



Written by [Sam Blumenfeld](#) on September 19, 2012

Unionized Teachers Show Their Clout and Win

Although Chicago's public school teachers are among the highest paid in the nation, they wanted more, and according to the settlement reached late Tuesday, September 18, they are getting more. Mayor Rahm Emanuel hailed the settlement as marking "a new day and a new direction" for Chicago public schools. He said it provided "higher pay for teachers and a higher standard of education for students." It included teacher evaluations, a longer school day, and plans for five new science and technology high schools.



But whether any of the changes actually improve education in the schools is still to be seen. This is the city of Saul Alinsky, who said that the purpose of revolution is for the have-nots to take from the haves. The teachers of Chicago may not technically be "have nots," but it pays to act like them.

Conservatives have always thought that permitting public school teachers and other government workers to unionize was a very bad mistake. A strike in which 350,000 children were held hostage by 35,000 teachers is nothing more than a crude form of blackmail. The fact that the union is led by a highly intelligent former high-school teacher, Karen Lewis, simply adds irony to the story. Her aim is not to fix a dysfunctional education system, but merely give teachers as much money and protection as they can possibly squeeze out of the taxpayers.

The average salary of a Chicago teacher is \$76,000 a year. If you add such benefits as healthcare and retirement, the total amount comes to about \$150,000 a year. And what are the parents and citizens getting for their money? According to the *Washington Times*:

Seventy-nine percent of the 8th graders in the Chicago Public Schools are not grade-level proficient in reading, according to the U.S. Department of Education, and 80 percent are not grade-level proficient in math.

In other words, only about 21 percent of Chicago school children emerge from their 12 years of "education" able to function competently in our high-tech economy. The Chicago Public Schools' own website reports "that only 7.9 percent of student test takers meet college readiness benchmarks." Ninety-two percent do not. The website further states:

"Our mission is clear: to ensure that every child has access to a world-class education and that our graduates are college and career ready," said CPS CEO Jean-Claude Brizard. "These results show we have work to do in pursuit of these goals. Our teachers are working hard to provide their students with a quality education based on all the tools at their disposal, but those tools are not enough. Students need more time in the classroom with their teachers and that time needs to be best used to boost student achievement. These results, coupled with a high school graduation rate of 57 percent and only 31 percent of eighth graders on track for college readiness, clearly show that our students can no longer afford to have the shortest school day and year in the country."



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The striking teachers may have accepted a longer school day, but they will also continue to implement the most debilitating progressive curriculum in Chicago's schools.

What was not being told in reports about the teachers strike is the fact that student reading scores on the Prairie State Achievement Exam (PSAE) are getting worse, not better. The official website reports:

Within the overall 2011 PSAE results:

The composite showed 28.3 percent of students meeting or exceeding standards, down 1 percentage point from 2010 results.

In reading, 30.9 percent hit the meets/exceeds benchmark, down 2 percentage points from 2010.

In math, the meets/exceeds was 29.4 percent, up 0.6 percentage points.

In science, 24.6 percent met/exceeded standards, down 1.5 percentage points.

The percentage of students exceeding standards also declined by .5 percentage points to 3 percent.

No wonder Marva Collins left the Chicago school system back in 1975 to create her own private school. And no wonder the teachers of Chicago do not want to be held accountable for their failure to teach the vast majority of their students to read. That is why they refuse to be judged by the test scores of their students. But according to the settlement, student test scores will count for a percentage of a teacher's competence, but not enough to get anyone fired.

Meanwhile, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, which is being touted as the state with the best schools in the nation, is having its own problems. The Boston Globe of September 18 reported:

The percentage of third-graders who scored proficient in math, for instance, fell from 66 to 61, and fifth-grade English scores saw a similar decline. Third-grade English scores, widely considered a key predictor of success, held steady at 61 percent, renewing concern that many students are falling behind from a young age.

"We should all be alarmed that 39 percent of third-graders are not proficient readers," said Amy O'Leary of Strategies for Children, a Boston group that advocates for early childhood education. "We know children who struggle in third grade continue to struggle."

In fourth-grade English, 32 percent of African-American students were proficient, compared with 64 percent of white students.... In third-grade English, just 40 percent of low-income students were proficient.

What all of this means is that America's public schools are still using methods of teaching reading that produce reading failure — such as "whole language" instruction. It's as if Rudolf Flesch had never written *Why Johnny Can't Read*. Of course, that book was published in 1955 before many of today's primary-school teachers were born. But the prejudice among educators against intensive, systematic phonics is inculcated in the colleges of education and is as strong today as ever.

In my book, *NEA: Trojan Horse in American Education*, published in 1984, there is a chapter entitled "The Conspiracy Against Literacy." I wrote:

Nothing has mystified Americans more than the massive decline in literacy in the United States. Children spend more time in school and the government spends more money on education than ever before. Yet, reading ability keeps declining. What has gone wrong?

I then proceeded to expose the conspiracy launched by John Dewey and implemented by his socialist



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colleagues in the early days of the 20th century. The authors of *The Dewey School*, in recounting the history of Dewey's Laboratory School, wrote in 1936:

Too much emphasis cannot be laid upon the fact that undue premium is put upon the ability to learn to read at a certain chronological age.... The entertainment plus information motive for reading conduces much to the habit of solitary self-entertainment which ends too often in day-dreaming instead of guided creative activities, controlled by objective success or failure.

Dewey readily admitted that children would not read as well with the new teaching methods. But not to worry. He wrote:

It is not claimed that by the method suggested, the child will learn to read as much, nor perhaps as readily in a given period as by the usual method. That he will make more rapid progress later when the true language interest develops ... can be claimed with confidence.

Tell that to the four Rockefeller boys who were permanently damaged by the reading program in their private progressive school. Tell that to Taylor Mali who wrote in *What Teachers Make*:

The evidence is overwhelming: when children have access to quality pre-primary education, the advantage they get is so great that their peers who were not as fortunate will never catch up. Never. Even if I had been the greatest teacher in the history of the world, by the time a student reached my sixth-grade class, the extent to which he or she could progress intellectually had been almost entirely determined nearly ten years earlier!

And according to Harvard Professor Anthony D. Oettinger, not everybody in America has to be literate. He told an audience of corporation executives in 1982:

The present "traditional" concept of literacy has to do with the ability to read and write. But the real question that confronts us today is: How do we help citizens function well in their society? How can they acquire the skills necessary to solve their problems?

Do we, for example, really want to teach people to do a lot of sums or write in "a fine round hand" when they have a \$5 hand-held calculator or a word processor to work with? Or, do we really have to have everybody literate — writing and reading in the traditional sense — when we have the means through our technology to achieve a new flowering of oral communication?

But everyone knows that the road to success in our global economy starts with literacy. That's why Chicago's parents send their children to school. But apparently the educators seem to agree more with Prof. Oettinger than with the parents.



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