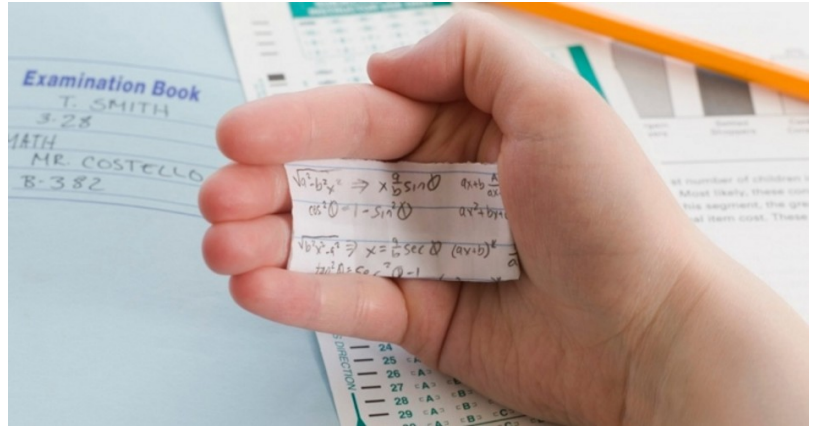




Written by [Brian Koenig](#) on August 31, 2012

## Atlanta Teacher Helped Students Cheat Because They Were “Dumb as Hell”

An Atlanta math teacher allegedly offered students the answers to a test because she thought they were “dumb as hell,” the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* [reported](#) August 29. Shayla Smith, a former fifth-grade teacher at Dobbs Elementary School, was responsible for overseeing students while they were taking state-sponsored tests, and all tests monitored by Smith were reportedly blotched with questionable erasure marks, amounting to a “practically impossible frequency of changes from wrong to right [answers],” according to the Atlanta paper.



Around that time Schajuan Jones, who taught fourth-grade from across the hall, overheard Smith discussing the test with another teacher. “The words were, ‘I had to give your kids, or your students, the answers because they’re dumb as hell,’” Jones said of the dialogue between Smith and the other teacher.

A now-eighth-grade student also accused the disgraced educator of cheating, asserting that Smith offered the girl answers to a math test in 2010. “She would walk around and tell people the answer,” the student [asserted](#). “She would just come to our desks and read the question and say the answer.”

Superintendent Erroll Davis said erasure analyses revealed that tests supervised by Smith had an extraordinarily [high number of wrong-to-right erasures](#). “This district has lost complete and utter confidence in her ability to remain in the classroom,” Davis said of the disgraced teacher. “I have absolutely no confidence that [this] teacher could, in fact, administer future exams with integrity.”

Smith’s wrongdoing is part of a much broader scandal — arguably one of the worst U.S. teaching scandals ever — that implicated more than 170 Atlanta public school teachers, which has ignited an ongoing investigation. A year-long probe by former Georgia Gov. Sonny Perdue (R) released a startling [800-page report](#) in July 2011 that exposed rampant teacher cheating and unethical practices in the 55,000-student Atlanta public school system. Investigators administered more than 2,000 interviews and brushed through 800,000 documents in what is potentially the most comprehensive investigation of public-school cheating in U.S. history.

Students in the Atlanta school system have scored exceptionally high on state curriculum tests over the years, bringing national acclaim to the state’s schools, educators, and administrators. Due to the districts’ award-winning “success” in student achievement, Superintendent Beverly Hall was named the 2009 National Superintendent of the Year. Conveniently, Hall retired from her post on June 30 of last year, only days before the scandal was unveiled.

Student test scores soared throughout Hall’s tenure, *The New American* [reported](#) at the time, while she collected hundreds of thousands of dollars in bonuses, along with national applause — because of such extraordinary “improvements” in Atlanta student test scores.



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“In many ways, the community was duped by Dr. Hall. While the district had rampant cheating, community leaders were unaware of the misconduct in the district,” Perdue’s report stated. “She abused the trust they placed in her. Hall became a subject of adoration and made herself the focus rather than the children ... Her image became more important than reality.”

Perdue’s investigation revealed anxiety among teachers who were intimidated and threatened by principals and administrators. A third-grade teacher [confessed](#) to investigators, “There are ways that APS [Atlanta Public Schools] can get back at you [if you do not participate in cheating]. APS is run like a mob.” The report uncovered a “culture of fear, intimidation and retaliation” that forced teachers into delivering students the correct answers as well as amending wrong answers on standardized tests.

Of the 180 or so teachers who were caught cheating, only 17 have been fired, 16 reinstated, and 110 have either resigned or retired. According to [Georgia state law](#), educators can be fired for “incompetency, insubordination, willful neglect of duties, immorality, encouraging students to violate the law, failure to secure and maintain necessary educational training and any other good and sufficient cause.”

However, due to a costly, complicated, and heavily union-guarded system, firing an incompetent teacher — even for allegations as severe as sexual misconduct — can take months, and sometimes even years.

This scandal serves as yet another example of what many perceive to be the failure and inadequacy of government-run education in this country.



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