Forget passing handwritten notes underneath desks or inking your arm with essential math formulas before a killer test. If students today want to cheat, they have a more insidious tool at their disposal: cellphones. More than one third of teens with cellphones admit to having stored information on them to look at during a test or texting friends about answers, a new survey finds.

And teens' parents, while realistic about the frequency of cheating in schools, might need to overcome their own blind spots: More than 75 percent of parents responding to the survey say that cellphone cheating happens at their children's school, but only 3 percent believe their own teen is using a cellphone to cheat.

"I believe my kids' consciences would prevent them from doing it, as they are good kids deep down," one parent said in an interview for the nationwide online poll, conducted by Common Sense Media, a San Francisco-based education company.

"The results should be a wake-up call for educators and parents," says James Steyer, CEO and founder of Common Sense Media. "These versatile technologies have made cheating easier. The call to action is clear."

That action, Steyer says, should consist of parents and teachers educating themselves on how kids use technology to cheat and then helping students understand that the consequences for online or electronic cheating are just as serious as those for old-fashioned cheating.

But first, adults will have to leap another hurdle. Nearly 1 in 4 students thinks that accessing notes on a cellphone, texting friends with answers, or using a phone to search the Internet for answers during a test isn't cheating.

Some students say that the lack of person-to-person contact in new 21st-century methods of cheating makes it harder for them to feel as if they're doing something wrong. Others see texting during tests simply as helping one another, as opposed to looking at someone else's paper during an exam, which they consider cheating.

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Madeline Jones, a recent graduate of Baylake Pines School in Virginia Beach, Va., says that for papers or online tests, students might use the Web to copy and paste text from other published reports. And for regular in-class exams, she says sneaky students can easily take advantage of the iPhone and its wireless Internet access, as one of her classmates typically did.

Two thirds of responders to the poll—which surveyed 1,013 teens in late May and early June—say others in their school have cheated with cellphones. More than half admit to using the Internet to cheat.

But even as teens advance their electronic cheating strategies, educators are beginning to fight back with their own anticheating technologies, such as text-matching software, biometric equipment, virtual students, and cheatproof tests, experts say (http://www.usnews.com/articles/education/2008/10/03/professors-use-technology-to-fight-student-cheating.html).

At the University of Central Florida, for instance, business students now take their tests on cheat-resistant computers in a supersecure testing center. UCF students report much less cheating than students at other campuses.

"We've scared the living daylights out of them," explains Taylor Ellis, associate dean for undergraduate programs and technology at UCF's college of business.

Researchers at Common Sense Media and school administrators say that parents should not assume that kids know what to do or how to behave ethically when it comes to tests on their own. Families should establish open communication about the use of technology in school—including a strict set of guidelines for kids to follow—and understand that kids are cheating.

Experts also say that if teachers hold open discussions, issue warnings, and present guidelines for taking tests and writing papers, kids will be more hesitant about cheating.

Jack Lorenz, principal of Ridgewood High School in New Jersey, doesn't think restricting cellphones is the answer.

"I think it's a little bit naive to think that that's going to solve the problem," he said in an interview with CBS News. "If you have a culture in your school where . . . there is an expectation that students are honest about their academic achievements, where students and the administration promote it, I think you decrease the opportunities for students to cheat."
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