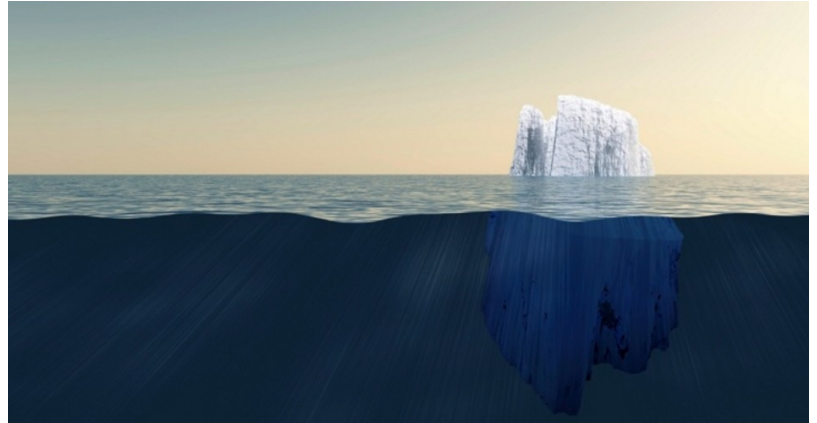




Written by [Alex Newman](#) on April 15, 2015

Atlanta School Cheating Scandal Is Just Tip of the Iceberg

A [massive conspiracy among government-education officials in Atlanta](#) to inflate student test scores by cheating resulted this week in seven-year prison sentences for some of the conspirators, convicted by a jury recently of racketeering, conspiracy, and other crimes. But while a handful of public school employees in Georgia may be facing the brunt of public outrage — though some are attempting to justify it — the scandal in Atlanta represents just the tip of a giant scandalous iceberg, according to experts. In fact, just in recent months, more cheating schemes to fraudulently boost student test scores have been discovered in Pennsylvania, Ohio, New Mexico, and other states. The true magnitude of the problem has yet to be discovered — and the cheating scandal pales in comparison to other, far more serious abuses and crimes going on in the government school system.



The scandal now engulfing Atlanta's government-school system began in 2011, when state investigators [uncovered the cheating](#) on standardized assessments that had been going on for years. The reason for the fraud was an effort to meet federal "benchmarks" to bring in bigger budgets, keep jobs, and earn undeserved bonuses. The scale of the conspiracy was massive: At least 178 principals and teachers across the school district were reportedly involved. Dozens were fired or quit, more than 20 pleaded guilty to everything from obstruction to making false statements, and another 12 were criminally prosecuted for the conspiracy. Even the superintendent at the time, Beverly Hall, who died from cancer before the case was over, was reportedly involved. Prosecutors and investigators also argued that whistleblowers who attempted to expose the conspiracy faced retaliation from officials.

After a high-profile trial that sparked months of headlines across America, 10 former school district employees were convicted. This week, sentences that are being described as "tough" were handed out to many of them. Two of those involved took plea deals, with the others being sentenced to between one and seven years behind bars. "I think there were hundreds, thousands of children who were harmed," said Fulton County Superior Court Judge Jerry Baxter. "That's what gets lost in all of this." Blasting the educational fraud, the judge also referred to the scandal as "the sickest thing that's ever happened in this town." Public outrage over the scandal was boiling across Atlanta and nationwide, with countless critics saying the students had been cheated out of everything from a decent education to government funds that would have paid for tutoring those scoring poorly on the tests.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, some apologists for the government school system are openly expressing sympathy with the convicted conspirators. Among other arguments, the apologists claim that the controversial standardized testing regime forced on American schools is to blame — not the criminals



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who cheated to boost the scores. “I think these teachers got caught in a trap,” argued former Atlanta Mayor Andrew Young in a statement to the judge this week. It is true that the obsessive reliance on federally imposed tests is a major problem. Students, teachers, education, and taxpayers all suffer as a result. However, the way to deal with it is not by cheating. Instead, those educators and school officials should have worked to raise awareness of the damage being inflicted, and have state and local authorities refuse to participate in the federal scheming.

