

FROM THE EDITOR

When words aren't yours

Earlier this year, as Washington, D.C., Mayor Adrian Fenty made his bid to take over the perennially struggling school district, his staff offered a detailed plan to improve instruction, morale, and achievement.

There was one problem: Large portions of the plan weren't theirs. Instead, one-third of the 31-page document was copied—word for word—from the vision statement of North Carolina's Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools.

Within days after the plagiarism was reported, Fenty's staff had submitted a rewritten version of the plan. Still, it called into question whether the mayor will be able to successfully run the system.

That's what plagiarism—the theft of a person's intellectual property—does. And today, with billions of pages, words, and phrases available on the Internet for anyone to cut, paste, and call their own, it makes everyone question the validity of an author's work.

Ironically, just as the revelations about the Fenty plan were being released, we were notified of an incident of plagiarism that appeared in the pages of *ASBJ*. From August through October of 2005, we published a three-part series on micromanagement under Michael Jazzar's byline.

Jazzar, a former teacher, counselor, and superintendent, was employed as an assistant professor at—here's more irony—the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. The articles, like many we publish by outside authors, presented salient points on management and policy development for board members.

Trouble is, those points weren't his.

Much like the Fenty plan, large sections of Jazzar's articles were copied word for word. They were taken from pieces published on the Internet by Hildy Gottlieb, an author and speaker who runs Help 4 NonProfits, a Tucson, Ariz.-based

community engagement organization.

When Gottlieb brought the matter to our attention in mid-May, we investigated and asked Jazzar to respond to her complaint. While expressing his “deepest regret and apology” and noting that he had resigned his UNC-Charlotte position due to other factors, he says he made “an honest mistake.”

That is not an excuse, however, for stealing the work of someone else. We require all outside authors to sign an assignment of copyright in which they state that their “work is original and does not violate the copyright of any person or entity.” Jazzar signed this statement several months before the articles were published and had multiple opportunities to come clean. Sadly, this did not happen until long after the damage was done.

Even though our trust was betrayed as well, we wanted you, our readers, to know what has happened. We apologize to Hildy Gottlieb and urge you to visit her website—www.Help4NonProfits.com—to check out her work. We also have made Jazzar's employer aware of what occurred, and they confirmed that he has resigned his position.

“Please know that we share the commitment of the *American School Board Journal* to the highest standards of professional ethics,” said Mary Lynne Calhoun, dean of UNC-Charlotte's School of Education. “I am deeply saddened and embarrassed by this ethical breach.”

In 2005, the Center for Academic Integrity reported that 60 percent of high school students have admitted that they stole someone else's work. While technology companies are coming up with solutions to help high schools and colleges to deal with this growing problem, keep an eye out and be aware. We are, now more than ever.

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