

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

Beach Court Elementary School

I. BACKGROUND

The Denver Public Schools (DPS) identified significant anomalies in 2011 Colorado State Assessment Program (CSAP) results for Beach Court Elementary School (Beach Court or the School), a Denver Public Schools Transitional Native Language Instruction School (TNLI) located at 4950 Beach Court in Denver and shared its analysis with the Colorado Department of Education (CDE).

DPS identified: 1) unusual answer patterns, 2) low correlation between constructed response (CR) and multiple choice (MC) scores, and 3) a high level of Wrong-to-Right (WTR) Erasures across all subjects and for all Beach Court grade levels taking the 2011 CSAP. In particular, Beach Court had extremely high levels of WTRs for both 2010 and 2011. This, coupled with unusual answer patterns and low MC/CR correlation, serves as a strong indicator of potential testing irregularities.

Across all Beach Court classes taking the 2011 CSAP, the level of WTR erasures was approximately 15 times higher than the Colorado State mean, with 94 percent of all answer changes being WTRs. A 94 percent WTR/Total Erasure ratio indicates that, for every 100 answers changed, 94 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 Beach Court.

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 Beach Court and other locations over several days, beginning on May 15, 2012. We interviewed 23 individuals, including current and former Beach Court staff, students, and others with knowledge of testing at the school. In some cases, we interviewed individuals on more than one occasion.

At Beach Court, 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 CDE indicated that results for all grade levels contained 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 Beach Court 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,
 - 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 two potential testing violations related to the security of test materials, one potential testing violation related to reporting of testing irregularities, and strong circumstantial evidence that potential violations involving WTR erasures did not occur at the classroom level. We describe these potential violations in detail below.

A. Test Materials Security Breach 1. Test Score Sheets Stored in Administrative Office

Several sources confirmed that, in 2011, School Administrators removed testing materials from the School's secure storage area and placed them in an Administrative office for an extended period after the conclusion of testing and prior to the delivery of the completed test materials to DPS. An Administrator personally delivered the testing materials to the test processing center. A former staff member indicated concerns about the removal of testing materials from the secure location in 2011, but did not report these concerns.

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 storage of test materials in an Administrative office, to which the SAL did not have access, appears to be a violation of this protocol.

B. Test Materials Security Breach 2. Unauthorized Personnel Given Access to Testing Materials

Several sources reported that certain Administrative staff erased "stray marks" from 2011 CSAP student answer sheets. We found that one particular Administrative Staff member whose

responsibilities do not include student instruction participated in this process. This Staff member's involvement in testing is highly irregular.

The DPS document, *CSAP Materials and Administration 2011* (Page 22), indicates that access to testing material is restricted to "authorized personnel," that test materials may only be checked out by the SAL to Test Administrators, and that the SAL should not "clean up" test materials. The *Colorado Student Assessment System 2010-2011 Procedures Manual* (Page 40), issued by CDE's Office of Standards and Assessments (*Procedures Manual*), states that, "All educational professionals responsible for any part of the administration procedures/processes, for any of the state assessments, must be trained every year."

The Administrative Staff member in question did not sign the CSAP Training Sign-in Sheet (*Procedures Manual*, Page 26), and did not sign a Verification of CSAP or CELA Administration Training Form (*Procedures Manual*, Page 25). S/he could not, therefore, qualify as a person authorized to have access to test materials. S/he also likely does not qualify as an "educational professional" under the CDE standards. This Administrative Staff member's participation in testing appears, therefore, to violate CDE and DPS test security procedures.

C. Failure to Report Potential Testing Irregularity

At least two teachers at Beach Court met with the School's Administration to discuss the fact that their students' CSAP scores were not reflective of the students' classroom performance. One stated, "We've always been surprised at the [CSAP] scores" and "we've always wondered what happened but we didn't want to think it's anything here."

The School's Administration acknowledged that this meeting occurred, and admitted 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 *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[ordinator]/D[istrict] A[ssessment] C[ordinator]." 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 2010-2011 Procedures Manual in Section 4.2, Administration of Assessments, Unethical Behavior/Practice in Preparation and Administration of Assessments. The Administration's failure to report such potential behavior reported by the two teachers appears to constitute a violation of the CDE irregularity reporting requirements.

D. Extraordinary Level of WTR Erasures

Despite extensive questioning, Administrative Staff did not offer any potential explanations for the high level of WTR erasures reported at Beach Court. In response to numerous questions regarding erasures, the School's Administration repeatedly stood behind the students' scores. Administrators denied erasing or changing answers on the CSAP and denied ordering others to do so.

Every one of the interviewed Test Administrators reported that they received test materials in their classrooms just before testing began, and that the School's Administration picked up the materials as soon as testing ended. None of the students, with one uncorroborated exception related to a year prior to 2011, reported any testing violations by Test Administrators. All of the students corroborated the Test Administrators' assertion that testing materials were only in the classrooms while testing was being conducted.

Given the consistent responses at the classroom level, our investigation indicates a low probability of material WTR violations occurring at the classroom level. WTRs at the reported level, across all subjects and grade levels, would have required collusion among all of the Test Administrators. Our investigation revealed that this group would be unlikely to work together in such a significant undertaking.

We interviewed each of the three SALs who served at the school during the 2010 through 2012 testing periods. We found that neither of the two former SALs worked at Beach Court during both 2010 and 2011, and, therefore, it is highly unlikely that either participated in altering tests during both years.

Several Test Administrators and former School Administrators expressed concerns with student scores and testing processes at Beach Court, and a number exhibited strong reactions to questions about changes to student answer sheets.

IV. CONCLUSION

We believe that two to three individuals, including School Administrators, have withheld material information about WTRs from the investigators. However, our investigation provides evidence from multiple sources, including current and former Staff member interviews and test score analysis, that testing violations occurred at the Principal-level at Beach Court during the 2010 and 2011 CSAPs.