



Written by [Sam Blumenfeld](#) on July 20, 2012

Michigan Parents Sue Schools for Failing to Teach Their Kids to Read

A group of parents in Highland Park, Michigan, have sued the public schools in their district for failing to teach their children to read, something the schools are required by state law to do. The suit is being filed by the American Civil Liberties Union, which is part of the Progressive movement that has deliberately dumbed-down the American public education system. As we know, it was John Dewey, an ACLU hero, who planned the Progressive program that has destroyed high literacy in the United States and created the Black underclass. Dewey wrote in 1898: “The plea for the predominance of learning to read in early school-life because of the great importance attaching to literature seems to me a perversion.”



It was the Progressive state of mind that was the real perversion, not the conservative method of teaching reading which produced high literacy. But what was Dewey’s solution to the “perversion?” Get rid of the traditional alphabetic-phonics method of teaching reading and replace it with a new whole-word, sight method of reading as if our English printed words were like Chinese characters, an ideographic or picture system of writing. The result has been a massive decline of literacy in America.

We doubt that anyone at the ACLU has the faintest idea of the cause of our reading problem. As for the parents at Highland Park, they are like the millions of other parents who send their children to public schools and are given all sorts of reasons why their kids can’t learn to read. According to the ACLU:

“No case ever filed anywhere in the U.S. has addressed a school system in such dire straits. [What took them so long?] The Highland Park School District is among the lowest achieving school districts in the nation, let alone Michigan,” said Mark Rosenbaum, University of Michigan Law School Professor and ACLU cooperating attorney. “How the State responds to this lawsuit — whether it opposes a right to read for the two-thirds of Highland Park schoolchildren who score below proficient on the Michigan reading assessment test — reveals its concern for the fate of these children and their community. The destiny of these children will be the destiny of Michigan.”

According to 2011-2012 MEAP scores, 65 percent of fourth graders are not reading at a proficient level; 87 percent are not proficient at math. In seventh grade, 75 percent are not reading at a proficient level while 93 percent are not proficient at math. According to 2011-2012 MME results, by eleventh grade, when students should be college-ready, 90 percent failed reading; 97 percent failed math, 94 percent failed writing and 100 percent failed the social studies and science portions of the exam.

In its lawsuit, the ACLU of Michigan argues that the dismal test scores and reading evaluations prove



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that the state of Michigan and Highland Park Schools have violated the students' right to read as set forth by state laws, which requires the state to provide "additional assistance" to children who are not reading at grade level.

What the parents at Highland Park don't know is that this shell-game being played among our Progressive educators, who pretend they really believe in education while at the same time reducing it to shambles, has been going on for more than 75 years. Back in 1929, Dr. Samuel T. Orton, a neurologist, wrote an article on how the new teaching methods were causing reading disability. Its title, "The 'Sight Method' of Teaching Reading as a Cause of Reading Disability," was a warning writ large. It was published in the *Journal of Educational Psychology* in February 1929, a publication edited by the very Progressive educators who were planning the dumbing-down of America. What was their reaction to Orton's warning? It confirmed that their new teaching method would do what it was supposed to do: lower literacy skills and dumb down Americans.

Highland Park is one of the towns most severely impacted by Progressive education. It is an independent municipality completely surrounded by Detroit. In 1909, Henry Ford built his Highland Park Ford plant which brought many workers to the town. The community was incorporated as an independent city in 1918. During Detroit's heyday, Highland Park was an affluent middle-class community. But white flight from the city accelerated after the 1967 Detroit 12th Street riot. Chrysler also had a plant in Highland Park which it moved in 1993 to Auburn Hills. Thus, the town, which had a population of over 52,000 in 1930, now has a population of only about 11,000. In August, 2011 over two thirds of the streetlights were removed by the city due to its inability to pay a \$60,000 per month electric bill. Its public library closed in 2002. Its education facilities consist of two elementary public schools and the Highland Park Community High School. Its Catholic St. Benedict's Elementary School closed in 2005. According to the ACLU:

An independent evaluation to assess the reading proficiency of the plaintiffs found that students were reading between four and eight grades below their current grade level. The organization also cited serious academic deficiencies caused by a documented lack of books, outdated materials, filthy classrooms and bathrooms.

[If the city can't even pay its electric bills, why should it surprise us that it can't pay for toilet paper and soap in the schools toilets? I assume that there is an adequately paid janitor in the school who doesn't believe that the students need toilet paper or soap and a principal who doesn't care. Of course this is a government enterprise with such a dismal record of failure that we wonder why so many Americans believe that government can run a national healthcare system.]

Inadequate mastery of basic reading skills for students in any Michigan school district is a violation of state law, continued [ACLU director Kary] Moss, which requires districts to provide additional remedial assistance to students who are not performing at grade level. In addition, our state Constitution requires that "the legislature shall maintain and support a system of free public elementary and secondary schools as defined by law" and singles out education as a uniquely important state function.

