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## **San Mateo School District Using Computer Program to Detect Student Plagiarism**

By Neil Gonzales

SAN MATEO — Hillsdale High School junior Gauri Vilash knows students who have lifted whole paragraphs — word for word — from the Internet to blend into their essays.

"It's really easy to plagiarize," said Gauri, 15, who shuns the practice herself. "Big search engines give students a variety of media. Everything is on the Internet. Most often, teachers won't notice."

San Mateo Union High School District leaders hope a Web service that checks the originality of a student's work will help teachers identify those turning in plagiarized assignments.

Earlier this month, the district board approved a license agreement with the Oakland-based education-technology company iParadigms for the Turnitin program, which allows teachers to monitor students' work for possible plagiarism by comparing it against academic, media and other databases.

The service comes as a recent survey by the Los Angeles-based ethics consulting firm Josephson Institute showed that 36 percent of high-school students nationwide admitted to using the Internet to plagiarize assignments — up from the 33 percent in 2006.

In general, cheating in school is apparently growing worse. According to the survey of nearly 30,000 students, 64 percent cheated on tests during the past year compared with 60 percent two years ago.

The Web provides plenty of content that students can potentially plagiarize, district Trustee Robert Griffin said. Unless a teacher happens to read a certain work previously published, "it's kind of hard to detect" what part of a student's assignment has been copied.

The district will pay about \$9,000 to use Turnitin at Hillsdale, Aragon, Burlingame, Mills and San Mateo high schools. Capuchino High has its own agreement with iParadigms.

"All we're trying to do is get students to really show originality of thought," Griffin said. The program will serve as an incentive for students "to be honest about their efforts."

But the majority of students — at least at Hillsdale — are honest, Gauri said. "Most students are not lazy. We know we have to work hard."

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