Beverly:

The answer to this ethical question is not just black or white for me, there is a bit of gray area. I’m sure I’m not the only one who struggled with answering this question. Ironically, I am actually working towards my bachelor degree to become a high school teacher.

If I were a high school biology teacher who had assigned all my sophomore classes a term project and then I caught students plagiarizing and cheating... The course of action that I would choose to take would be to give those students zeros. This of course would depend on the degree of plagiarism or “cheating. If there were some papers where a student did not site a source on one or two quotes or sentences, I would deduct points. However, if most of the paper was obviously not the students work, they would receive a zero.

The students who plagiarized or cheated did not do the work; therefore, they did not complete the project and did not follow directions. They plagiarized and as a result, they will receive a 0 and will not be able to resubmit the work.

When I assigned the project, I set clear standards, discussed rules of plagiarism and informed all my students that anyone who cheated or plagiarized would receive an automatic zero. As a teacher, I would be sure that my students knew they could come to me for clarification and for help with their assignments.

I think it is very important to follow through on your word, actions have consequences. I believe it is imperative that children learn this before they become adults. These students are in their second year of high school. This is not the first time they’ve had to write a paper and it is not the first time they’ve heard about plagiarism. They would know that cheating and plagiarism are unethical and wrong by this age.

I would use the theory of fairness when making this ethical decision. The fairness theory states when making an ethical decision, the decision should be made fairly and there should be no discrimination or bias. The student’s grades would reflect the effort that they put into their projects. My decision and the grades that the students earned would be based solely on the work that the students did or did not do.