
The Washington Post

SAT Firm Probes Cheating at Landon; [FINAL Edition]

Brigid Schulte. **The Washington Post**. Washington, D.C.: Nov 26, 2002. pg. B.03

Full Text (577 words)

Copyright The Washington Post Company Nov 26, 2002

The company that administers the SAT is conducting a widespread investigation into allegations of cheating after eight students at the Landon School in Bethesda admitted to copying and sharing answers to boost their scores.

Although they declined to comment on the specifics of their investigation, officials with the Educational Testing Service said yesterday that they are reviewing not only the tests taken by the eight Landon seniors but also those of every student in the room at the Holton-Arms School in Bethesda, where the college entrance exam was administered Oct. 12.

That day, students from a number of area schools, including Holton-Arms and Georgetown Preparatory School, were in the testing room. Sources familiar with what happened said the room was poorly proctored, opening an opportunity for sharing and copying.

"Some chitchatting started, and the next thing, kids were exchanging information," said Rob Bordley, coach of Landon's top-ranked lacrosse team, some of whose players admitted cheating.

ETS opens an investigation if a student's combined math and verbal SAT scores rise 350 points from one administration of the exam to the next. The New Jersey-based company also looks into irregularities when contacted by schools or test centers.

In this case, Landon Headmaster Damon F. Bradley contacted ETS two weeks ago, after officials of the all-boys private school heard rumblings of cheating and when some SAT results came back with higher-than-expected scores. One week later, the eight male students came forward and admitted cheating.

"We don't just look at the ones involved in the allegation," said Ray Nicosia, director of test security for ETS. "We look at the test center."

Working with seating charts and a computer index of average scores for schools and individuals, ETS looks at the number of wrong answers that match test takers seated in the same area or same room. It's a measure called the Probability of Matched Incorrect Answers and helps company officials track test copying or illegal information exchange.

Investigations can take anywhere from a week to a month, Nicosia said. Often ETS officials contact students or school staff members to add to the analytical data they've gathered, he said.

Once all the evidence is in, ETS convenes a panel and determines whether to take no action, or to cancel scores and give students either a refund or a chance to retake the test.

"We have to narrow down who, if anyone, had an unfair advantage. Was it a small group sharing, or was it widespread?" Nicosia said. "If we cannot determine who did and who did not benefit, then we cancel all scores and offer a free retest."

A spokesman for Holton-Arms, an all-girls private school, referred a reporter's inquiry to ETS. Tim Lewthwaite, Georgetown Prep's spokesman, said: "No one has come to our administration directly with any allegations of cheating on the October 12 administration of the SAT test. If they do, we will follow our internal disciplinary procedures."

Bradley said the student honor council at Landon met Sunday and yesterday to determine disciplinary recommendations on the eight students who confessed to cheating. The school's honor code calls for three- to five-day suspensions for first-time infractions, and expulsion -- although rare -- for repeated, serious honor code violations.

Bradley expects to announce punishment in a letter to be sent to the students' parents this week. The fact that the eight came forward will be an important mitigating factor, he said. "Adolescence is a time of growth," Bradley said. "Not perfection."

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction or distribution is prohibited without permission.

Subjects: Private schools, Investigations, Entrance examinations, Cheating

Locations: Bethesda Maryland

Companies: Educational Testing Service (NAICS: 611710, Sic:8299) , Landon School-Bethesda MD (NAICS: 611110)

Document types: News

Section: *METRO*

ISSN/ISBN: 01908286

Text Word Count 577

Document URL: