

ALVAREZ & MARSAL
2011 Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP)
Test Security Investigation
School Summary Report

HALLETT FUNDAMENTAL ACADEMY

I. BACKGROUND

The Denver Public Schools (DPS) identified significant anomalies in 2011 Colorado State Assessment Program (CSAP) results for Hallett Fundamental Academy (Hallett or the School), a Denver Public Schools “School of Choice” located at 2950 Jasmine Street in Denver, and shared its analysis with the Colorado Department of Education (CDE).

DPS identified a high level of Wrong-to-Right (WTR) Erasures across the Reading, Writing, and Math sections for all Hallett grade levels taking the 2011 CSAP. The School was not flagged for unusual answer patterns or for low correlation between constructed response (CR) and multiple choice (MC) scores.

Across all Hallett classes taking the 2011 CSAP, the level of WTR erasures was approximately 3.5 times higher than the Colorado State mean, with 81 percent of all answer changes being WTRs. An 81 percent WTR/Total Erasure ratio indicates that, for every 100 answers changed, 81 were changed to the correct answer.

II. THE INVESTIGATION

To determine the source and cause of these anomalies, DPS asked CDE and its legal advisor, the Colorado Attorney General’s Office, to investigate. The Attorney General’s Office engaged Alvarez & Marsal (A&M) to conduct an on-site investigation at Hallett.

Given the extent of WTRs across all grades, we focused our investigation on the possibilities that: 1) Test Administrators (generally Teachers or Paraprofessionals) engaged in wholesale WTRs to improve student scores, or 2) Administrators at levels above the classroom engaged in WTR erasures.

A. Interviews Conducted

With DPS providing scheduling and personnel assistance, we conducted interviews at Hallett and other locations over several days, beginning on May 15, 2012. We interviewed 27 individuals, including current and former Hallett staff, students, and others with knowledge of testing at the school. In some cases, we interviewed individuals on more than one occasion.

At Hallett, Third, Fourth, and Fifth Grade students took the 2011 CSAP, with all students in these grades sitting for the Math, Reading, and Writing sections. Students in Fifth Grade also sat for the Science section. Because the results for all grade levels contained WTR anomalies, our

interviews included all Test Administrators for these classes, as well as members of the School's Administration.

B. Interview Process

Four A&M personnel (in two teams) conducted interviews at Hallett and other locations. The interviewers utilized five interview protocols at each school, with approximately 60 questions each. We designed each protocol to elicit information related to the interviewee's role in the 2011 CSAP testing process. Our protocols focused generally on:

1. **Background.** These questions related to the individual's history at the school and familiarity with the administration of the 2011 CSAP.
2. **Process.** We used process questions to elicit the individual's understanding of:
 - a. The 2011 CSAP testing guidance issued by CDE and DPS,
 - b. the required CSAP test administration and ethics training, and
 - c. security procedures for test materials before, during, and after test administration.
3. **Culture.** We designed these questions to elicit information on the environment at the school, in particular whether the school culture is one in which faculty, staff, and students can report concerns over potential violations of testing standards without fear of retaliation.
4. **Behavior.** We used behavioral questions to obtain information on the individual's awareness of specific activities in the school that might constitute test violations. We specifically asked each individual whether he or she had cheated on the 2011 CSAP and whether he or she was aware of others who may have cheated. This section included questions on types of test violations most often reported, including:
 - a. Assisting students by identifying incorrect answers on test sheets
 - b. Reading correct answers aloud during testing
 - c. Erasing students' incorrect answers and replacing them with correct answers
 - d. Obtaining test materials in advance of the test
 - e. Arranging seating to allow weaker students to copy stronger students' answers

The protocols were prepared for:

1. Principals,
2. Site Assessment Leaders (SAL),
3. Test Administrators,
4. Proctors, Monitors, and School Staff, and

5. Students.

We conducted all interviews with two A&M personnel present - a lead interviewer and a scribe. Except in cases where a school staff member requested the presence of a Denver Classroom Teachers Association (DCTA) representative, we conducted all staff interviews with no one else present. DPS obtained parental permission in advance of all student interviews, and provided an observer for these interviews.

III. FINDINGS

Our investigation revealed a potential testing violation related to the security of test materials, a potential testing violation related to reporting of testing irregularities, and evidence that potential violations involving WTR erasures may have occurred at the classroom level. We describe these potential violations in detail below.

A. Test Storage Location Inadequately Secured

Our interviews revealed that unauthorized individuals had access to the secured closet where the CSAP tests were stored. Those with access included numerous members of the School's Administrative staff. The Administrative staff member with control over keys at the School did not receive instructions to secure the test storage location.

The *2010-2011 CSAP Testing Protocols* (Page 1), provided to us by DPS, indicates, in relevant part, that:

All SALs must keep their CSAP materials locked up in a secure location unless they are being used for testing. Access to the secure room must be limited to the SAL, a custodian and the principal. Other staff members should never have access to the CSAP materials unless under the direct supervision of the SAL.

