

# Hi-Tech Cheating



Excerpts from interviews with poll respondents:

"[I don't cheat] that often, just when I think the test is unfair... the teacher gives questions that are too hard or they did not prepare us for... I guess it's cheating... using work that isn't your own is cheating, but I don't really think about it." – student

"I only [downloaded a paper or report from the Internet] once when I was in 6th grade because my teacher had us do a project that I knew nothing about... I tried to find information, but it was taking too long as it had to be five pages and I started the night before. So I decided I should turn that in instead of nothing." – student

"If someone is texting during a test and looks suspicious, it's obvious they are cheating... the teachers don't really see because the person texting looks for them and hides their phone when the teacher comes by." – student

Common Sense Media ([www.commonsensemedia.org](http://www.commonsensemedia.org)) commissioned the Benenson Strategy Group to conduct a poll of teenagers and parents on the use of digital media for cheating in school. Two-thirds of teenagers today own cell phones,\* and most 8- to 12-year-olds will own a cell phone in the next three years.\*\* And those numbers are only a small representation of our kids' 24/7 media world.

The results of the poll show a great need for a national discussion on 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. Technology opens up so many doors for our kids, but it's our responsibility as parents and leaders to start developing a set of rules and guidelines for smart, ethical behavior in an increasingly digital world.

## Key findings

More than a third of teens with cell phones (35%) admit to cheating at least once with them. And two-thirds of all teens (65%) say others in their school cheat with them. Half (52%) of teens admitted to some form of cheating involving the Internet. Many students don't consider these activities serious cheating offenses – and some don't consider them cheating at all.

- For example, only 41% say that storing notes on a cell phone to access during a test is cheating and a "serious offense." And almost 1 in 4 (23%) don't think it's cheating at all.
- Similarly, only 45% say texting friends about answers during tests is cheating and a serious offense, while 20% say it's not cheating at all.
- More than a third (36%) say that downloading a paper from the Internet to turn in isn't a serious cheating offense, and almost 1 in 5 (19%) say it isn't cheating at all.

Parents are quite realistic when it comes to the frequency of cheating in schools – they just don't believe it happens in their own backyard.

- 76% say cell phone cheating happens at their child's school. But perhaps not surprisingly, just 3% of parents say *their* child has ever cheated with cell phones.
- Similarly, 79% say teens at their child's school download papers from the Internet to turn in as their own work, but only 7% say *their* child has done this.

## Cell phone use in schools

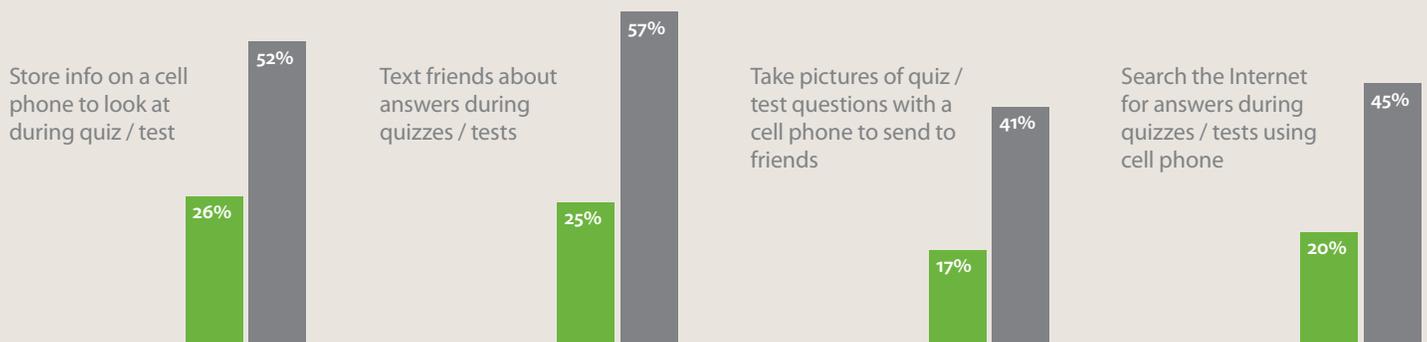
Nearly two-thirds of students with cell phones (65%) use them during school, regardless of policies against this at most schools. But parents don't seem to know their child is using his / her cell phone in school.

- Teens with cell phones send 440 texts a week on average... and 110 a week while in the classroom.