Other commentators expressed outrage and noted that the scandal in Atlanta was merely scratching the surface. “While there’s widespread teacher test cheating to conceal education failure, most notably among black children, it’s just the tip of the iceberg,” [explained](#) Walter Williams, professor of economics at George Mason University, pointing to a series of statistics showing that children in cities such as Philadelphia, where another cheating scandal emerged last year, are performing terribly. “Politicians, civil rights organizations and the education establishment will do nothing about the fraud. In fact, they give their full allegiance to the perpetrators.” Indeed, despite the obligatory comments that cheating is not acceptable, there was widespread sympathy expressed among self-styled “leaders” in Atlanta and other areas surrounding the cheating scandal.

What happened in Atlanta, of course, is symptomatic of cheating scandals going on nationwide. A 2012 survey of educators in Arizona found that four in 10 knew of colleagues cheating. In recent years, cheating on standardized tests by educators has been confirmed in some 40 states, along with the District of Columbia. One expert who has drawn attention to the problem is Robert Schaeffer, public education director of the National Center for Fair and Open Testing. Despite trying to shift the blame for the widespread criminality onto the abuse of standardized testing — Bush-era “No Child Left Behind” scheming and Obama’s “Race to the Top” agenda, for example — Schaeffer has been raising awareness about the fact that the scandal in Atlanta represents what he describes as merely the “tip of a cheating iceberg.” Cut-and-dry cheating schemes such as what was exposed in Atlanta, he also explained, are hardly the only means used by dishonest educators to fraudulently boost scores.

“Adults manipulated test scores in more than 60 ways, from shouting out correct answers to barring likely low-scorers from enrolling,” Schaeffer explained in a recent analysis published by the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. “Across the nation, strategies that boost scores without improving learning are spreading rapidly. These include changing answers, narrow teaching to the test and pushing out low-performing students. These practices are immoral, unethical and, in many cases illegal.” However, he also claims that it is all “completely understandable” and that it is “hardly surprising that more school professionals cross the ethical line” in the face of pressure to boost scores. In essence, Schaeffer, who has been widely quoted amid the cheating scandals, argues that the fixation on tests is the problem — and that to end widespread cheating on them, the “misuses” of the testing schemes must end as well.

Of course, Schaeffer does make a number of valid points about the outrageous testing regime imposed on state governments and local school districts by unconstitutional federal actions. And while those in no way justify criminal cheating, it is beyond clear that the standardized tests demanded by lawmakers and unconstitutional Washington, D.C., bureaucracies are a major problem. Now, in addition to enforcing compliance with federally backed “standards,” the assessments are being used to gather unprecedented amounts of sensitive data for dossiers on U.S. children. That is part of the reason why, across America, students are “opting out” of the standardized tests in massive numbers — generally with the support of their parents. As *The New American* [reported recently](#), the trend is exploding and may, if it continues, represent a serious hurdle to the radical “cradle-to-career” education agenda being



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pursued by the establishment.

Beyond those very serious issues, though, is a scandal that makes the fraudulently achieved test scores pale by comparison. As education expert Sam Blumenfeld and this writer document extensively in the recent book [Crimes of the Educators: How Utopians Are Using Government Schools to Destroy America's Children](#), the government education system has been literally designed to dumb down the population of the United States. The fruits of the miseducation system are now clear to see as well: Widespread functional illiteracy, a destruction of moral values, a lack of understanding on everything from history to civics, and a great nation in decline. It was no accident. To deal with the very real crisis in the schools, the establishment, which is largely responsible for the disaster, is now in the next phase in its radical campaign: Imposing the Obama administration-backed Common Core national standards across America. Not only will the terrible standards not solve the crisis, however, they will make it worse — and much harder to fix. At the global level, [similar schemes promoted by UNESCO and other entities](#) are taking place as well.

The solution to the educational crisis that has produced students unable to understand even basic reading and math, and teachers willing to engage in cheating, is not further federalizing schools and stepping up the entire testing regime. In fact, the exact opposite — restoring local control and proper education, such as phonics reading methods — is where any serious efforts must begin. Aside from being unconstitutional, federal involvement in education has played a key role producing the escalating education disaster currently engulfing America. While the cheating scandal in Atlanta may sound outrageous, it did not happen in a vacuum, and it must be viewed in context — in reality, it is a mere symptom of far broader problems. The fact that schools are dumbing down children by design is an infinitely more serious scandal. And that deserves far more public attention than cheating conspiracies.



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