

With student learning down, education officials invent happy-talk metrics to hide the failures of public education

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BLOG
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Last week state Superintendent Reykdal announced results from Spring 2022 state tests in math and reading. Results show the state Smarter Balance tests show schools failed to teach 49.3 percent of students adequately in English and 62.3 percent of students adequately in math. Here's the link:

<https://washingtonstatereportcard.ospi.k12.wa.us/ReportCard/ViewSchoolOrDistrict/103300>.

Yet the Superintendent [said of these poor scores](#):

“The data show 70% of Washington’s students were proficient or made progress from the fall 2021 assessments...”

The strange mixing of “proficient” and “made progress” is designed to hide the widespread failures of the public education system. “Made progress” means “didn’t pass”. The deceptive wording shows a lack of concern for children, because it sounds like most students received the education they were promised when the test scores show they didn’t.

The twisted wording is a shift from past official test announcements, which provided a more honest report to the public. The Fall 2021 test scores showed schools failed to teach 52 percent of students adequately in English, and 70 percent of students adequately in math. The Superintendent [told the public](#):

“Data from this fall [Fall 2021] show slight decreases in English language art scores from 2019, with larger score decreases in math.”

The office [reported on Spring 2018 test scores](#) this way: “This year’s results show scores are remaining stable.”

“Remain stable” means in 2018 public schools failed to teach 40 percent of students adequately in English and failed to teach 51 percent adequately in math.

Today, telling the public that 70 percent of students “are proficient or made progress” is standard political spin to make bad numbers look less bad. The Superintendent issued

bar charts with invented categories like “Accelerated to Proficiency” and “Maintained Progress,” made-up terms with no meaning, which parents won’t understand even if they see them – but then again, that’s the point.

The highest educational office in the state, one whose core mission is to teach young people clarity of thought and expression, itself provides a case study in using pleasing verbiage and vacant phrases to hide the learning failures of the public school system.

Meanwhile, the latest NAEP scores, a national standard beyond the reach of state officials, [show an unprecedented decline in reading and math scores](#) in public schools. (More on the measurable harm done to students over the last two years is reported in our new [study here](#).)

Parents are not fooled, which explains why so many are leaving the public system. Seattle Times columnist Danny Westneat [recently reported on this trend](#).

Other states are making major progress on school choice. Arizona legislators recently authorized \$7,000 per child in direct family aid for education; Idaho lawmakers just approved \$1,000 per child in direct assistance so families can make up learning shortfalls. To date 32 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico now offer families [a total of 76 school choice programs](#). HB 1633, a bill introduced in our state would provide up to \$10,000 in direct learning assistance to families who ask for it.

Parents are clearly fed up with the happy-talk and word-spinning from school officials who aren’t being straight with the public. Rather than trying to decode empty slogans like “made progress” and “accelerated to proficiency,” more and more parents are simply seeking better choice elsewhere.

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