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Roanoke County School Board
Hearing of Citizens and Delegations
Copy for the Clerk of the Board
(unabridged and uncensored)
Roanoke, VA 24019
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"Cheating on **non-SOL Testing** with School-Issued Laptops in Roanoke County High Schools."

1 I am Robert Maronic, and I am deeply concerned about cheating on **non-SOL testing** involving laptops in our
2 Roanoke County high schools. I was a Latin teacher at Hidden Valley High School from 2011 to 2013. After I was
3 hired the Coordinator of Foreign Languages, Mrs. Nancy Cundiff, and my mentor, Dr. Tim Spence, highly
4 **encouraged** me to go paperless as much as possible. Unfortunately, my two primary textbooks *Latin for*
5 *Americans* and *Wheelock's Latin* were not digitized. However, once I learned how to use the Respondus
6 database in order to upload digital content to Blackboard on October 6, 2011, all testing was given and graded
7 on Blackboard for the next two years.

8 In order to prevent cheating I naïvely assumed there were security precautions already existing within my
9 database and Blackboard. I was sadly mistaken. On January 13, 2012, the last day of the Second Nine Weeks, I
10 reported two students to Andy Clapper, the Technology Resource teacher at Hidden Valley, for suspected
11 cheating on a test. That afternoon after school from 3:30 to 5:00 I was especially busy with over twenty students
12 making up multiple tests and quizzes because the administration REFUSED to enforce the School Board policy of
13 making up a test or quiz within ten school days. The students had the entire nine weeks to make up work from
14 October 24, which was the first day of the marking period. The following week I asked a tenured teacher within
15 my department about enforcing the policy, but he told me he had tried numerous times in the past and not to
16 waste my time. Unfortunately, this problem persisted my entire two years at Hidden Valley. **1**

17 As I suspected, both students had cheated on the test, which was confirmed by a student internet history
18 report from the central office showing numerous unauthorized IP addresses such as Google, Google Translate
19 and Wikipedia. Unfortunately, when I informed Ms. Tina Turner, an Assistant Principal at Hidden Valley, she told

20 me to allow each student to retake the test and average the second grade with a 50% in addition to calling a
21 parent. When I discussed the matter with the same teacher within my department, I was told that the
22 administrator had violated School Board policy, and both students should have received zeros on the test with
23 no retake!

24 Until that time I believed that the primary ways the students were cheating were through hidden notes, cell
25 phones and unauthorized internet access. The next day I talked to a teacher outside of my department upon the
26 recommendation of a former Hidden Valley teacher, and I was informed in a hushed and fearful tone that
27 cheating had been huge problem at the school for years because the students not only had complete access to
28 the internet, but also to their hard drives, hidden thumb drives and SD cards. I was completely shocked! She
29 explained to me how easily it was for a study guide to become a cheat sheet hidden on the desktop or taskbar. A
30 second teacher later confirmed what this teacher had said, and warned me not to be too persistent or else “it
31 would be a one-way ticket out the front door.”

32 I emailed Andy Clapper on January 15, 2012 if the county would consider purchasing the Respondus lockdown
33 browser in order to reduce cheating, and I unbelievably received a curt answer of “No” without any further
34 explanation (~~see attachment; see p. 5~~). He also told me in an email on January 17, 2012 in regard to student
35 internet history reports that the “internet history request should be used sparingly,” and “We do not want to
36 wear out [the] central office with too many requests (~~see attachment; see p. 6-7~~.” His comments were truly
37 mystifying and demoralizing.

