



Hi-Tech Cheating: Cell Phones and Cheating in Schools *A National Poll*

Overview

Common Sense Media 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 the great dilemma our children face today. Personal technology has been a real game-changer for education. Information has never been easier to access, and the Internet provides powerful ways to collaborate, communicate, and create. Many believe the mobile phone also has potential as a learning tool. But as this poll shows, the unintended consequence of these versatile technologies is that they've made cheating easier. Digital life, by its nature, is distant, hard to track, and often anonymous, which can diminish the impact of action and consequences.

The call to action is clear: Parents and educators have to help our kids apply the same sense of responsibility and ethical behavior whether they're online or off.

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.commonsensemedia.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 non-profit 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.

Methodology

The Benenson Strategy Group conducted a total of 2,015 nationally representative online interviews with students and parents between May 28, 2009 and June 5, 2009. All respondents were screened prior to entering the survey to ensure they were:

Students (N=1,013)

- Ages 13-18
- Currently enrolled in grades 7-12

Parents (N=1,002)

- Age 30+
- Parent of a child age 13-18 who is currently enrolled in grades 7-12

The margin of error for students is ± 3.08 and is ± 3.10 for parents at the 95% confidence level. It is higher among subgroups.

The sample also included 846 teens with cell phones (margin of error $\pm 3.37\%$ at the 95% confidence level) and 839 parents of teens who have cell phones (margin of error ± 3.38 at the 95% confidence level).

Within the memo, “cell phone cheaters” includes the following behaviors:

- Text friends about answers during quizzes or tests
- Take pictures of quiz or test questions with a cell phone to send to a friend
- Search the internet for answers during quizzes or tests
- Store notes or information on a cell phone to look at during a quiz or test

Internet cheating includes:

- Download a paper or report from the internet to turn in as their own work
- Copy text from websites to turn in as their own work
- Search the internet to find a teacher’s manual or publication with answers

Respondents were also invited to participate in real-time, online one-on-one interviews, conducted by iModerate Research Technologies, following their responses to questions regarding cheating behaviors. We conducted a total of 55 interviews (28 with students and 27 with parents).

Key Findings

Digital Cheating

- 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:
 - o Most notably, more than a third (38%) have copied text from Web sites and turned it in as their own work.
- No significant differences in the frequency of cheating private vs. public school or honors students vs. non-honors students.
- Many students don’t consider these activities serious cheating offenses — and some don’t consider them cheating at all.
 - o 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.
 - o 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.
 - o Over a third (36%) said that downloading a paper from the Internet to turn in was not a serious cheating offense, and almost 1 in 5 (19%) said 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% says *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.

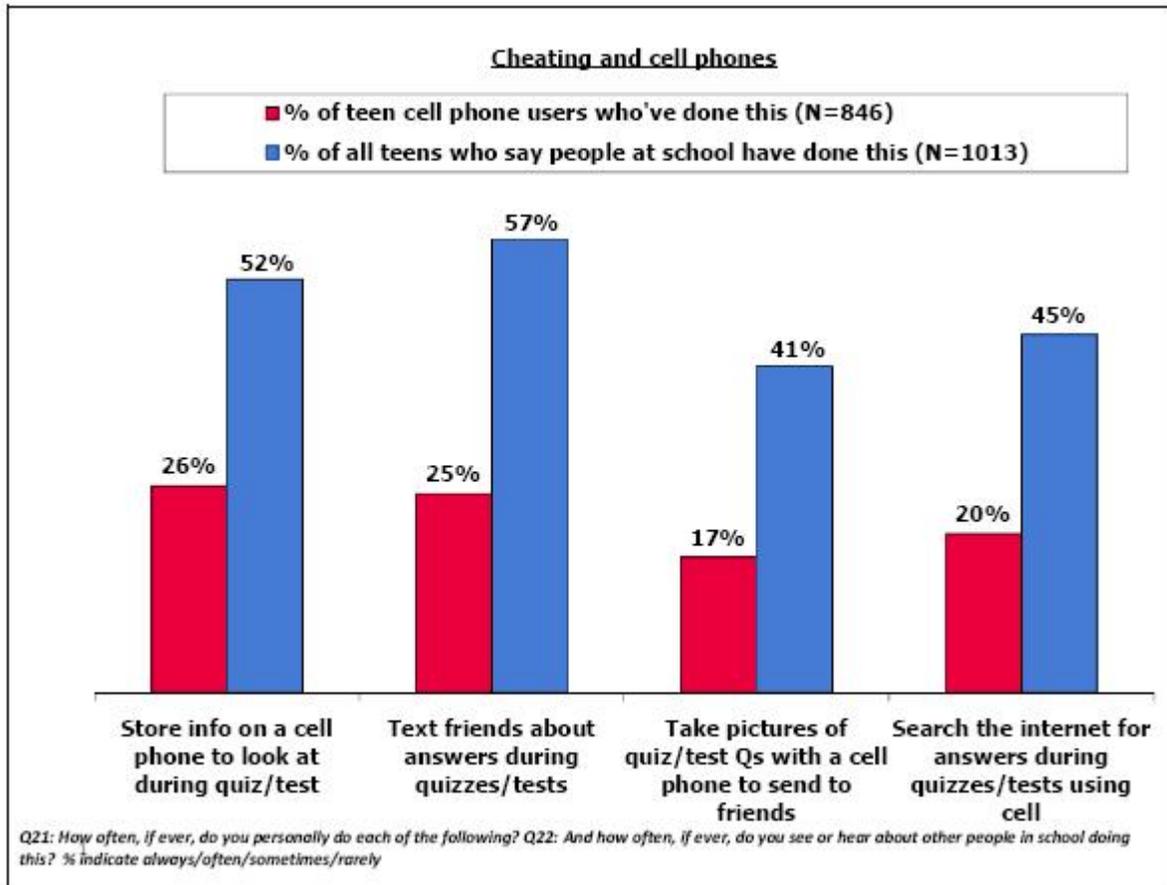
*U.S. Cellular (2008)

