

THE 2016 UPDATE

Blacks Continue Falling Through The Gaps In Louisville's Schools

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Blacks Continue Falling Through Gaps in Louisville's Schools

The 2016 Update

Kentucky has a serious problem in its largest school district.

It isn't a new problem.

In fact, this problem was already well understood back in June 2012 when the Bluegrass Institute issued its first paper in the "Blacks Falling Through Gaps" series. That paper highlighted the fact that blacks in the Jefferson County Public Schools District (JCPS) were continuing year after year to significantly lag behind white students in academic performance.

The initial Bluegrass Institute paper, "Blacks Falling Through Gaps," was based on test results from 2011 and high school graduation rates from 2010.

After "Unbridled Learning," Kentucky's new school accountability program, came online in 2012, the institute updated that first report with "Blacks Still Falling Through Gaps, The 2012 Update." School-performance data examined in that second report included the 2012 results from Unbridled Learning's major new test component, the Kentucky Performance Rating for Educational Progress (KPREP) academic tests in mathematics. The second report also analyzed the 2011 high school graduation rates.

It's now been more than three years since our last "Blacks Falling Through Gaps" report on Jefferson County's school system was issued, and it's time for an update. So, this paper completely updates the analysis of mathematics and graduation rate data covered in our earlier reports. This new report also examines more, including a puzzling finding from our earlier reports: How is it possible for a number of high schools in Jefferson County to actually post notably larger high school graduation rates for black students than for whites?

Achievement gaps and high school graduation rate gaps continue to present problems in many JCPS Schools.

Significant Improvement Still Badly Needed

It would be nice to be able to report really notable reductions in some of the serious achievement gap issues we discovered in our first two reports. Unfortunately, despite myriad efforts to reduce achievement gaps in Jefferson County Public Schools – including creating new magnet schools, reconstituting school staff in what are now called the "Priority Schools" and even redistributing student populations – our updated findings based on 2015 data demonstrate that achievement gaps and high school graduation rate gaps continue to present significant problems in many JCPS schools.


Attempted improvements in the district even included bringing on board Dewey Hensley, Ed.D., a prov-

an expert in school turnarounds. Hensley had previously served as associate commissioner in charge of school turnarounds at the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE). Before reporting to the KDE, he posted a notable track record of turnaround success at Jefferson County's J.B. Atkinson Elementary School.

Nevertheless, despite all of these efforts, improvements in the gap situation in JCPS as of 2015 are very modest, at best. Worse, in too many areas, there have actually been performance decays.

For example, across the school district white minus black performance gaps on the EXPLORE (Grade 8) and PLAN (Grade 10) college readiness tests from the ACT, Inc. are actually worse in 2015 than in 2012, the year Kentucky's new Unbridled Learning program started. EXPLORE and PLAN tests are given to all eighth-grade and tenth-grade students in Kentucky.

Table 1 summarizes the 2011-12 and 2014-15 EXPLORE results as reported in the 2012 and 2015 Kentucky School Report Cards for Jefferson County.¹


Table 1										
Jefferson County Public Schools EXPLORE (Grade 8), Percent of Students Reaching Benchmark Scores, By Race, 2012 and 2015										
	2012 Percent Meeting Benchmark		2015 Percent Meeting Benchmark		White Minus Black Gaps			Change in Percent Meeting Benchmarks Between 2012 and 2015		
	White	Black	White	Black	2012	2015	Change	Whites	Blacks	
English	62.0	34.6	62.1	33.9	27.4	28.2	0.8	0.1	-0.7	
Math	32.2	11.6	31.8	9.7	20.6	22.1	1.5	-0.4	-1.9	
Reading	43.9	19.6	40.4	15.8	24.3	24.6	0.3	-3.5	-3.8	
Science	16.3	4.2	17.4	4.1	12.1	13.3	1.2	1.1	-0.1	
Data Source: Kentucky School Report Cards, Jefferson County, 2012 and 2015										
Changes shown in bold yellow typeface with red backgrounds indicate declines in performance										

As Table 1 indicates in the "White Minus Black Gaps" section under the "Change" column, the gaps for white minus black performance grew larger between 2012 and 2015 in all areas tested by EXPLORE.

Even worse, the actual percentages of blacks meeting the EXPLORE Benchmark Scores, which show students are on track to succeed in college, dropped in all four subjects. Given the very low percentages of blacks meeting Benchmark Scores to begin with, any drop is clearly a major problem.