### Cheating and cell phones

■ % of all teen cell phone users who've done this  
■ % of all teens who say people at school have done this

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“Technology changes have happened so quickly, I didn’t even think of [talking to my kids about them]... plus, I believe my kids’ consciences would prevent them from doing it, as they are good kids deep down.”  
– parent

“I don’t think [students] use phones too much because teachers are watching.” – parent

“Truthfully I have no clue how they [would use technology to cheat].” – parent

The white paper is available for download at our Web site, [www.common sense media.org/hi-tech-cheating](http://www.common sense media.org/hi-tech-cheating).

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## What can we do about it?

**Parents:** Be aware of the technology that kids are using every day. Don’t be afraid of it – embrace it. Get educated on how to use digital media, and don’t turn a blind eye just because you’re unsure how things work. Don’t assume kids know what to do or how to behave on their own. Establish open communication about technology – including a strict set of guidelines for kids to follow. Most importantly, understand that kids *are* cheating – even your own – and address the issue with your kids so the consequences are fully understood.

**Educators:** Understand that cheating is happening, and discuss the clear consequences with students. If no one is talking about it, kids are more likely to continue doing it. If there are open discussions, warnings, and guidelines for taking tests and writing papers, kids are going to be more hesitant. In conjunction with this poll, Common Sense Media is also releasing a white paper that lays out our vision for digital literacy and citizenship in the 21st century. Cheating is just part of the larger issue of how we want our kids to live and lead in a digital world.

To ensure that America’s youth have the knowledge, skills, and ethics they need to harness the power and the potential of this increasingly digital world, we must:

### EDUCATE

Create tools and curricula that teach young people how to be media savvy and safe, to search for age-appropriate content, and to be careful and ethical with regard to their own digital conduct.

### EMPOWER

Give parents and teachers the tools and information they need to raise kids to be responsible and respectful digital citizens.

### PROTECT

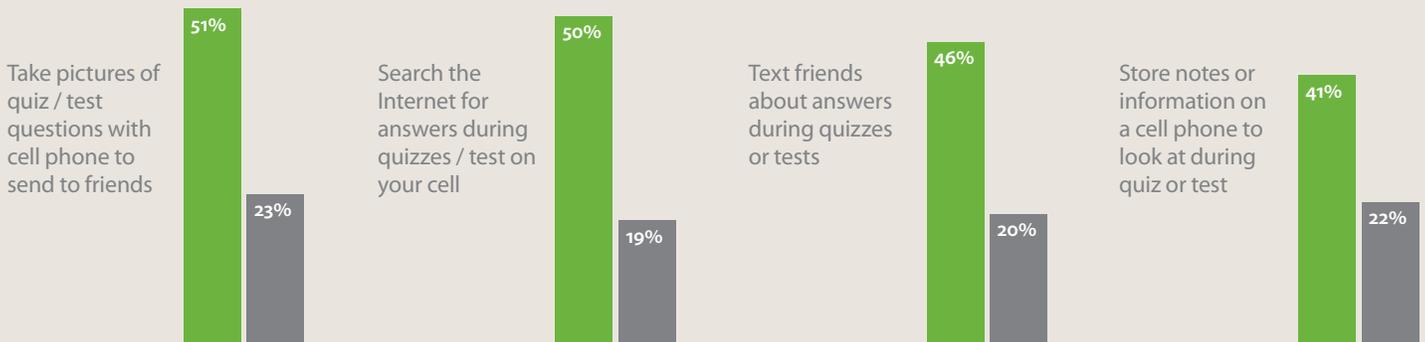
Define a healthy balance between safe and smart digital media practices for kids and families and other important societal rights.

\*U.S. Cellular (2008) \*\*The Yankee Group (2008)

### Type of cheating

■ Think it’s cheating  
■ Think it’s not really cheating or it’s just helping a friend

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#### About Common Sense Media

Common Sense Media is the nation’s leading nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to improving the impact of media and entertainment on kids and families. Common Sense Media provides trustworthy ratings and reviews of media, entertainment, and technology based on child development criteria created by leading national experts. For more information, visit [www.common sense media.org](http://www.common sense media.org).

#### About Benenson Strategy Group

The Benenson Strategy Group is a nationally recognized strategic research and consulting firm with a reputation for being energetic, fast-paced, and analytically aggressive. Founded in 2001, The Benenson Strategy Group’s clients include major nonprofit organizations, President Barack Obama, governors, U.S. senators, members of Congress, international labor unions, and Fortune 100 companies. For more information, visit [www.bsgco.com](http://www.bsgco.com).