

Kid Cheats; Father Sues School District. Wait, What?



By [Isa-Lee Wolf](#) April 30, 2012 3:36 PM

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COMMENTARY | A high school sophomore supposedly cheated on homework. He was kicked out of his honors English class, and his father doesn't deny the cheating occurred. But that's not where it ends; that's where it starts.

[Jack Berghouse is suing](#) California's Sequoia Union High School District in response to his son's demotion to regular English.

As the Palo Alto Daily News reports, honors class members kept journals and four students apparently shared entries, copying them from one another despite an academic honesty pledge they signed informing them cheating was grounds for removal from the class.

The mother of the student in question also signed the pledge. Berghouse claims his son's removal violates due process and the punishment is too severe. He also asserts the school is in violation of its own plagiarism policy, which provides for dismissal after the second offense.

I'm not sure how these "academically advanced" kids thought the copied entries would go unnoticed, but that's something else entirely.

[This story evoked strong reactions](#), maybe because of the ethical breach. Or perhaps it's due to the idea of a parent suing to help his child avoid responsibility for his actions, but I think it's something else.

Entitlement.

The boy took to Facebook [to denounce](#) the "tyranny" of his punishment. Compounding that, Berghouse, according the San Mateo Times, said his son had a shot at getting into an Ivy League college; he's blaming the school for blowing it.

And here we have it. Berghouse shirks responsibility while rejecting the school district's ability to enforce its pledge by removing his son from the advanced-level class. Essentially, he's saying the school doesn't have that right, not with only one documented incidence of cheating. His son isn't wrong -- the school district is.

This argument stems from thinking something belongs to his son. And Berghouse's lawsuit essentially says you cannot take that away, not without due process of law. It is his, and he has rights to it.

Not that he has to earn that advanced-level slot. He has rights to it. And the Ivy League education to follow.

It's a case of entitlement passing from father to son, out in the wild. It's entitlement so entrenched, so oblivious that Berghouse seems surprised by [the negative reaction](#). Whether Berghouse can win the lawsuit, who knows. A public school, as a part of the government, must comply with the federal and state constitutions, so there are more legal issues than it appears in the newspaper retelling.

But aside from the ethics of cheating, aside from the refusal of responsibility, there is something greater at stake. We've entered an era where opportunities must be earned, not expected, and information is far too readily available for the invisible roads of entitlement to keep on carrying their stealth traffic.

The school didn't ruin this kid's chances at an Ivy League education, the kid did by allegedly cheating and violating the pledge he signed. Perhaps, without cheating, this boy wouldn't have a shot in a million at an Ivy League school; we can't know.

But that doesn't seem to matter to his Dad. Nope, the important thing is his belief that his son belongs in the advanced class-track to the Ivy League. How he gets there, it seems, is immaterial; the spot is his, and no one should be able to take it away.

Not even his own son.

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