** The Yankee Group (2008)

Detailed Findings

Cheating With Cell Phones Widespread

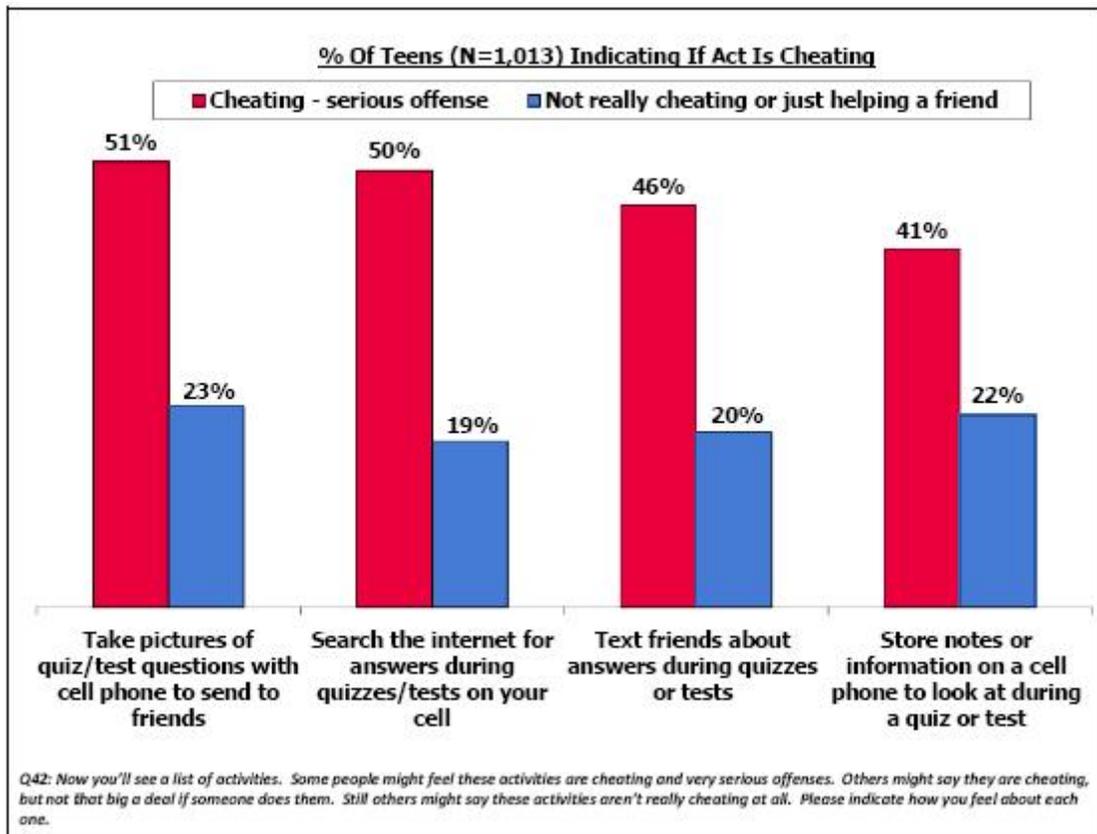
- More than a third (35%) of teens with cell phones admit to cheating at least once with them. And 65% of all teens say they have seen or heard about other people in their schools cheating with cell phones. Specific types of cell phone cheating include:



(Full data table in appendix)

- No significant differences are seen across private vs. public school or honors students vs. non-honors students.