[Education has been "a uniquely important state function" since public schools were first created. But the state has never defined what it thinks education ought to be. It has left that up to the educators who are responsible for what goes on in the public schools of America. What the response of the educators will be to this lawsuit will tell us why the system can't be reformed.]

The ACLU of Michigan is asking for immediate remedy by the state, including research-based methods



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of instruction, highly trained educators and administrators, a process for monitoring progress, new educational materials and textbooks, and a clean and safe learning environment.

[This is what all public schools are supposed to have. So why are conditions in Highland Park's public schools so wretched?]

"No one can walk through the halls of Highland Park schools and say that this is a suitable and safe environment to learn," said Michelle Johnson, a lifelong Highland Park resident whose daughter is entering her junior year, but reads between five and seven levels below her grade. "I spoke out at nearly every public meeting and I went to school with my kids every day, all day this year. But nothing I do will work if the district and the state don't meet me half way. All I am asking for is a full partner in my child's education so that she can learn the basics — reading."

Anyone who has seen the film *Waiting for Superman* would sympathize with Mrs. Johnson, who is very much like those parents in the film hoping that their child would win a seat in a Charter School, but weeping in terrible disappointment when their child did not win the lottery. Unfortunately Mrs. Johnson doesn't know that the system is incapable of providing the kind of remedial program that will turn her daughter into a literate human being. Whatever program they do offer will be of little substance or benefit. The shell game will go on, even though we know how to achieve high literacy in America. Homeschoolers are doing it every day without the help of progressive educators. Therefore, it is important for us to follow this court case and see what happens.

As for the ACLU, it is a decidedly liberal non-profit organization founded in 1920 by three progressives — Crystal Eastman, Roger Baldwin, and Walter Nelles. Eastman was a feminist socialist activist who died in 1928. Baldwin, who served as executive director of the ACLU until 1950, was a believer in Democratic Socialism. Baldwin had been greatly influenced by the radical social movement of the [anarchist Emma Goldman](#) and joined the [Industrial Workers of the World](#). In 1927, he visited the Soviet Union and wrote a book, *Liberty Under the Soviets*. At the beginning of the ACLU, he had said, "Communism, of course, is the goal." Later, however, as more and more information came out about [Josef Stalin's](#) regime in the [Soviet Union](#), Baldwin became more and more disillusioned with Soviet-style communism and called it "a new slavery."

Walter Nelles, a classmate of Baldwin's at Harvard, became a pacifist and opposed U.S. entry into World War I. As a lawyer, he became the ACLU's legal counsel. He died at the age of 53 in 1937. He is the late grandfather of Amanda Pedersen Norton, a [Washington, D.C.](#) attorney and former chief mediator for the U.S. [Food and Drug Administration](#), as well as great grandfather of Leif Pedersen Diaz, a network television producer and correspondent.

The ACLU claims that it is dedicated to defending and preserving the individual rights and liberties guaranteed to every person in America by the Constitution and laws of the United States. The ACLU provides legal assistance in cases in which it considers [civil liberties](#) to be at risk. Legal support from the ACLU can take the form of direct legal representation, or preparation of [amicus curiae briefs](#) expressing legal arguments (when another law firm is already providing representation).

The ACLU fights against the teaching of creationism in the public schools, and supports gay "marriage," affirmative action, and the legalization of abortion. It opposes the death penalty.

The ACLU's LGBT Rights Project supports equal rights for all gays and lesbians, which includes equal civil marriage and adoption rights for LGBT couples. On the issue of national security it is opposed to compromising civil liberties in the name of national security. In this context, the ACLU has condemned



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government use of spying, indefinite detention without charge or trial, and government-sponsored torture. This effort is led by the ACLU's National Security Project.

It supports prisoners' rights and believes that prisons should focus on rehabilitation. The ACLU works to ensure that prisons treat prisoners in accordance with the Constitution and domestic law. On religion, it supports the right of religious persons to practice their faiths without government interference. But it also believes that the government should neither prefer religion over non-religion, nor favor particular faiths over others. The ACLU is opposed to prayer in schools. In other words, it supports atheist government schools.

During [World War II](#), the ACLU defended Japanese-American citizens who were forcibly relocated to [internment camps](#). During the [Cold War](#), the ACLU headquarters was dominated by anti-communists, but many local affiliates defended members of the Communist Party.

The ACLU was also involved in the [Miranda](#) case, which addressed misconduct by police during interrogations; and in the [New York Times](#) case which established new protections for newspapers reporting on government activities.

The ACLU is certainly capable of arguing that the schools of Highland Park have not lived up to the education requirements of Michigan law. But what it will not be able to do is prescribe how reading will be taught in those schools. That will be left up to the educators.



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