



U.S.

Philadelphia Principals Fired in Cheating Scandal

By MOTOKO RICH and JON HURDLE JAN. 22, 2014

Three Philadelphia Public Schools principals were fired last week after an investigation into test cheating that has implicated about 140 teachers and administrators, a spokesman for the district said Wednesday.

The action follows years of investigating the results of state standardized math and reading tests taken from 2009 to 2011. The investigation, conducted by the school district and the state department of education, in conjunction with the Pennsylvania Office of Inspector General, identified 33 schools — including three public charter schools — where an analysis of test answer sheets found a suspicious number of wrong answers that were erased and made right.

The 140 educators were accused of violating test protocols, either by providing students with answers, erasing wrong answers or supervising those who did without reporting improprieties, the district said.

With a growing number of teachers, parents and public education activists protesting the heavy reliance on standardized testing to evaluate schools and increasingly, individual teachers, some argue the potentially severe consequences of these tests can lead to cheating.

“Some educators have felt such pressure because of the high-stakes testing,” said Jerry Jordan, president of the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers. “That has unfortunately caused some people to make the very mistaken conclusion to not report accurately student test scores.”

Mr. Jordan said that although there was a legitimate place for standardized testing, it needed to be used “as an instrument to help drive

and improve instruction, not as an instrument to punish staff and schools.”

School district officials, working with the law firm Morgan Lewis & Bockius, interviewed more than 550 people, including teachers, principals, other administrators and some students.

The district cleared three schools of any wrongdoing and found inconclusive evidence at three other campuses. But 69 educators at 13 schools showed evidence of cheating, according to the district spokesman, Fernando Gallard.

Another 29 employees have either retired, resigned or been laid off, Mr. Gallard said. An additional 31 teachers, seven administrators and two other school employees on staff could face disciplinary action, Mr. Gallard said. Depending on the severity of their actions, the educators may be fired, suspended or barred from coordinating tests.

Philadelphia schools have been battered by a series of troubles. Last spring, the district closed 23 schools, and in the fall, schools opened with far fewer teachers, administrators and other staff because of severe budget cuts.

“We are saddened to see so many individuals involved in cheating,” Mr. Gallard said. “But we are serious about the implications of it and the actions that we are taking.” He said he was “not aware of” any criminal charges against Philadelphia educators but said that the district would cooperate with any agency that requested information or assistance.

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