



Written by [Walter E. Williams](#) on February 5, 2014

Schoolteacher Cheating

Philadelphia's public school system has joined several other big-city school systems, such as those in Atlanta, Detroit and Washington, D.C., in widespread teacher-led cheating on standardized academic achievement tests. So far, the city has fired three school principals, and [The Wall Street Journal reports](#), "Nearly 140 teachers and administrators in Philadelphia public schools have been implicated in one of the nation's largest cheating scandals." (1/23/14). Investigators found that teachers got together after tests to erase the students' incorrect answers and replace them with correct answers. In some cases, they went as far as to give or show students answers during the test.



Jerry Jordan, president of the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers, identifies the problem as district officials focusing too heavily on test scores to judge teacher performance, and they've converted low-performing schools to charters run by independent groups that typically hire nonunion teachers. But William Hite, superintendent of the School District of Philadelphia, said cheating by adults harms students because schools use test scores to determine which students need remedial help, saying, "There is no circumstance, no matter how pressured the cooker, that adults should be cheating students."

While there's widespread teacher test cheating to conceal education failure, most notably among black children, it's just the tip of the iceberg. The National Assessment of Educational Progress, published by the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics and sometimes referred to as the Nation's Report Card, measures student performance in the fourth and eighth grades. In 2013, 46 percent of Philadelphia eighth-graders scored below basic, and 35 percent scored basic. Below basic is a score meaning that a student is unable to demonstrate even partial mastery of knowledge and skills fundamental for proficient work at his grade level. Basic indicates only partial mastery. It's a similar story in reading, with 42 percent below basic and 41 percent basic. With this kind of performance, no one should be surprised that of the state of Pennsylvania's 27 most poorly performing schools on the SAT, 25 are in Philadelphia.

Philadelphia's four-year high-school graduation rate in 2012 was 64 percent, well below the national rate of 78 percent. Even if a student graduates from high school, what does it mean? What a high-school diploma means for white students is nothing to write home about, as suggested by the fact that every year, nearly 60 percent of first-year college students must take remedial courses in English or mathematics. What a high-school diploma means for black students is nothing less than a disaster, as pointed out by Drs. Abigail and Stephan Thernstrom in their 2009 book, *No Excuses: Closing the Racial Gap in Learning*. They state that "blacks nearing the end of their high school education perform a little



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worse than white eighth-graders in both reading and U.S. history, and a lot worse in math and geography." Little has changed since the book's publication.

Hite rightfully said that test cheating by adults harms students, but that harm pales in comparison with the harm done by teachers awarding fraudulent grades and conferring fraudulent high-school diplomas, particularly to black students. You say, "Williams, what do you mean by fraudulent diplomas?" When a student is given a high-school diploma, that attests that he can read, write and compute at a 12th-grade level, and when he can't do so at the eighth-grade level, that diploma is fraudulent. What makes it so tragic is that neither the student nor his parents are aware that he has a fraudulent diploma. When a black person is not admitted to college, flunks out of college, can't pass a civil service test or doesn't get job promotions, he is likelier to blame racial discrimination than his poor education.

Politicians, civil rights organizations and the education establishment will do nothing about the fraud. In fact, they give their full allegiance to the perpetrators.

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