Things look scarcely better when we examine Jefferson County's performance on the tenth grade PLAN test results in Table 2, which also come from the Kentucky School Report Cards.

Once again, the gaps in white minus black performances in all subjects tested grew worse between 2012 and 2015. Furthermore, with the lone exception of math (where the percentage of blacks meeting the PLAN Math Benchmark Score increased by less than 1 percent), the percentage of blacks meeting the PLAN Benchmark Scores also declined in every other tested subject.

Table 2									
Jefferson County Public Schools PLAN (Grade 10), Percent of Students Reaching Benchmark Scores, By Race, 2012 and 2015									
	2012 Percent Meeting Benchmark		2015 Percent Meeting Benchmark		White Minus Black Gaps			Change in Percent Meeting Benchmarks Between 2012 and 2015	
	White	Black	White	Black	2012	2015	Change	Whites	Blacks
English	66.5	36.2	63.4	30.8	30.3	32.6	2.3	-3.1	-5.4
Math	32.5	8.1	33.3	8.8	24.4	24.5	0.1	0.8	0.7
Reading	49.2	21.9	47.5	19.4	27.3	28.1	0.8	-1.7	-2.5
Science	25.0	5.9	25.4	5.1	19.1	20.3	1.2	0.4	-0.8
Data Source: Kentucky School Report Cards, Jefferson County, 2012 and 2015									
Changes shown in bold yellow typeface with red backgrounds indicate declines in performance									

A Leadership Crisis

As all of this was transpiring, Hensley, the one proven expert in school turnarounds in the JCPS district, left the district under far-from-happy conditions. Hensley's explosive resignation letter charges that his tenure at JCPS was largely marked by:

"...marginalized voices, eroded credibility, and a great deal of time devoted less to developing quality schools for children and more about managing perceptions for adults."

Hensley also charged there was a:

"...focus on perception and pseudo-innovation (as opposed to real innovation)."

Letter from Dewey Hensley to David Jones,
Jefferson County Board of Education chairman,
and JCPS Superintendent Donna Hargens
October 10, 2015

Hensley's dramatic departure raises serious concerns about the education system currently in place in Jefferson County.

Now, let's see how test scores and graduation rate data add to those concerns.

Examining The 2015 KPREP Mathematics Test Results

Let's examine the data in a way that allows us to find valid indications of what's happening in Kentucky's largest school district while trying carefully to avoid falling into the trap of managed perceptions for adults.

We begin by updating the analysis of the math performance on state tests we conducted in our two previous "Blacks Falling Through Gaps" reports.

Our current examination of the KPREP math test proficiency rates for whites and blacks is conducted separately by school level – elementary, middle and high schools. We analyze the KDE’s officially reported math proficiency rates for whites and blacks found in Excel spreadsheets released in October 2015, calculating the white minus black math proficiency gap for each school.²

When we compare our new results to what we discovered in the 2012 data, what we find is disturbing.

- In the 2012 data, the white versus black math proficiency rate achievement gap exceeded 10 percentage points in 116 of the 134 schools that had scores for both white and black students. Three years later, gaps still exceeded 10 percentage points in 102 of the 136 regular (Class A1) schools in Jefferson County with data necessary to perform the comparison. That’s a small improvement, but the vast majority of the Jefferson County schools still have notable gaps.
- In 2012, the white versus black math achievement gap exceeded a more disturbing 20 percentage points in 65 schools. Flash forward to the new 2015 results, and a nearly identical 62 schools posted this more objectionable gap.
- Also in 2012, a total of 32 JCPS schools had math gaps exceeding 30 percentage points, a seriously unacceptable figure. This was reduced to 25 schools by 2015, but the notable number of schools with such exceptionally large gaps is extremely objectionable, especially after more than a quarter-century of expensive reforms following passage of the Kentucky Education Reform Act of 1990 (KERA).
- Worse still, we found even larger gaps in some schools. In 2012, a total of 11 Jefferson County schools had white minus black math proficiency rate gaps of more than 40 points. In 2015, this grew to 12 schools that posted these phenomenally high gaps in math – clearly a decrease in performance.
- Worst of all, white versus black math proficiency rate gaps exceeded an absolutely astonishing 50 percentage points in two Jefferson County schools in 2012. In 2015, Dunn Elementary School and Noe Middle School have similar, simply astonishing math achievement gaps exceeding 50 points.

