

September 3, 2009

At Atlanta Public Schools, integrity and credibility are important to us. When we report consistent gains in student performance, we want our parents, civic leaders, business leaders and others to know those gains are real and measurable.

Over the course of the last decade, test scores have increased along with overall academic performance in the Atlanta Public Schools. This has been the result of implementing research-based instructional practices, smaller class sizes and smaller schools, our efforts to hire and retain more experienced teachers, and a strong management team focused on providing students with the best education possible.

In 2000, APS fourth-graders trailed the state by 18 percentage points – and only 47 percent of them were meeting Georgia standards in reading. Today, 86 percent of APS fourth-graders meet or exceed state standards in reading. And the gap between the state scores and APS scores is essentially closed -- only two percentage points remain. The same is true across all grades and subjects, even as state standards become more rigorous.

Our district-wide graduation rate has increased *by more than 80 percent*, from 39 percent in 2002 to 71.2 percent in 2008.

These gains are real and measurable, and reflect dramatic improvements in the classroom and on standardized tests for *thousands of students* over the last decade.

Everyone was alarmed when the Governor's Office of Student Achievement levied a charge of tampering with 11 students' test sheets during the summer 2008 retest of the CRCT at Deerwood Academy. Tampering with test results hurts everyone, especially students. At APS, cheating is not tolerated. Teachers and administrators who fail to adhere to strict APS and state testing guidelines face harsh penalties, up to and including termination.

We promptly requested an independent investigation to discover if tampering took place on the 11 students' answer sheets. The investigation involved dozens of interviews with test-takers, administrators and others involved in the CRCT retest. And while the study found irregularities in the testing process at Deerwood Academy, it found no evidence of tampering with students' tests. The independent investigator also found that administrators lacked opportunity and motivation to tamper with students' test sheets.

For the summer 2009 CRCT retests, we increased our monitoring to make sure the district's testing procedures were followed during a time when there are fewer administrators on campus. We have also initiated sanctions against those teachers and administrators who failed to follow APS and state testing guidelines during the 2008 summer retests.

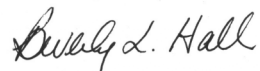
We have re-emphasized the importance to teachers and administrators to report incidents in which they believe cheating or test tampering may have occurred, and we encourage all employees to use our anonymous hotline to report such incidents.

Why are we taking these steps? Because we want you to know that the gains we have experienced over the last decade are genuine. We know those gains are real when students demonstrate improved performance in the classroom and on state and national standardized tests. We know their success is real when they graduate in far greater numbers.

Cheating robs students of the academic attention they need to improve and succeed. Rest assured that we will not tolerate cheating even for one child. We also hope the consistent gains we have made involving thousands of students over the last decade are kept in their proper perspective.

The progress we are making in Atlanta Public Schools is real and measurable. The progress is recognized by our state and our nation. We will continue to push forward for the best education possible for our students.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Beverly L. Hall".

Beverly L. Hall, Ed.D.  
Superintendent