

WESTPORT PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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Dear Parents:

Every school wrestles with issues of *academic integrity*. In Westport, as elsewhere, scholastic dishonesty has been made easier--and so much more tempting--with the advent of the internet and of technology which brings a broad range of information within effortless reach of everyone.

To combat cheating we have adopted a range of consequences for students who violate the rules against unethical behavior. These are discussed both in our parent handbook and in the handbooks of each individual school. But the outcome of soul-searching staff discussions is the recognition that our primary aim as a school system is not to catch and punish perpetrators, but to help children develop the degree of competence, the self esteem, and the sense of honor that would preclude cheating, plagiarism, or any other strategy to avoid doing their own work, or to usurp the work of others without acknowledgement.

In collaboration with parents and the larger community, our school district has identified goals for Westport students, prominent among which are that students should treasure learning for its own sake, strive to do their personal best, develop academic competence, learn to think analytically, value ethical behavior and take responsibility for their own actions. There is no doubt in my mind that the *values* goals and the *academic* goals are inseparable. Because, after all, who are the cheaters cheating? They are cheating themselves since, if they do not truly learn and do their own work, but resort to subterfuges, they may, if undetected, *look good on paper*—but they will not have acquired the knowledge and skills needed for a successful life, or developed the confidence that accompanies that competence.

While the problem may seem more acute in the upper grades, the mind-set that either allows students to cheat, or protects them from the temptation, starts much earlier and is influenced not only by what we teach them at school, but what they see all around them, in their families and the world at large. Even as parents and teachers encourage students to get good grades and develop their transcripts, we need to help them see that the real value of education lies not in the grade, but in the learning it represents. At the start of this new school year I invite you, our partners in your children's education, to share the responsibility of reinforcing the attributes of diligent work, academic integrity and personal honesty that we all value.

Sincerely,

Elliott Landon
Superintendent of Schools

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