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EXCLUSIVE



FINES IN GLEN COVE CHEATING SCANDALS

\$144G

2 administrators, 6 teachers must pay

A2-3 | TALK ABOUT IT AT [NEWSDAY.COM](http://newsday.com)

LI SKYDIVER KILLED, INSTRUCTOR HURT A5

Business	A41
Editorials/Opinion	A34
Flash!	A18
Health & Science	A32
Long Island	A12
Lottery	A71
Nation	A47
Obituaries	A50
Reaching Newsday	A16
TV listings	B26
Weather	A37
World	A48

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TOP STORIES


EXCLUSIVE

EDUCATORS MUST PAY

\$144G in fines for 2 administrators, 6 teachers in Glen Cove cheating scandal

BY JO NAPOLITANO
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Two administrators and six teachers in the Glen Cove City Schools, including the assistant principal at the high school, were fined a total of \$144,522 in connection with two cheating scandals in spring 2012, state Department of Education records show.

The penalties ranged from \$3,118 to \$26,750, with half the amount paid to the state and the other to the school district, according to records Newsday obtained this week in response to a Freedom of Information Law request.

"The fines paid by Glen Cove educators are among the highest paid in the state for test security violations," an Education Department spokeswoman said yesterday.

The grade-changing and test-coaching rocked the 3,100-student school system and prompted investigations by the district, the state and the Nassau County district attorney's office. Both

the state's and the district attorney's probes are continuing.

The two cases were separate, though both occurred in the 2011-12 school year. In the high school incident, a student's failing Regents grade was changed to passing. At Connolly and Landing elementary schools, a district-commissioned investigation found that nearly two dozen teachers improperly helped children on state English Language Arts and mathematics tests.

Joseph Hinton, the high school principal at the time, lost his New York State administrative and teaching certificates in connection with the Regents grade change. The principal, who resigned in spring 2013, was not among the eight named in the documents released to Newsday.

In addition, a former guidance chair is suing the district, the school board and the superintendent in federal court, saying he was denied tenure in May in retaliation for his role in exposing the Regents grade change. Michael Tweed, 40, of

Plainview, is seeking reinstatement with back pay and \$3 million in punitive damages.

The records released to Newsday consist of eight settlement agreements reached among the employees, the state and the district. The educators involved had the legal counsel of their choosing, and the agreements were signed in fall 2013.

High school assistant principal Allen Hudson III, district English and Social Studies coordinator Melanie Arfman, and elementary school teachers Susan Amass and Barbara Engel admitted wrongdoing in the settlement agreements. The other four did not and their names were redacted by the state.

The four named employees, who each paid two months' salary in fines, did not respond to emails or return calls seeking comment.

Fines paid to state, district

Tina Sciocchetti, executive director of test security and educator integrity at the Education Department, said the portion of the

fines due to the state has been paid. She did not know the status of payments to the district.

District Attorney Kathleen Rice's office is awaiting the outcome of the state's investigation to decide if "additional action is warranted," spokesman Shams Tarek said.

Superintendent Maria Rianna, in a statement yesterday, said the district's "security measures and implementation of assessments have been reviewed and processes have been put in place ensuring that all assessments are properly administered and provided to students in an optimal setting. Officials from the state Education Department have observed our process over the last two years and commended the district on its practices."

Rianna, who became superintendent in July 2013, said the district's staff members "have received extensive annual training in administration and implementation of state assessments as well as ethics training, further enhancing our process."



An investigation concluded that teachers at Glen Cove's Landing Elementary School improperly aided student test-takers.



A student's failing Regents grade was changed to a passing one at Glen Cove High School.

