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Opinion

Leadership vacuum: Why the APS cheating scandal matters to you

The Atlanta Public Schools teacher cheating scandal may be old news, but it's still sad news. And whether you know it or not, as business professionals it matters.

Forty-four out of 56 schools in the APS system were found to be cheating on standardized test scores, to ensure students passed and schools got remunerated. Now, we have kids passing into higher grades unready for the challenges they face.

Dr. Beverly Hall, the superintendent since 1999, put incredible pressure on administrators and faculty to get grades up — so the system appeared to be healthy. But it wasn't at all. So often, both our schools and homes do a better job protecting than preparing our kids. Can you imagine what this will do to those students as they enter adulthood unprepared? What a sad commentary on the price adults will pay to survive — even at the expense of the kids. Three truths are clear about so many of these educators:

The focus is me. Adults were more concerned with themselves than the students.

The priority is now. Forget about the negative impact on the future jobs of these kids.

The goal is survival. Teachers got caught up in saving their jobs, not doing their jobs.



VIEWPOINT
Tim Elmore

The long-term impact on all of us

We may not personally feel the impact of this scandal today or even a year from now. But mark my words — we will feel it. As employers, as fellow citizens, these students are our future. And we have damaged them unwittingly. May I suggest the long-term impact we just might feel from it all?

- 1. Waves of depression coming and going.** A student who's passed on to the next grade when they have failed to demonstrate they are ready will eventually spiral. Life will either ambush them or they'll likely sabotage themselves.
- 2. The inability to compete in a global economy.** Students in India and China who've achieved legitimately will surpass our artificial graduates in the United States. There are more honor students in China than all students in the United States. This will only make it worse.
- 3. Expediency will rule the day, not moral leadership.** Adults have modeled pitiful coping mechanisms to survive: just cheat. We cannot expect our kid's ethics/values to be trustworthy if they made progress by cheating.
- 4. Job hopping.** They'll be unable to work hard and follow through. Success has been easy and artificial. With no consequences to actions, long-term commitment will atrophy. By 2030, we may see five-year marriage contracts and few long-term jobs.

This is disgraceful. When education becomes more about teacher tenure and security than about student success, it's time to overhaul the system.

Your future employees are in school today. They're learning something, good or bad.

I wish I could say this is an isolated incident. Unfortunately, other cheating scandals have emerged around the country, including in Washington, D.C. This is disgraceful. When education becomes more about teacher tenure and security than about student success, it's time to overhaul the system. Growing Leaders, our nonprofit, plans to join hands with other organizations and businesses to offer any help we can to superintendent Erroll Davis as he attempts to pick up the pieces. I encourage you to get involved as well.

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Elmore is president of Growing Leaders, a Norcross, Ga.-based nonprofit organization that serves public schools, state universities and civic organizations, as well as faith-based organizations, to develop young leaders.