This isn’t the first time Dunn Elementary has appeared on our “radar.” In 2012, Dunn had a KPREP white minus black math proficiency gap of 48.8 points, which swelled to 50.5 points in 2015.

Dunn’s black math proficiency rate of 24.0 ranks way down at No. 67 among the 89 elementary schools in Jefferson County with available data from the 2015 KPREP. In sharp contrast, Dunn’s whites rank No. 13 from the top among white scores from that same group of 89 schools. Dunn certainly outperforms the average for its white students but blacks at Dunn – many of whom undoubtedly are bused to the school from the West End of Louisville – might actually be better off in a large number of other schools in Louisville, including their residential “resides” area school.

We also must note that Dunn was rated as a “Distinguished” school – the highest rating – in the 2015

Unbridled Learning school accountability system. Despite its enormous disparity in white and black math performance, Dunn’s staff can point to Unbridled Learning to claim credit for supposedly far better-than-average performance. Meanwhile, many other schools clearly did a better job for their black students, but you cannot tell that from the overall Unbridled Learning scores. Only by digging into the data is this problem revealed.

Dunn also was not flagged as a “Focus School” in Unbridled Learning reports despite its comparatively low black math proficiency rate score, which was 9.2 percentage points below the elementary school average math proficiency rate in Jefferson County’s elementary schools.

Unbridled Learning Missed Some Very Large Achievement Gaps, Again!

Unbridled Learning does have features intended to highlight schools with minority student group performance problems. Schools that trip one of these performance checks are designated as “Focus Schools.” The problem is that Unbridled Learning isn’t effectively identifying real problems.

One Unbridled Learning performance check for special student groups lumps all special students together from the racial minority, learning disabled, poor and English language learner groups before making performance determinations separately for the subjects of reading, math, science, social studies and writing. However, in a number of cases this becomes mostly just a measure of poor white performance in those subjects because most schools have far more special students in this one category. As a result, the “Gap Group” calculation, as this feature is called, can allow a foundering racial group’s problems to go undetected in Unbridled Learning’s school classification system.

Another attempt at minority-group protection in Unbridled Learning is based on a statistical approach using standard deviations. This approach is inappropriate for racial minority performance monitoring and has never worked well in practice for minority students. The Bluegrass Institute has challenged Unbridled Learning’s standard deviations approach since our second “Blacks Falling Through Gaps” report’s release in 2012.

Specific examples of the continuing problem with unidentified low performance for minority groups can be found in the 2015 Unbridled Learning data.

Dunn Elementary – despite the school’s enormous achievement gap – placed in Unbridled Learning’s top school performance category in 2015 without any problem-indicating “Focus” flags.

As previously mentioned, Dunn Elementary – despite the school’s enormous achievement gap – placed in Unbridled Learning’s top school performance category in 2015 without any problem-indicating “Focus” flags.

The second-worst white minus black math achievement gap in 2015 among Jefferson County’s elementary schools is found at Field Elementary School. Its gap of 49.4 points is scarcely smaller than Dunn’s, yet

Field gets a 2015 Unbridled Learning classification of “Distinguished/Progressing” and the school is listed as a “School of Distinction” in the “Rewards and Assistance” category without any “Focus” flags.

Just behind Field is Hawthorne Elementary with a math gap of 49.1 points. This school is listed as a “Proficient/Progressing” school and has received no flags for its large gap in math performance.

It’s Taking Too Long To Fix Unbridled Learning’s Insensitivity To The Gap Problem

