is meaningless
6. Misunderstanding of an assignment

Cheating can be intentional (e.g. brazen stealing of a test or repeated offenses) or unintentional

How to reduce cheating

1. Instruct
2. Punish
3. Maintain institutional consistency in response to incidents of cheating

Our district’s policies vary by grade level:

Elementary (K-5) incidence is low, no formal consequences

- 56 % of teachers have only 1 to 3 incidents per year
- 82.5 of teachers discuss academic integrity in class

Middle School (6-8)

- Formal instruction in academic integrity  
(e.g. define difference between working together and copying)
- Informal handling of incidents on a case by case basis

High School (9-12)

- Formal instruction in 9<sup>th</sup> grade social studies classes
- Tiered policy for incidents

Discussion from Barbara Dwyer & Jennifer Raphaels, Ridge High Social Studies Teachers

Dual mission of social studies curriculum – to teach some history while giving students a foundation for success

Turnitin.com

A tool for detection of plagiarism; facilitates teaching students to think, read, and write for themselves.

- Originality Report number = Percentage of work that is unoriginal
  - Color coded highlighting of sections of text vary from blue to red with severity of unoriginality.
  - Shows which phrases may need quotation marks or need to be rephrased in the student’s own words.
- Settings adjusted by teacher can exclude e.g. direct quotations or anything less than ten words
- Teacher report has web links to the original sources for further scrutiny of the matching texts.

Ridge Ethics Club

Founded by Mrs. Raphaels and Mrs. Quimby 4 years ago to promote a culture of honesty, in accordance with a theory discussed by a guest speaker, Allen Rosenthal. The club's goals are to:

1. Give students an incentive not to cheat. (Students who attend a certain portion of the meetings are evaluated by their teachers for an ethics award.)
2. Discuss ethical issues
3. Role play at risk situations (e.g. wanting to help your friend who asks for your homework).
4. Provide a framework for evaluating ethical situations.

Illustrations of ethical situations with audience response via cell phone:

1. 5<sup>th</sup> grader caught with notes written on wrist during test. (Cheating)
2. AP class chapter notes were those of a former graduate. (Cheating)
3. A 55 % match between 2 reports on a group assignment. (Depends)

#### Q & A with Principal Howlett and the Speakers

1. Q: Is it ethical to give a collective grade for group assignments when 1 or 2 students carry the group?  
A: Ridge values collaborative work because colleges say students lack this important skill.  
Ridge encourages group projects that have different graded components (e.g. from Mrs. Raphaels –intermediate due dates for individuals preparing for the final group aspect and a peer evaluation as a component of the grade.)
2. Q: Does cheating result in later periods from using common assessments in all periods of the day?  
A: Ridge encourages teachers to change the order of questions on exams and to have student cell phones placed on the teacher's desk during exams to eliminate photos being taken and shared. Teachers may also use different versions of tests within a classroom and throughout the day.
3. Q: Is group studying ethical?  
A: As long as it's not dividing up the subjects and sharing the copied results, group studying can be very beneficial.
4. Q: Which students cheat more?  
A: Cheating used to be more common among the struggling students, but now AP students, who observe other students cheating and receiving better scores, cheat more.
5. Q: What types of violations are common in AP classes?  
A: Mostly copying homework, so some teachers do not give credit for homework. Also, for tests, using a pool of 300 to 400 questions can minimize cheating.  
Also, plagiarism (e.g. using sources not authorized for particular assignments, such as Google Translator.)  
Also, using cell phones on exams.

6. Q: Should Ridge limit the number of AP classes a student is allowed to take?  
A: No because some students are capable of carrying a full AP load without resorting to cheating.
7. Q: Is studying from an older sibling's old test a violation of academic integrity?  
A: No, although it may hinder their learning and not be in their best interest. The exception would be sample AP tests that are not released samples and that Ridge purchased.
8. Q: How is plagiarism handled?  
A: On the first offense, the student can redo the assignment for credit. After that, the Assistant Principals evaluate situations on a case by case basis (e.g. a second semester senior caught with a cheat sheet is likely to receive a zero on the assignment, a Saturday detention, and may have National Honor Society membership and teacher recommendations rescinded.)
9. Q: Is the level of homework for Ridge AP classes excessive compared to other districts?  
A: The southern states start school earlier in the fall and have more instructional days to cover the material before the national May AP exam dates than the northeastern states.
10. Q: When an exam is stolen at the end of the school year, will Ridge investigate and alter grades?  
A: If the summer is underway when the incident surfaces, it's very difficult to make changes.
11. Q: Why are students allowed to have cell phones and water bottles on their desks during exams?  
A: Teachers set their own policies and may not want the responsibility for lost cell phones on their desk.
12. Q: What can Ridge do about the AP class arms race?  
A: The race is real with some students giving up electives (e.g. orchestra) because the non-AP credit may lower their GPA. Colleges are the source of the problem for expecting students to take the most rigorous courses available.
13. Q: Might Ridge consider unweighting the GPA?  
A: No. Ridge has created honors opportunities for some music electives and sociology. Ridge also offers Option II to reduce stress on over-committed athletes.

