



Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on November 2, 2015

## Detroit Report Card: Students Failing but Teachers “Highly Effective”

The [report just released](#) by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) showed that “In 2015, the average score of eighth-grade students in Detroit was 237 ... lower than the average score of 257 for public school students in large cities.” But, said the report, this wasn’t as bad as it could have been:



The average score for students in Detroit was not significantly different from their average score in 2013 and in 2009. The percentage of students in Detroit who performed at or above the “Proficient” level was 7 percent in 2015. This percentage was not significantly different from that of 2013 (9 percent) and in 2009 (7 percent).

This, amazingly, was proclaimed a victory by Detroit Public Schools (DPS) spokeswoman Michelle Zdrodowski:

While these scores clearly indicate that Detroit Public Schools has more work to do to improve student outcomes ... we are pleased that the scores appear to be leveling out. Improvements in student achievement are at the center of the restructuring that is currently underway in DPS, and is guiding all of the district’s actions and decisions.

Only in Detroit can such atrocious performance be considered a victory. The city, which went bankrupt in 2013, left DPS hanging with a \$500-million annual operating debt that is growing at the rate of \$7,600 every day, bonded indebtedness of \$1.54 billion, and an estimated \$1.2 billion in unfunded pension liabilities.

All this is to be paid from a shrinking tax base that has reduced the number of DPS students by 72 percent just since 2000.

As Jack Lessenberry, the ombudsman for the *Toledo Blade*, put it:

Detroit’s public schools have been a tremendous failure. Four emergency managers have failed to reverse staggering enrollment declines ... nor are the students learning what they should. Detroit Public Schools’ students are performing far below the state average in every area measured: math, reading, writing, science and social studies.

But while Detroit’s schools have been failing to give its students even the most basic skills needed just to exist in today’s society, its teachers have supposedly been doing very well. Out of 171 members of the “leadership corps” of the DPS — superintendents, assistant superintendents, administrators, principals, and assistant principals — only one was judged to be “ineffective,” with the others getting



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grades of “effective” or “highly effective.”

Tom Gantert at Michigan’s Mackinac Center wrote:

There were 96 officials given the highest rating of “highly effective,” 68 were rated “effective” while just six were deemed to be “minimally effective.” Plus the single “ineffective” administrator.

What about the teachers? Gantert explained that “2,542 DPS teachers (79 percent) were rated “highly effective,” 541 teachers (17 percent) were rated “effective,” 73 teachers (3 percent) were rated “minimally effective,” and 52 teachers (2 percent) were rated “ineffective.”

Michigan Governor Rick Snyder has proposed some cosmetic changes. The first is splitting the public schools into two units: The first, the DPS, will no longer teach any students but will instead receive real estate taxes and use them to attempt to pay down the district’s enormous liabilities. The second, a newly created City of Detroit Education District, will be governed by more government bureaucrats, only different ones. Of the seven members of the new district, four would be chosen by the governor himself and three by Detroit’s mayor. The plan is for those seven to be replaced by a publicly-elected board within two years.

The new district will, of course, need money. Lots of money. Snyder’s plan proposes that local taxpayers will pump an additional three-quarters of a billion dollars into it over the next 10 years.

As David Osborne noted in *U.S. News*, “The operational elements of the public education system in Detroit would not change that much ... but [school administrators] would now be accountable to the Detroit Education Commission and its education manager, who would create a performance standard to measure the performance of every public school by a common yardstick.”

In other words, taxes will go up, those “highly effective” administrators and teachers will remain in place, and students’ performance will no doubt remain at dismally low levels — all of which will give the appearance of change without improvement.

According to [economist Mark Perry](#) with the American Enterprise Institute:

The Detroit Public School system apparently exists in a bizarre, upside-down and reverse Lake Wobegon world — academically, it’s the nation’s worst-performing urban school district, where only 6% of its high school students are proficient in math, only 4% are proficient in science, and only one-third are proficient in reading. Financially, DPS has to be the worst-performing urban school district in American history. And yet, more than half (56%) of the current DPS administrators are rated “highly effective” and a large majority (79%) of the district’s teachers are rated “highly effective.” In other words, the students in Detroit public schools are way, way below average, but all of the teachers and administrators are way, way above average. How can that be? It could only happen in a government-run public school monopoly, staffed with unionized teachers and administrators — in other words, an unrealistic fantasy world like Lake Wobegon — one that is totally divorced from reality, competition, accountability and common sense.





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