

# THE PLAIN DEALER

**Student protests cheating implication  
ACT flagged results because of improved score**  
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Like many high school students taking college entrance tests, Jerome Cash of Cleveland Heights had a rough go the first two times he took the ACT.

With his eyes set on college, Jerome's mother sought out a private testing coach to improve his score of 17 out of 36. Math tutoring and some test coaching appeared to pay off when his score of 23 came back last year.

That big boost brought the Lutheran East High School graduate attention he didn't expect when he became the subject of an investigation by ACT officials.

He learned through a letter from ACT shortly after starting his freshman year at Kentucky State University last fall that his improved entrance exam score had been flagged.

While the word "cheat" wasn't used in the letter, that's the insinuation he and his mother, Beverly Cash, got from it.

"I was figuring maybe if they had it on camera, they saw something," she said.

Instead, the letter said Jerome's answers matched some of those given by a student who sat diagonally across from him during the test, Cash said.

ACT rotates questions on its tests so that different versions of the tests are distributed at a testing site, though some students get the same version, as was the case with Jerome and the other student. Tests are numbered so that officials know where students sat during the test-taking and which version they took.

Ken Gulleck, a spokesman for ACT, said any rise in score more than three or four points has the potential to be "flagged" as an anomaly.

Gulleck would not speak specifically about Jerome's case, but said it takes more than just a higher score to attract the ACT's attention. Many students have scores flagged and then released without ever knowing about it, he said.

Jerome was given the option of retaking the test, having his score nullified or going through arbitration. He and his mother chose arbitration, which is pending.

Susan Henschel, manager of The College Review, a Beachwood-based tutoring and test-prep company, is going to bat for Jerome, providing ACT with proof of tutoring sessions she and others in the company had with him to improve his score.

"I don't believe he cheated," she said.

Jerome says he didn't cheat.

"They had people in the rooms walking up and down the rows, and with the directions they give you, there's not even a way to cheat," he said.

Gulleck said "no student has ever been penalized for blowing a test." Instead, ACT looks for differences in handwriting on the essay portion from one test to the next, or investigates if a room full of test takers end up with the same score.

Gulleck said ACT has specific security measures to ensure the sanctity of the test. He said officials want to be fair to students whose scores are flagged, too. If a student opts to retake the test, ACT will pay for it and won't reveal to the proctor why the test is being retaken. If a student agrees to nullify a score, ACT will do so without telling the student's college why.

Still, Henschel hopes others will learn from Jerome's experience, especially now as students prepare to take the ACT late next week and the SAT in March.

"Test scores are what open the doors to college," she said. "The moral of this story is never walk into this exam unprepared."

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