#### Additional Anonymous Questions

Emailed to the PTO, responded to by Ms. Fox Via Email After the Meeting

1. Q: Cheating rings exist at RHS - one student does the science homework, another does the math; homework is shared as well as quiz and test questions. A student in my teen's class took a picture of a test with a cell phone - have you made it mandatory for students to leave phones at the front of the class for every quiz/test? What procedures do you have in place to detect cheating and what punishments have you handed out to date?

A: Teachers are strongly encouraged to collect cellphones and other devices for assessments. It is not mandated, as some teachers are very uncomfortable with the responsibility of student devices as well as the problem of handling those inadvertently left behind.

2. Q: The integrity issue extends beyond the classrooms to sports and other extracurricular activities. There are clubs with a minimal number of members that rarely meet or don't do much, and yet other kids wanting to start more active clubs to help the community are turned away. Is anything being done to review existing clubs? Can the approval of clubs be a committee decision without the Principal having veto power?

A: Co-curricular clubs are reviewed and the majority are approved. Clubs are monitored quarterly and their activities and attendance are reviewed. That is handled by Assistant Principal Tom Thorp and you are welcome to contact him with your suggestion about a committee approval process.

3. Q: I realize the importance of exposing the kids to a "team approach" to work, however I feel there are too many of these group assignments and partner tests. The takeaway for the kids who do most of the work: others will get the credit. What are the teachers doing to grade these assignments fairly? Some teens try to "police" each other, but it is difficult and not always well received.

A: This was discussed extensively last night. Group work is a valuable component of our instructional program and all group assignments should include both individual and group components to any grades. If that is not the case in a particular situation, then I would strongly encourage the student and/or their parent to contact the teacher to discuss it. If, after talking with the teacher, it continues, then it should be brought to the attention of the curriculum supervisor. If we do not know about it, then we cannot do anything about it.

4. Q: There are those who believe that aspects of this policy application are flawed, most specifically in two areas relating to citations - at the first level, and then again at the appeals level. Some recommendations have been shared: First, ask the teachers first to teach the subject area very specifically and to use the review process as a chance to correct any mistakes made to citations - to make 'corrections' to a student's understanding of a topic by educating them in the classroom as a first step. If this has not been done and verified, no reporting should be accepted from a teacher at this level. It should be the first question the teacher and the principals ask "did you understand what occurred here and how to properly cite a work, etc". Never should a child be told that he is cheating as a first negative assumption unless it is clearly obvious that he/she is. A correction should stand as a teachable moment and nothing more. If there is a second such incident within that same academic year, then initiate the policy with the certainty that you have done all necessary steps to educate first. Second, get rid of that reporting of first infractions (corrections or teachable moments) on their school home access record - permanent until they graduate. It is a heavy burden and negative reminder and serves no purpose other than to raise a level of anxiety for those students who are not deserving of it. This goes well beyond a 'correction' to become an actual preoccupation, an additional stressor that is not necessary. Finally, in addition to a revamp of the application of this policy at a first level,

revamp the appeals process to include an IMPARTIAL panel of people completely outside of the same school administration. It is clear that they will never go against their own teachers and this should not be the process of appeal for these students. It is not respectful to the students in any way and to assume that there is fairness in this approach is to be naive. When these types of assurances are incorporated, then the policy might be viewed as fair and impartial. As of now, it is in need of improvement and the question is will you, as a panel, consider these issues?

A: The first part of this email was addressed thoroughly in the presentation. I hope we made it very clear that instruction is our primary goal with our approach to Academic Integrity.

- a. The process is thoroughly taught, to include an opportunity to correct mistakes prior to final submission. This is the major benefit of the turnitin.com program used by many of our teachers.
- b. All students are given due process (as described above) through the Report of Misconduct process. The teachers who suspects a violation, submits the incident to the appropriate Assistant Principal (as described on the Academic Integrity Guidelines) and that administrator investigates and determines the appropriate, if any, consequence for the incident. Everything described in this question is part of that process.
- c. The "reporting" of the first infraction is not included on a students' transcript, is not reported to anyone outside of the district, and a first incident will not prevent a student from anything. Only a continued pattern of infractions would result in any longer term consequences - a Level 2 or Level 3 violation - and those are specified on the Academic Integrity Guidelines. The record of the first incident, however, is intended as a deterrent to students from engaging in subsequent incidents of academic dishonesty. If a student learns from that first mistake, then it does not harm them at all.
- d. I will include your suggestion for an appeals panel to our annual review procedure for the guidelines. It is our intention to monitor and adjust annually based on the feedback of everyone impacted by the guidelines. Your suggestion has some merit and is certainly worthy of consideration. However, I do not believe it is realistic to expect outside administrators to serve on a panel of this nature as it would be logistically prohibitive for everyone involved. I would also disagree with the contention that administrators do not go against their own teachers, as I can personally attest to several instances where a reported incident was overturned as part of the administrative due process procedure.