

Part 3: Why *should* you care about the “appropriateness” of test preparation?

As educators, our decisions are constantly guided by considerations about what would be in the best interests of our students. Decisions regarding test-preparation activities should be no different. Sometimes, however, exactly how students might benefit or be harmed by a particular activity is not all that clear. Thus, it’s also important to consider how you personally might be impacted, or how your school or district could be impacted.

For example, consider the following headlines:

“TEACHER IS ACCUSED OF CHEATING ON STATE TEST”

“SCHOOL UNDER SUSPICION FOR CHEATING”

What if one of these headlines about your school was in your local paper? In the *Des Moines Register*? What would be the potential fallout?

Here are just some of the potential negative consequences:

- Parents/community might lose confidence in the teacher/school, doubting the trustworthiness and sincerity of future actions.
- Students might believe that “cheating” is an appropriate practice.
- Teachers or administrators might be suspended, fired, and/or have their licenses revoked.

Even if the allegations are not true, the simple suggestion of impropriety can be severely damaging to the integrity of the teachers and/or school. More importantly, the damage to students (e.g., belief that cheating is acceptable, or even expected) might be irreparable.

Let’s take a closer look at what “cheating” means. According to *Encarta® World English Dictionary* © 1999 Microsoft Corporation,

“to cheat” means . . .

- to deceive or mislead somebody
- to break the rules in a game, examination, or contest, in an attempt to gain an unfair advantage

We probably all share a similar understanding of what it means for a student to “cheat.” But what does “cheating” look like when it’s done by an educator in an assessment context?

to deceive or mislead somebody:

actions taken by an educator that result in test scores being higher (or lower) than they should be (i.e., misrepresentation of student achievement)

to break the rules in a game, examination, or contest, in an attempt to gain an unfair advantage:

actions that are not consistent with the standard conditions specified for the administration of the test and/or school policy

Although the potential allegation of “cheating” is an obvious reason for caring about the appropriateness of test preparation, hopefully an even more compelling reason is the negative consequences associated with students receiving scores higher than they really should be. This reason should be made more obvious as the three criteria presented in Part 4 are reviewed.

Time for reflection and/or interaction:

Are there any test-preparation activities that have been used in your school (past or present) that could possibly be considered as “cheating?”