

THE SHOCKING STATISTICS OF AMERICA'S FAILING SCHOOL DISTRICTS

Over the past two years, public school systems across the country have continued to struggle with plummeting student proficiency rates in reading and math.

Did you know?...

- ➔ In [2024](#), only 23 percent of Chicago's fourth graders were proficient in reading, and 21 percent were in math. Only 27 percent of eighth graders were proficient in reading and 21 percent in math.
- ➔ In [Denver](#), only 31 percent of eighth graders were proficient in reading, and just 24 percent reached proficiency in math.
- ➔ In [Oakland](#), the crisis is especially alarming for students of color, with 80 percent of Black and Brown students unable to read at grade level.
- ➔ Philadelphia School district is in the midst of a [civil rights probe](#) for failing to protect Jewish students from harassment, despite only 18 percent of eighth graders were proficient in reading and 15 percent proficiency in math.



Controversy Over DEI Initiatives at Failing Schools

In 2024, Parents Defending Public Schools filed a [federal civil rights complaint](#) against Denver Public Schools for requiring staff to participate in a "Black Excellence" pledge while the school system overall had poor performance.

[The Education Department](#) recently put out a letter stating, "treating students differently on the basis of race to achieve nebulous goals such as diversity, racial balancing, social justice, or equity is illegal."

The Shocking Statistics of America's Failing School Districts

Executive Summary

Over the past two years, public school systems across the country have continued to struggle with plummeting student proficiency rates in reading and math. In Denver, only **31 percent of eighth graders were proficient in reading**, and just **24 percent reached proficiency in math**. The situation in Chicago was similarly concerning, with over **70 percent of students failing to show proficiency in math** and reading for their grade levels in national tests. Michigan also faced significant challenges, ranking **44th in the nation** for fourth grade reading scores. Third through eighth graders in the state remained three-quarters of a grade level behind in reading compared to pre-pandemic levels. Philadelphia, often cited as one of the worst-performing large urban school districts, reported only **17 percent of fourth graders proficient in reading** and **19 percent in math**. Among eighth graders, those numbers dropped to **18 percent for reading** and **15 percent for math**. In Oakland, the crisis is especially alarming for students of color, with **80 percent of Black and Brown students unable to read** at grade level.

Despite struggling academic achievement levels, some school districts are misplacing priorities around various equity initiatives, causing mounting backlash from parents and advocacy groups. Several public school systems are facing federal civil rights complaints for **prioritizing racial equity initiatives over improving student performance**. Oakland Unified School District saw protests from parents and students for poor academic achievement when it was revealed **that 80 percent of Black and Brown students could not read at grade level**. San Francisco Unified School District recently backed down from implementing an equity initiative after intense backlash from parents. Philadelphia School district is in the midst of a civil rights probe for **failing to protect Jewish students from harassment**, despite only **18 percent of eighth graders were proficient in reading** and **15 percent proficiency in math**.

Chicago Public Schools

In [2024](#), only 23 percent of Chicago's fourth graders were proficient in reading, and 21 percent were in math. Only 27 percent of eighth graders were proficient in reading and 21 percent in math.

Chicago schools have been working on a [plan](#) to provide additional support for black students, roughly 30 percent of students, by hiring more Black male teachers, reducing disciplinary actions, and teaching more about Black history and culture.

- In February 2025, an advocacy group called Parents Defending Education filed a [civil rights lawsuit](#) against Chicago Public Schools over an initiative to give extra support to Black students.
- [The Education Department](#) recently put out a letter stating, "treating students differently on the basis of race to achieve nebulous goals such as diversity, racial balancing, social justice, or equity is illegal."

Denver Public Schools

In [2024](#), only 31 percent of eighth graders were proficient in reading and 24 percent were proficient in math.

In 2024, Parents Defending Public Schools filed a [federal civil rights complaint](#) against Denver Public Schools for requiring staff to participate in a “Black Excellence” pledge while the school system overall had poor performance.

- The complaint references a [pledge](#) that states “all educators need to understand the prevalence and deep harm whiteness brings to students” and directs teachers to “dismantle the system that allows certain students to excel and others to perish.”

Michigan

In [2024](#), Michigan ranked 44th in the nation for fourth grade reading scores. A report from the Education Trust Midwest showed third through eighth graders were still three quarters of a grade level behind in reading than they were before the COVID-19 pandemic.

- In response to poor reading scores, [Grand Ledge Public Schools](#) decided to re-invent the way it teaches reading, and the district school board officially adopted a new literacy curriculum.

Oakland Unified School District

In April 2025, parents and students organized a rally and march on the school district’s meeting because of [poor academic achievement](#), where “[80 percent](#) of Black and Brown students here in Oakland cannot read at grade level” according to Kimi Kean, the CEO of Families in Action. Kean said the [district promised](#) to improve minority academic performance, but there haven’t been results.

- In 2025, the Families in Action group had [three demands](#): schools to publicly disclose performance scores, better collaboration, and to stop wasting resources by having too many small schools.
- The group was also upset that the district was considering [firing](#) the long-term superintendent without properly informing parents.

Philadelphia School District

Philadelphia has one of the worst performing big-city school systems in the country. [In 2024](#), only 17 percent of Philadelphia fourth graders were proficient in reading, and 19 percent were proficient in math. Only 18 percent of eighth graders were proficient in reading, and 15 percent were proficient in math.

In December 2024, A US civil rights probe found that the [Philadelphia School District failed to protect Jewish students from](#) harassment despite “repeated, extensive notice” that students, teachers and administrators were engaging in antisemitic behavior.

- On December 18, 2024, the Department of Education’s civil rights office sent a [letter](#) outlining the allegations to the school district’s attorneys.
- Philadelphia school administrators [did not adequately address allegations](#) that students were performing Nazi salutes, drawing swastikas on school property, and uttering slurs and threats against Jewish students.

- Federal investigators also cited complaints about [allegedly antisemitic social media posts](#) by a school board member, an assistant superintendent, and four teachers.
- The Anti-Defamation League, a prominent Jewish advocacy group, was among [several Jewish groups to file complaints](#) against the district earlier in 2024.

San Francisco Unified School District

In May 2025, school officials tabled plans to test out alternative grading methods for high school students after outrage from parents and politicians.

- The “[Grading for Equity](#)” initiative would have been a trial of 70 teachers across 14 high schools who would align grades with learning rather than attendance, participation, and other factors.
- The [program](#) would have allowed students multiple chances to take tests, redo essays, and reconfigure the 100-point grading scale.
- The program would also have cost the district [\\$172,000](#) to contract with a consultant to implement the new grading system.
- [Parents](#) were highly critical of the proposed changes on social media and San Francisco’s mayor opposed the plan.
- The executive director of the [SF Parent Coalition](#) said parents weren’t properly informed about the potential changes to the grading system.