- Only around half of students tend to say these activities are a serious cheating offense (and less in some cases).

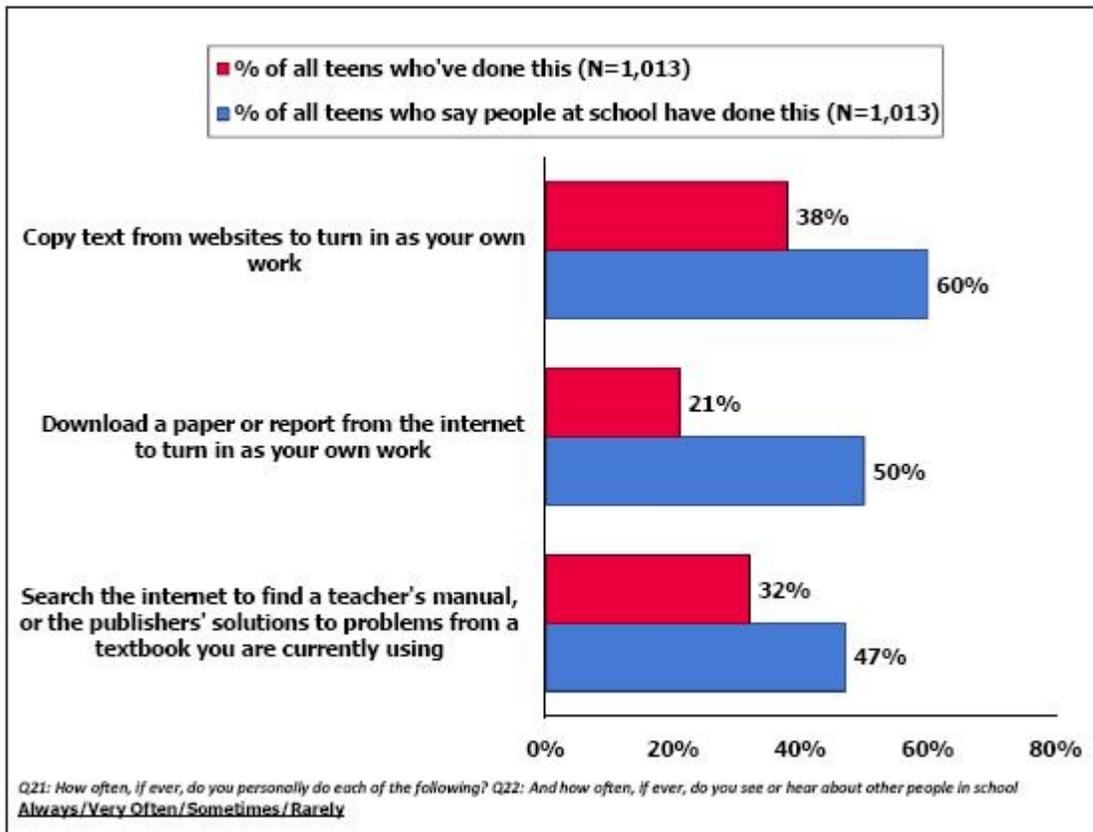


(Full data table in appendix)

- Though it's debatable whether or not it's truly cheating, nearly half (48%) of teens with cell phones call or text friends to warn them about pop quizzes. And there's little debate among teens – just 16% say this is cheating and a serious offense and 46% say it's just helping out a friend.

Cheating & The Internet

- A majority (52%) of teens admitted to some form of cheating involving the Internet:
 - o 21% have downloaded a paper or report from the Internet to turn in (and 50% have seen/heard about others doing this)
 - o 38% have copied text from Web sites and turned it in as their own work (60% have seen/heard about others doing this)
 - o 32% have searched for teachers' manuals or publishers' solutions to problems in textbooks they are currently using (47% have seen/heard about others doing this)



- While students generally viewed plagiarism more seriously than other types of cheating, a full third of teens (36%) said that downloading a paper from the Internet was not a serious offense and 42% said copying text from Web sites was either a minor offense or not cheating at all.

View of Internet Activities: Are they considered cheating?	Teens (N=1,013)			
	Yes, serious offense	Yes, minor offense	No but not permitted	Just helping yourself/a friend
Search the internet to find a teacher's manual, or the publishers' solutions to problems from a textbook you are currently using	36	28	20	16
Copy text from websites to turn in as your own work	58	20	14	8
Download a paper or report from the internet to turn in as your own work	64	17	11	8

Parents, Teens Getting their Wires Crossed?

