

School Cancels Graduation for Cheaters

Ohio district says will still mail diplomas to 60 high school students

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COLUMBUS, Ohio—An Ohio school district says it uncovered a cheating scheme so pervasive that it had to cancel graduation ceremonies for its 60 seniors—but will still mail their diplomas. A senior at Centerburg High School accessed teachers' computers, found tests, printed them and distributed them to classmates, administrators said.

Graduation was canceled because so many seniors either cheated or knew about the cheating but failed to report it, said officials of the Centerburg School District. Superintendent Dorothy Holden said the district had to take a stand and let students know that cheating can't be tolerated. "I am alarmed that our kids can think that in society it's OK to cheat, it's a big prank, it's OK to turn away and not be a whistle-blower, not come forth," Holden said.

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The district says it has identified a student who apparently accessed shared file folders on teachers' computers. Officials believe the cheating involved at least five tests in a senior World Studies class dating to early January. One of the tests quizzed students on Aztec Indian history. Teachers had suspicions about some higher-than-expected grades during the semester, Holden said.

The cheating unraveled when a student discovered a congratulatory note to the perpetrator on a school computer Tuesday and gave it to Principal John Morgan. Administrators learned Friday that the cheating plot may have involved underclassmen, as well. Holden said so many students are involved that it was impossible "to separate the wheat from the chaff" in terms of deciding who could graduate. Instead, all students will be mailed their diplomas.

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Some parents angry about the cancellation are organizing an unofficial graduation ceremony. Jeanette Lamb, whose son is a senior at the school, asked the Centerburg School Board to reconsider its decision to cancel graduation. The board declined. "At that point I did tell them that commencement would continue, it will be at the park, I will put it together and their presence wasn't welcome," Lamb told WTVN radio in Columbus. Lamb said parents and members of the community have offered help.

Centerburg High, with about 400 students, is one of the state's top schools, with an "excellent" academic rating last year, according to the state Department of Education. Last year, the school had a 99 percent graduation rate, compared to a statewide rate of 87 percent.

Some students admitted they cheated; others said they knew of the cheating but didn't participate; and others said they had the tests but didn't use them, Holden said. One student who used the test still failed.