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Hearing Set on Cheating Claim in Capital

By **MOTOKO RICH**

The City Council in Washington will hold a hearing next week after a memo warning officials of cheating on standardized tests during the chancellorship of [Michelle A. Rhee](#) surfaced Thursday night.

Allegations of cheating have dogged Ms. Rhee — now a lightning rod in education circles for her advocacy through StudentsFirst, a nonprofit group she founded — since an [investigation by USA Today](#) found high rates of erasures on standardized tests at a Washington elementary school.

Although subsequent investigations by both the city's inspector general and the federal Education Department concluded that widespread cheating had not occurred, a memo that said 191 teachers in 70 schools were "implicated in possible testing infractions" in 2008 has ignited calls for further inquiries.

The memo, [disclosed by John Merrow](#), the education correspondent for "NewsHour" on PBS, was written by a consultant hired by the Washington school system to investigate data that showed a high number of test answer sheets on which wrong answers had been erased and changed to correct answers. The memo, which Mr. Merrow said had been written by Fay G. Sanford, a consultant, offered a detailed discussion of a high number of erasures at Aiton Elementary School. But the memo noted that "Aiton is NOT the only school in this situation."

Ms. Rhee issued a statement saying that she did not recall receiving the memo. She added that both the city inspector general and the Education Department had already "reviewed the memo and confirmed my belief that there was no widespread cheating."

Blanche Bruce, the deputy inspector general in Washington, declined to comment on whether her office had reviewed the memo.

A spokeswoman for the Education Department's Office of Inspector General confirmed that the agency had reviewed the memo.

Mr. Sanford did not return calls seeking comment.

Critics say teachers come under enormous pressure to cheat, given the high stakes of the tests,

which are used to hold schools accountable and are increasingly tied to teacher evaluations.

Experts in analyzing test results were divided on whether the memo clearly indicated widespread cheating. John Fremer, the president of Caveon Consulting Services, which conducts security audits and investigates possible cheating, cautioned against drawing conclusions. Mr. Fremer, who was hired by the Washington school system to conduct interviews of teachers who were suspected of cheating in 2009 and 2010, said he found evidence of only two cheating episodes.

“I have not seen anything, including this memo,” that pointed to systemic cheating, he said.

Walter M. Haney, a retired research associate at the Center for the Study of Testing, Evaluation and Educational Policy at Boston College, said the memo clearly indicated “a much broader pattern.”

“It seems to me a responsible executive really ought to have looked further,” Mr. Haney said.