



A Clever Idea: Reduce Accountability to Reduce Cheating

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Of course, it is disturbing whenever individuals in positions of trust abuse that trust. It is most disturbing when the abusers are educated, supposedly knowledgeable individuals. Recent scandalous examples are disappointing; ranging from college officials who placed football reputation ahead of children's safety, corporate officers who report bogus profits, bank officials who ruined clients they had committed to protect and educators who falsified student performance records to advance their own careers. All of these perpetrators held positions that the public relies on for integrity and none falls into the category of common criminal.

To be sure, public reaction to these trusted individuals who broke rules has been wide spread and sanctions and penalties for those who are caught have broad public support. Even though it is well-accepted that the numbers involved represent a small fraction of the decent individuals who hold similar positions, there is no good excuse for greed, dishonesty or deceit from even a few. Loss of employment, financial penalties and incarceration as consequences of abuse of trust are being assessed or are under consideration. Public officials are actively engaged in developing better warning signals, greater controls and stiffer penalties to deter rule violations. Public revulsion and consequence calls for reactions to scandals are to be expected.

However, one reaction from some education experts is new, different and quite novel. Since, it is argued, that a major cause of educator cheating is the recently established outside pressure on educators to meet standards and report student achievement, the incidence of cheating by educators can be reduced by removing this pressure. Back off of the so-called accountability movement and return to the less pressured times when educators evaluated their own performance. Do away with standardized assessment and the public reporting of results and the incidences of cheating will disappear, the argument goes.

This argument is compelling and most likely predictive.

A similar initiative to do away with speed limits and traffic enforcement could dramatically reduce the number of reported traffic violations. Eliminating required and standardized accounting of corporate profits could reduce the incidence of reported fraud and financial misrepresentation. Seems pretty simple.

Pretty simple, that is, until someone asks about the consequences.