WHAT IT COST THEM

Allen Hudson III	High school assistant principal	\$26,750
Melanie Arfman	Tenured administrator	\$25,914
Susan Amass	Tenured teacher	\$24,044
Barbara Engel	Tenured teacher	\$23,214
Unnamed teacher	Tenured teacher	\$16,974
Unnamed teacher	Tenured teacher	\$12,902
Unnamed teacher	Tenured teacher	\$11,606
Unnamed teacher	Non-tenured teacher	\$3,118

Source: State Department of Education, settlement agreements

According to the documents, Hudson admitted he "created an inaccurate record for a Glen Cove High School student with respect to a New York State Regents Exam" and was fined \$26,750.

Hudson authorized the changing of a high school senior's Regents grade under pressure from the child's parent, a source close to the incident said. The student would not have graduated without the switch, the source said.

Hudson earned \$157,995 in the 2012-13 school year, state records show.

Arfman, a tenured administrator who earned \$158,025.88 that year, was fined \$25,914 for her role in the high school case.

"Respondent admits that she altered a Regents Examination grade of a Glen Cove High

School student in violation of NYSED procedure," her settlement agreement said.

In the elementary-school case, the investigation commissioned by the district found that 22 teachers supplied fifth-graders at Connolly and Landing schools with answers, darkened answer forms for them, or urged them to reconsider wrong responses on the ELA and math tests. Newsday obtained the confidential report, written by an attorney with the Farmingdale law firm Guercio & Guercio and completed in March 2013, and wrote about its findings in September.

According to the law firm's report, 84.7 percent of the 60 children interviewed "indicated they received inappropriate staff-directed assistance"

on one or both of the tests, and students' descriptions of the incidents "were consistent and overwhelming, both in terms of the gravity of the alleged transgressions and the persistence with which they are alleged to have occurred."

Assigning blame

The law firm's investigation found that the two schools' administrators were partly to blame for such problems. Rosemarie Sekelsky, principal at the Connolly school, has remained at her post though the report said she helped foster a "testing culture" that "encouraged extra assistance" in violation of state regulations.

Michael Israel, then principal at the Landing school, since has become assistant superin-

tendent for curriculum, instruction and technology, according to the district's website. The law firm's report found he did not properly train his teachers to administer the exams.

Most of the elementary-school students had special needs or were English-language learners. The cheating was discovered when one child, who had poor classroom grades, scored so well on state exams that she no longer qualified for free tutoring.

The settlement agreements show that Amass, a tenured special-education teacher who earned \$118,420.64 in 2012-13, admitted that she failed to properly administer the ELA and math exams at Connolly. Her penalty was \$24,044.

Amass, along with several

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other teachers, was a test proctor for 25 to 30 third-, fourth- and fifth-graders in the library in spring 2012, according to the Guercio report. At the time of the law firm's investigation, she denied wrongdoing.

But students and teachers contradicted her: One Connolly fifth-grader said she wrote the answers to math questions in the child's test booklet, and in another incident, told a student what to circle in relation to three math questions, the law firm's report found.

Teachers involved

A teacher who proctored the fourth-grade English test with Amass told investigators with the law firm that Amass reworded questions for students, checked their responses before allowing them to move on to the next question, and gave them unlimited time to finish.

The state records show that Engel, another tenured teacher involved in the elementary-school case, admitted to "providing unauthorized assistance to students during such assessments." She was fined \$23,214.

A teacher who proctored the fourth-grade ELA exam under Engel's direction told the law firm's investigators that Engel left materials in the classroom that could have helped students during the test. Another teacher said Engel told children "you need to look at that again" when examining their work.

Engel earned \$119,540.48 in 2012-13.

The four educators who did not admit wrongdoing paid a total of \$44,600 in fines, state records show.

Two of those, both tenured teachers, faced the possibility of charges under education law. One paid a \$16,974 fine and the other a \$12,902 penalty.

Another tenured teacher paid a \$11,606 fine. The school district found it had grounds to file charges against that employee under education law but decided not to "take any other disciplinary action."

One teacher, who had not received tenure, paid a \$3,118 fine. According to state records, the district found grounds to terminate this employee but decided to add the settlement agreement to the teacher's personnel file.

STEVE POST

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