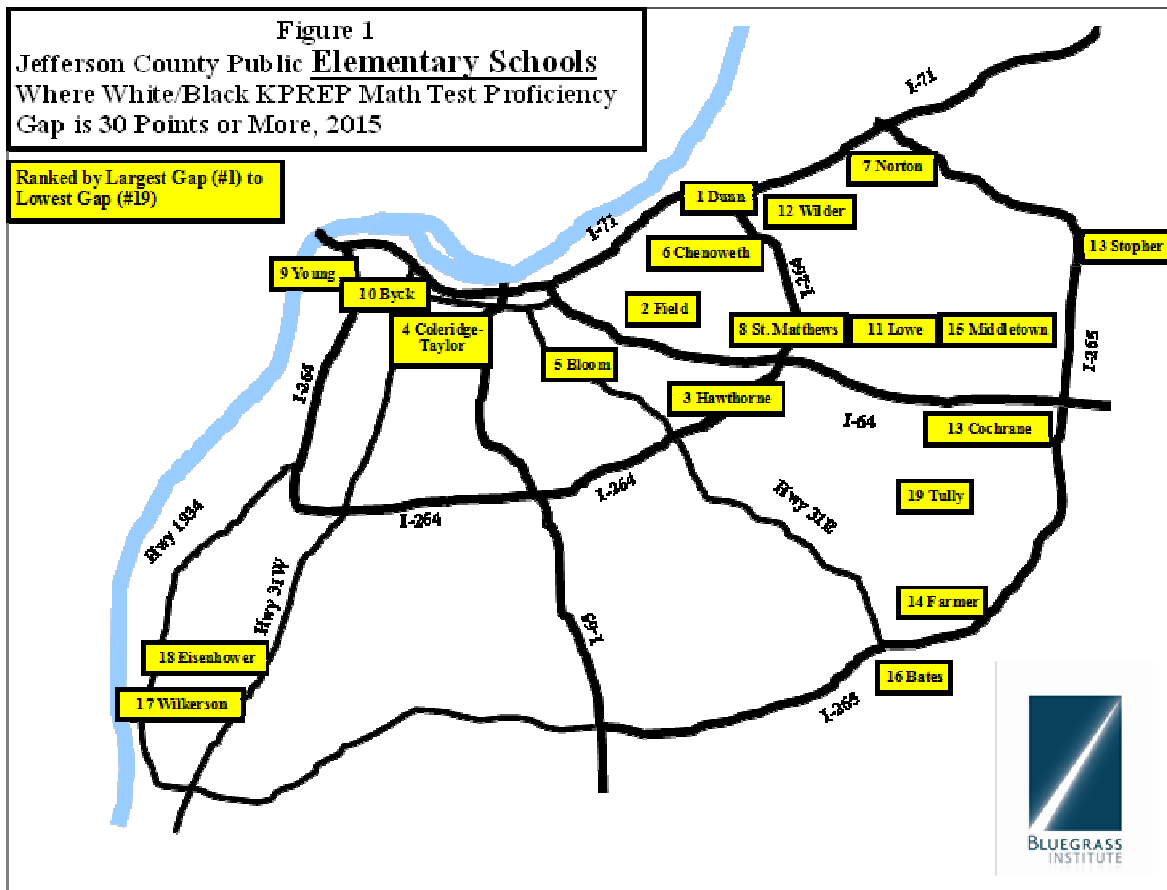
As mentioned earlier, we began highlighting problems with Unbridled Learning overlooking large achievement gaps for individual student subgroups in our “Blacks Still Falling Through Gaps” report in December of 2012. Unfortunately, a better approach to identify schools where student subgroups have serious under-performance in individual academic subjects won’t go into effect until the 2016 scores are released.

The lengthy delay in addressing this very obvious problem is simply unacceptable. This tardiness of action sends the wrong message that gaps really don’t matter that much to the state’s education leaders and that there’s no sense of urgency about fixing obvious problems regarding minority student monitoring in Unbridled Learning.

It’s Geographic

As in our first two reports, we again find obvious geographic patterns in the worst white versus black achievement gaps in Jefferson County’s schools. The largest gaps generally are found in schools in the upper-scale portions of the school district – basically East of I-65 in Eastern Jefferson County.

Figure 1 shows the location of the 19 JCPS elementary schools which posted 2015 KPREP math gaps of 30 percentage points or more last October.



Even a cursory examination of Figure 1 reveals that most of the schools with the district's largest gaps are located in upper-scale areas East of I-65. Overall, 14 of Jefferson County's big-gap schools are in more affluent areas of the district. Only five of the district's elementary schools with math proficiency rate gaps of 30 percentage points or more are found West of I-65.

Worse, just as we found in our earlier reports, black students in some elementary schools in eastern Jefferson County such as Dunn Elementary actually have much lower 2015 math proficiency rates (24.0% in Dunn) than blacks achieve in West End schools like Kennedy (45.5%) and Carter (61.5%) (Note: Kennedy and Carter don't have huge achievement gaps and therefore are not shown on the map).