38 I soon realized that the seating arrangement within my classroom in quartets (groups of four students sharing
39 two tables), which had been recommended to me by my mentor since the previous August in order to
40 encourage collaborative learning, was completely ineffective in preventing cheating. On February 6, 2012 I
41 reorganized the seating arrangement into a modified seminar-seating layout as recommended by my
42 Technology Resource teacher where half the students would be facing the other half separated by a narrow
43 middle walkway. When the students took a test or quiz everybody would face the same direction while I

44 observed all their screens from behind the last row. However, I soon realized that unless I was DIRECTLY behind
45 a student's laptop I could not accurately see the screen. If I were in the middle of the row, I had great difficulty
46 seeing either far to the right or far to the left not to mention the students at the other end of the room. **Half the**
47 **time it was all bluff.** I also soon realized that walking around the room looking for traditional cheating was the
48 kiss of death since I could not monitor all the students' laptops.

49 I used the same seating layout during the 2012-13 academic year. When I briefly mentioned my concerns
50 about cheating to Ms. Rhonda Stegall, the principal at Hidden Valley, in mid-November 2012 she basically told
51 me that she "would look into the matter" and "get back with me." She never did, and nothing ever was resolved.
52 Calling the IT department for advice at the central office **was also unhelpful.** Unbelievably, an article entitled
53 "Cheating Continues to Plague Academic Careers" later appeared in the *Titan Times* on May 2, 2013 describing
54 the serious problem of cheating on Blackboard at Hidden Valley (~~see attachment; see pp. 8-9~~). More
55 unbelievably the article is still on the school's server, and the problem with cheating has only worsened in the
56 last three years according to my former students and other county graduates.

57 **I was able** to put a major dent into the cheating during my second year at Hidden Valley, but was never able
58 to completely stop it because students could still right click on Google for a search, **access** the Snipping Tool,
59 copy and paste answers, email passwords (**despite two-minute timeouts**), and most insidiously program a key to
60 perform screen captures of a an entire test or quiz to a Google server. However, one of the worst complaints I
61 repeatedly heard last May and June was that many teachers had become extremely apathetic in regard to
62 cheating. They simply gave the students a username or password to a test and at their desk not watching any
63 laptops. In my opinion they believe that trying to prevent cheating has become a losing battle which is both
64 demoralizing and exhausting because they have little confidence in administrative backup and leadership. As
65 one teacher stated to me in 2013 after not being supported by the main office, "I don't care anymore. Let them
66 cheat." **I could go on ad nauseum.**

67 During my two years at Hidden Valley It was simply IMPOSSIBLE to watch twenty-five to thirty laptop screens

68 or even fifteen at once, especially when a student needed help with a difficult question, arrived late after the
69 password had timed out, a messenger knocked at the door, the telephone rang, or when I would have to walk
70 within the classroom to look for suspected cheating on a cell phone or crib sheet.

71 Since May 2015 I have had over TEN graduates at Hidden Valley and one at William Byrd complain to me that
72 cheating remains a huge problem resulting in overly inflated GPAs and distorted class rankings, which have
73 negatively impacted both their college admissions and the receiving of grants and merit-based scholarships.
74 Numerous students have used such words and phrases to describe the present situation as “rampant,” “nuts”
75 and “out of control.” One recent Hidden Valley graduate told me last week, “Hidden Valley [HV] is awful for
76 people with morals and ethics because it teaches you to drop them at the door.” Unfortunately, I have heard
77 almost the same information from at least TEN graduates of Cave Spring in the past three years. One senior told
78 me last May that the administration was more concerned about the paying of parking decals than cheating,
79 which is both pathetic and disgraceful.

80 Cheating truly poisons a classroom, erodes the work ethic, and creates a tremendous disrespect for learning. I
81 urge the School Board to purchase some type of lockdown browser and other needed software in order to
82 create a level and fair playing field, improve the quality of education, and teach good citizenship. Or better yet
83 simply go to the Roanoke Valley Governor’s School, and observe Dr. Kowalski and the faculty because they do
84 not let the students cheat. Thank you.

85 ¹ Within a few months I soon realized that many students were deliberately missing a test or quiz so that they
86 could later “preview” it after a classmate had programmed a laptop key in order to perform screen captures of
87 an entire test or quiz, which would be sent to a Google server.