- Parents are shockingly ready to believe that cell phone cheating is even more widespread than teens believe. But, perhaps not surprisingly, almost no one is willing to believe their child is the culprit.
 - o While 92% of parents say some time of cell phone cheating happens at their child's school, just 3% of parents say their child has done any one of the following.

Frequency of Cheating With Cell Phones	Parents with Cell User Children (N=839)	Parents (N=1,002)
	% say child has done this	% say occurs at child's school
	EVEN ONCE	Always+ Often+ Sometimes + Rarely
Text friends about answers during quizzes or tests	3	70
Store notes or information on a cell phone to look at during a quiz or test	1	72
Search the internet for answers during quizzes or tests using your cell or mobile device	1	68
Take pictures of quiz or test questions with a cell phone to send to friends before they take the quiz or test	1	67

- As seen with cell phone cheating, parents seem to think Internet cheating happens more frequently than teens even see it happening; however, again, they are largely unwilling to believe their children are the ones cheating.

Frequency of Cheating With Cell Phones	Parents (N=1,002)	
	% say child has done this	% say occurs at child's school
	EVEN ONCE	Always+ Often+ Sometimes + Rarely
Copy text from websites to turn in as your own work	20	80
Download a paper or report from the internet to turn in as your own work	7	79
Search the internet to find a teacher's manual, or the publishers' solutions to problems from a textbook you are currently using	8	77

- If parents are discussing ethical behavior, and what's right and wrong when it comes to using technology like cell phones and the Internet in school and for school work, many teens aren't hearing it.
 - o 80% of parents say they've addressed this with their kids, but only 64% of teens say their parents have.

Cell Phones Invading Schools

- More than 8 in 10 teens (83%) have cell phones, and over half (53%) have had them since they were 12 or younger.
- While parents may be getting their teens phones to coordinate schedules or reach them in an emergency, they seem largely oblivious to how teens are using them:
 - o 65% of students with cell phones say they use them during school. (n=846)
 - o Only 23% of parents whose children have cell phones think they are using them during school. (n=839)
- Cell phone policies, as currently enforced, are barely making a dent. A large majority of schools (69%, as reported by teens) do not permit phones to be used during the day. However, among teens with cell phones (n=846) at schools...
 - o ... where phones must remain off all day: 66% use them in school anyway
 - o ... where phones must be stored during the day: 57% use them in school anyway
 - o ... that ban cell phones altogether in school: 63% use them in school anyway
 - o ... with no real or known cell phone restrictions: 72% use them in school anyway
- Teens' rampant texting also doesn't stop at the school gate. On average, teens with cell phones (n=846) send:
 - o 440 texts in an average week
 - o 110 texts in an average week during class
 - o Assuming a student has seven classes a day in a five day school week, this translates to sending more than three texts per class period.
- Perhaps because they don't realize just how widespread cell phone use in schools is, parents aren't clamoring for stricter cell phone policies in school. Just 10% say policies aren't strict enough, while 7% say they are too strict, and 83% say they are appropriate. (among n=888 parents whose child's school has a cell phone policy).

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Appendix: Data tables

Q21: How often, if ever, do you personally do each of the following? Q22: And how often, if ever, do you see or hear about other people in school doing this? % indicate always/often/sometimes/rarely

Types of Cheating with Cell Phones Among Teens	% of cell phone users who've done this (N=846)	% of all teens who say people at school have done this (N=1013)
	(% always/often/sometimes/rarely)	
Store notes or information on a cell phone to look at during a quiz or test	25	52
Text friends about answers during quizzes or tests	25	57
Take pictures of quiz or test questions with a cell phone to send to friends before they take the quiz or test	17	41
Search the internet for answers during quizzes or tests using your cell or mobile device	20	45

Q42: Now you'll see a list of activities. Some people might feel these activities are cheating and very serious offenses. Others might say they are cheating, but not that big a deal if someone does them. Still others might say these activities aren't really cheating at all. Please indicate how you feel about each one.

Cell Phone Activities: Are They Cheating?	Teens (N=1,013)			
	Yes, serious offense	Yes, minor offense	No but not permitted	Just helping yourself/a friend
Take pictures of quiz or test questions with a cell phone to send to friends before they take the quiz or test	51	26	13	11
Search the internet for answers during quizzes or tests using your cell or mobile device	50	31	10	9
Text friends about answers during quizzes or tests	45	34	9	11
Store notes or information on a cell phone to look at during a quiz or test	41	37	13	10