Pennsylvania's Failing, Violent Schools

Nearly 82,000 children are enrolled in the 141 public schools with available data on violence in Pennsylvania's lowest performing 5 percent on student proficiency. These schools reported more than 4,500 violent incidents in the 2009-10 school year alone.

Academic Achievement in the 141 Failing Schools

▪ In the 2009-2010 school year, only 32 percent of students were proficient in reading and 38 percent proficient in math on the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA).

⇨ In the worst 30 schools, only 21 percent of students were proficient in reading, while barely 18 percent were proficient in math.

⇨ Students in Philadelphia's William L. Sayre Middle School scored the lowest, with only 13 percent proficient in reading, and 8 percent proficient in math.

⇨ The PSSA itself is a low standard—some 80 percent more students reach proficiency on the PSSA than the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).

▪ In 2009-10, 81,799 students attended these 141 failing public schools.

School Violence in the 141 Failing Schools

▪ In 2009-10, these schools reported **4,547 violent incidents on students and staff** to the Pennsylvania Department of Education.

▪ On average, there were 6 violent incidents (detailed in the adjacent table) per 100 students.

⇨ Violent incidents ranged from zero at Benjamin Franklin School in Harrisburg City School District to 166 incidents per 100 students at Wilkinsburg Middle School in Wilkinsburg, Allegheny County.

Recorded Violent Incidents for Bottom 5% Schools, 2009-10	
Incident	Total
Assault on Student	1,698
Assault on Staff	893
Rape	0
Involuntary Sexual Deviate Intercourse	4
Sexual Assault	11
Indecent Assault	93
Indecent Exposure	225
Kidnapping/Interference with Child Custody	5
Reckless Endangering	337
Criminal Trespassing	103
Robbery	98
Theft	228
Rioting	1
Bomb Threat	2
Terroristic Threat	84
Weapon Possession	445
Burglary	3
Arson	33
Vandalism	284
TOTAL	4,547

Source: Safe Schools Online Reporting (www.safeschools.state.pa.us). Enrollment for 2009-10 was 81,799. Calculations are for the 141 out of 143 total schools in bottom 5 percent for which data are available.

- Student assaults on other students were by far the most pervasive violent acts across the 141 schools—there were 1,698 total assaults.
  - ⇨ Woodland Hills Junior High School in Pittsburgh recorded 105 assaults on students; or about one for every six students.
  - ⇨ Fairless Elementary School (also in Woodland Hills School District) witnessed 94 assaults on students, **nearly one for every three elementary students.** There were also 23 assaults on staff.
  - ⇨ Wilkinsburg High School in the Pittsburgh area recorded the highest number of violent incidents, totaling 442. The school further saw 150 incidents of indecent exposure, 177 of reckless endangering, 11 robberies, 18 terroristic threats and 47 assaults— in a school of only 345 students.
- In addition to student assaults, a number of serious crimes were committed against fellow students and school facilities:
  - ⇨ In Philadelphia's 86 failing schools, there were <u>**four incidents of involuntary sexual intercourse.**</u>
  - ⇨ Hannah Penn Middle School in York dealt with nine sexual assaults.
  - ⇨ Burton Elementary School in Erie City and Samuel Fels High School in Philadelphia saw the highest number of thefts, at 15.

Lowest-Achieving Public Schools, 2011				
School	Location	% of Students Proficient in Reading	% of Students Proficient in Math	Violent Incidents per 100 Students (2009-10)
William L Sayre MS	Philadelphia	13%	8%	10.76
Germantown HS	Philadelphia	17%	8%	6.28
Harrisburg HS	Harrisburg	19%	10%	0.77
Phoenix Academy	Lancaster	16%	10%	5.07
Simon Gratz HS	Philadelphia	12%	10%	6.37

Sources: www.safeschools.state.pa.us; paayp.emetric.net. Calculations are for the 141 out of 143 total schools in bottom 5 percent for which data are available.

School Choice: A Lifeline

- Almost 82,000 Pennsylvanian children are trapped in failing and dangerous public schools that they are assigned to by their zip code.
- Allowing parents to choose the best school for their children has been shown to increase academic achievement, and will help families find a safe learning environment for students.
- School choice will enable competition in the public school system, improving educational quality for all students.

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