Even the Portland Elementary School, a "Needs Improvement" school in 2015, has a much higher black math proficiency rate (39.3%) than Dunn's.

Incredibly, if a black student were to live near Portland but went to Dunn instead, that student would ride a bus to a school that might, on average, be offering less chance of academic success.

The middle-school situation also remains troubling. Figure 2 shows the 12 Jefferson County middle schools where the white minus black math proficiency rate gap posted in October 2015 exceeds 20

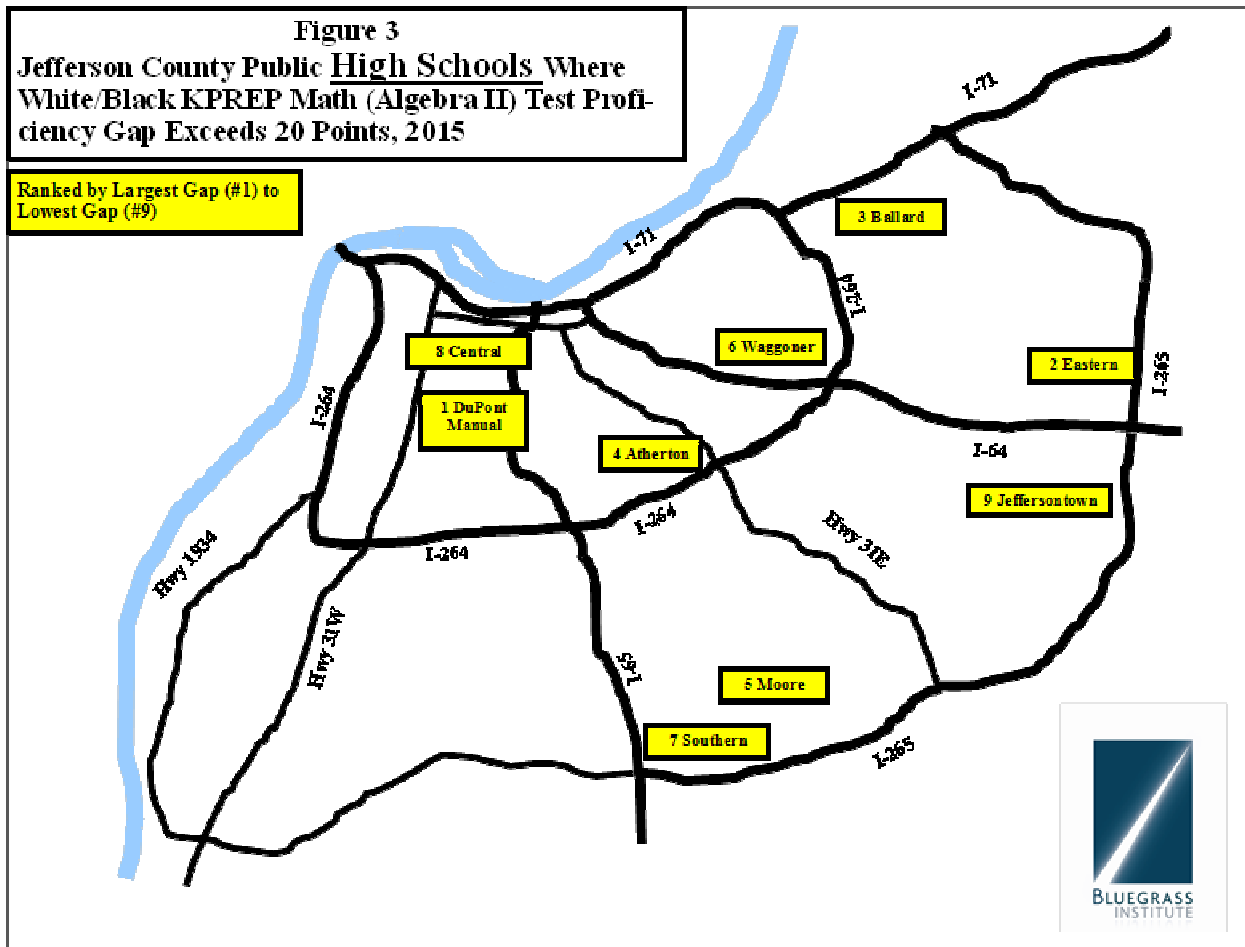
Ranked by Largest Gap (#1) to
Lowest Gap (#12)



Shouldn't a "Focus School" always be listed as a "Needs Improvement" school?