The fact that unauthorized personnel had access to the test storage location appears to be violation of this protocol.

B. Possible Assistance Provided to Students During Test Administration

We received a report from a former Hallett student that a member of the School's Administrative staff provided limited unauthorized assistance to students during testing. Our interview of the former student did not provide conclusive evidence of testing violations. The Administrative staff member denied the report, and other students from that classroom did not corroborate the former student's report. We cannot, therefore, conclude that students received unauthorized assistance on the CSAP.

C. Failure to Report Potential Testing Irregularities

Certain teachers at Hallett reported to Administrative staff members that some students' test results appeared suspicious based on those students' classroom performance. These teachers and

at least one other reported similar concerns to our interviewers. In follow-up interviews on subsequent days, some teachers retracted their earlier comments. The School's Administration acknowledged that at least one person had reported this information, and stated that these concerns were neither reported to DPS nor investigated internally.

Various CSAP-related documents provided guidance on reporting testing irregularities, including the *CSAP Ethics Training*, *CSAP Materials and Administration 2011*, and the *Colorado Student Assessment System 2010-2011 Procedures*, issued by CDE's Office of Standards and Assessments (*Procedures Manual*). The *Procedures Manual* (Page 30) specifically required that, "Missing test books or any test irregularities must be reported to the S[chool] A[ssessment] C[oordinator]/D[istrict] A[ssessment] C[oordinator]." The relevant District Assessment Coordinator is located at DPS, and would appear to be the appropriate individual to whom the School's Administration should have reported potential testing irregularities.

Behavior that resulted in changes to student answers or irregularities in scoring is covered by the *Procedures Manual* in Section 4.2, Administration of Assessments, Unethical Behavior/Practice in Preparation and Administration of Assessments. The Administration's failure to report the concerns of the teachers may constitute a violation of the CDE irregularity reporting requirements.

D. Extraordinary WTRs

The Administrative staff at Hallett did not offer any potential explanations for the significant level of reported WTRs. However, two teachers provided us with potential explanations for the high level of erasures, indicating that they taught their students to answer questions using a process of elimination. One noted that s/he told students not to mark near the answer sheet bubbles, but that it is possible that they did anyway. The other stated that s/he taught students to eliminate answers by marking Xs next to the answers they knew to be incorrect, and noted that some students made those markings directly on the answer bubbles. S/he also stated that s/he did not tell students to erase the markings because the tests would be "cleaned up" by the Administrative staff.

We could not corroborate these explanations through interviews of students. In fact, the students denied that they used the technique described by the teachers. In follow-up interviews, one of the teachers stated that s/he, "wouldn't be surprised if kids didn't remember." S/he was also unable to recall the names of any students who used the elimination technique s/he previously described.

In our initial interview (performed prior to our initial interviews of the two teachers), an Administrative staff member (not the Principal) stated that s/he did not clean up any marks made by students on the answer bubbles and did not mention that some students had marked Xs on the answer bubbles. However, in a follow-up interview, this Administrative staff member retracted her earlier responses, and corroborated the statements of the teachers, indicating that many students did mark X's on their answer sheets as a technique to eliminate the answers that they knew were incorrect, and stated that s/he did in fact erase those X's. When we followed up with two staff members who assisted the Administrative staff member in cleaning up the answer sheets, both noted that they had never observed a case where students marked Xs on the answer bubbles but that, if they had, they would not have erased the markings.

We have received conflicting evidence on the use of a process-of-elimination strategy to eliminate incorrect answers. Given the information provided, we cannot conclude that the WTR changes may be affected by this process-of-elimination strategy. However, we believe that the two teachers and the Administrative staff member may have attempted to mislead our interviewers. The referenced Administrative staff member is not the Principal.

E. Disallowed Test-taking Techniques

As noted above, we received one possible explanation for the high level of erasures at Hallett - the use of a process of elimination to determine correct answers. The 2011 CSAP document titled *Guidelines for Students Marking in CSAP Booklets* indicates that certain markings are not allowed including, but not limited to, the underlining of key words within a multiple-choice question, crossing out incorrect answers to multiple-choice questions, and any writing near the bubbles used to select answers on multiple choice questions. All of the aforementioned techniques, which are listed as “not allowed,” are the techniques that the teachers have described. We located a copy of this document in the files of an Administrative staff member (not the Principal) at Hallett.

If Administrative staff did, in fact, observe that a significant number of students marked Xs on their answer sheets, this irregularity should have been reported to DPS.

IV. CONCLUSION

Our investigation did not produce sufficient evidence to suggest that particular individuals were responsible for the high number of WTR changes occurring at Hallett. However, we are concerned by the fact that some staff members who reported concerns related to student performance compared to CSAP performance at least partially retracted their statements in follow up interviews. We believe that certain individuals intentionally provided misleading information to our investigators. However, we found no evidence that the Principal engaged in any wrongdoing.