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 a great need for a national discussion on digital ethics. Kids have always found ways to cheat in school, but the tools they now have at their disposal are more powerful than ever. Technology opens up so many doors for our kids, but it’s our responsibility as parents and leaders to start developing a set of rules and guidelines for smart, ethical behavior in an increasingly digital world.

**Key findings**

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. Many students don’t consider these activities serious cheating offenses – and some don’t consider them cheating at all.

- 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.
- 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.
- More than a third (36%) say that downloading a paper from the Internet to turn in isn’t a serious cheating offense, and almost 1 in 5 (19%) say 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% say 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.

### Cheating and cell phones

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>% of all teen cell phone users who’ve done this</th>
<th>% of all teens who say people at school have done this</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Store info on a cell phone to look at during quiz / test</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text friends about answers during quizzes / tests</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take pictures of quiz / test questions with a cell phone to send to friends</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Search the Internet for answers during quizzes / tests using cell phone</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What can we do about it?

Parents: Be aware of the technology that kids are using every day. Don’t be afraid of it – embrace it. Get educated on how to use digital media, and don’t turn a blind eye just because you’re unsure how things work. Don’t assume kids know what to do or how to behave on their own. Establish open communication about technology – including a strict set of guidelines for kids to follow. Most importantly, understand that kids are cheating – even your own – and address the issue with your kids so the consequences are fully understood.

Educators: Understand that cheating is happening, and discuss the clear consequences with students. If no one is talking about it, kids are more likely to continue doing it. If there are open discussions, warnings, and guidelines for taking tests and writing papers, kids are going to be more hesitant. In conjunction with this poll, Common Sense Media is also releasing a white paper that lays out our vision for digital literacy and citizenship in the 21st century. Cheating is just part of the larger issue of how we want our kids to live and lead in a digital world.

To ensure that America’s youth have the knowledge, skills, and ethics they need to harness the power and the potential of this increasingly digital world, we must:

EDUCATE
Create tools and curricula that teach young people how to be media savvy and safe, to search for age-appropriate content, and to be careful and ethical with regard to their own digital conduct.

EMPOWER
Give parents and teachers the tools and information they need to raise kids to be responsible and respectful digital citizens.

PROTECT
Define a healthy balance between safe and smart digital media practices for kids and families and other important societal rights.