Progressing” school for 2015. It didn’t get designated as a “Focus School” either, despite the fact that the school’s report card for 2015 shows a very large 46.3 point white minus black math proficiency rate gap. Meyzeek’s black math proficiency rate for 2015 of 25.0 percent is even lower than Noe’s 26.5 rate. But Noe gets flagged while Meyzeek doesn’t. Is this another variation on adult perception games?

The high school situation shows similar geographic patterns for the largest gap schools. Figure 3 shows the nine high schools where math gaps on the KPREP Algebra II End-of-Course exam exceed 20 points in 2015.



Among the high schools shown in Figure 3, DuPont Manual, Ballard, Atherton and Eastern High Schools all earned Unbridled Learning grades of “Distinguished.” None of the four tripped on extra checks in Unbridled Learning, so none of the four is a “Focus School.” Does this manipulate adult perceptions, as well?

To close this section of the report, we need to ask why all the high-gap schools discussed in this paper aren’t tagged in some way for extra help – or at least for closer monitoring – for their large achievement gaps. It’s important to understand that large gaps could indicate a host of problems, not the least of which may include a school faculty that works well with whites but not with minority students.

Gaps need to be properly and prominently identified so that education leaders and other policymakers can investigate and correct these issues. Right now, Unbridled Learning isn't getting this job done, and Jefferson County isn't making much progress to fix these significant problems, either.

Graduation Gaps Show Disturbing Trends, Too

During the research phase of our first “Blacks Falling Through Gaps” report, we made a surprising discovery: the KDE’s 2010 graduation rate data show blacks in some Jefferson County high schools actually have notably better odds of getting a high school diploma compared to the odds for whites in those same schools.

In our first report, we found four Jefferson County high schools where the black graduation rate unexpectedly was more than 10 points higher than each school’s graduation rate for whites.

When we updated our report with the 2011 graduation rate data, this unexpected trend in Jefferson County high school graduation-rate gaps was repeated. This time, three high schools had black graduation rates more than 10 points higher than their white rates.

This finding is puzzling because the vast majority of comparisons of white and black school performance data show conditions favor the white students. Why did we find something very different for graduation rates in Jefferson County?

Flash forward to the present, and we now have an additional way to look at the graduation rates. Some very troubling things have emerged from this new analysis. It appears a significant number of students in Jefferson County are being socially promoted all the way to a high school diploma even though these students are unable to qualify as either ready for college or ready for careers under any of the numerous ways such qualifications are now being determined. Even more disturbing, it looks like far more blacks than whites on a proportionate basis are being socially promoted to an empty high school diploma.

Let’s examine the latest high school graduation rate evidence.


What The Official 2015 High School Graduation Rates Show

Kentucky’s official 2015 graduation data is based on a formula known as the Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate, which is different from the Averaged Freshman Graduation Rate formula used for the 2010 and 2011 data found in our earlier reports. According to many education sources, including the US Department of Education, the Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate should be more accurate.

The Four-Year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate we use in this report shows the percentage of first time entering ninth-grade students who graduate four years later. A separate, Five-Year Adjusted Cohort Rate counts all students who graduate in a given year as a success even if some take up to five years to complete high school.

Due to more data made available by KDE, we use the Four-Year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate figures in this paper.⁴

Table 3 shows the officially reported 2015 Four-Year Adjusted Cohort High School Graduation Rates from the KDE for Jefferson County's standard (Class A1) high schools. The white minus black gap in

Table 3 Jefferson County High Schools: 4-Year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rates and White Minus Black Gap in the Rates, by Race, 2015			
			
School Name	White 4-Year COHORT Grad Rate	Black 4-Year COHORT Grad Rate	White Minus Black Gap in Cohort Grad Rate
Eastern High	94.3	82.6	11.7
Atherton High School	95.1	84.6	10.5
Pleasure Ridge Park High	87.9	79.2	8.7
Ballard High	94.3	87.8	6.5
Fairdale High School	89.2	83.9	5.3
Fern Creek High School	84.0	79.5	4.5
Brown School	100.0	95.5	4.5
Jeffersontown High School	84.8	80.5	4.3
Valley High School	80.1	76.5	3.6
Seneca High	87.3	84.8	2.5
Butler Traditional High School	98.4	97.4	1.0
duPont Manual High	99.4	98.6	0.8
Central High School	95.7	95.3	0.4
Louisville Male High School	97.6	97.3	0.3
Waggener High School	79.7	84.8	-5.1
Southern High School	77.5	87.4	-9.9
Moore Traditional School	78.2	88.5	-10.3
Doss High	78.8	91.0	-12.2
Iroquois High	51.4	66.7	-15.3
The Academy @ Shawnee	60.7	79.7	-19.0
Western High School	54.3	78.2	-23.9
Averages	84.2	85.7	-1.5
Data in Plain Typeface from KDE, Data in Bold Typeface Calculated by Author			

each school's graduation rate is also shown in the far right column. The table is sorted according to those graduation rate gaps.

As you can see from schools listed near the bottom of Table 3, once again a notable number of Jefferson County high schools officially report larger high school graduation rates for blacks than for whites. In fact, the number of such schools with gaps favoring blacks by more than 10 points is the highest we have encountered in any of our three reports, totaling five schools. The graduation rate gap in one of the schools, Western High School, strongly favors black students by more than 20 points.

Thus, the official graduation rate data continue to present the puzzling situation found in the earlier "Blacks Falling Through Gaps" reports. In fact, the puzzle in 2015 is the most perplexing we've yet observed in our three reports.

However, this time we can say more about this puzzle. To do that, we first discuss a new way the Bluegrass Institute computes Kentucky's high school graduation rates.

Effective High School Graduation Rates

The “Effective High School Graduation Rate” is an important concept, so let’s explain how it was developed by considering the latest (2014-15 school year) official data for the Jefferson County School District. Those official numbers are shown in the first two columns in Table 4.⁵

The first entry in Table 4 is the published Four-Year Adjusted Cohort High School Graduation Rate for the JCPS as a district. According to KDE documentation, this rate was 79.0 percent for Jefferson County’s high schools in 2015.

The second entry shows the percentage of those graduates able to qualify as college and/or career ready using one of a number of different qualification options allowed by the KDE. These options include performing adequately on the ACT college entrance test or on either of two alternative college placement tests known as the KYOTE test or the ACT’s own COMPASS test. Students can also be counted as a success in the College and/or Career Ready calculation by meeting one of several career-ready options. These involve successful completion of a number of career pathway courses in high school plus performing adequately on at least one of two tests, the ACT’s Work Keys test or the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB). In addition, the student either must earn an industry recognized certification, such as a welder’s certificate, or pass yet another skills-oriented test created by an organization of Kentucky employers.

Now, let’s put this data together.

As shown in Table 4, according to the 2014-15 Kentucky School Report Card for the Jefferson County School District, 79.0 percent – or 79 out of every 100 students who entered the ninth grade in the 2011-12 school year in the district – graduated on time from high school in 2015.

However, the College and/or Career Ready number tells us that only 63.1 percent of those 79 Jefferson County high school graduates were actually ready for what would come next in their lives – either college or a career.

Thus, only 49.8 students out of each original 100 students who entered the ninth grade in Jefferson County back in 2011-12 left school in 2015 adequately prepared for the rest of their lives.

That is an Effective High School Graduation Rate for Jefferson County – after more than 25

Table 4

2015 Data for the Jefferson County School District



4-Year Adjusted Cohort High School Graduation Rate	College and/or Career Ready Rate	Calculated Effective High School Graduation Rate
79.0 percent	63.1 percent	49.8 percent
Data in Plain Typeface Officially Reported by KDE		
Data in Bold Typeface Calculated by Author		

Only 49.8 students out of each original 100 students who entered the ninth grade in Jefferson County back in 2011-12 left school in 2015 adequately prepared for the rest of their lives.

years of expensive KERA reforms – of only 49.8 percent.

No one should be proud of that.

There is more, as we discuss in our online report, “Bluegrass Policy Brief: Kentucky Education’s shaky ‘college and career ready’ numbers cast doubt on claims of progress.”⁶ A good case can be made that the official College and/or Career Readiness data from the Kentucky Department of Education are too high.

Rather strong evidence of the inflation in the state’s College and/or Career Readiness Rates is found in a report from the Kentucky Legislative Research Commission’s Office of Education Accountability (OEA), “A Look Inside Kentucky’s College And Career Readiness Data.”⁷ Figure 3.G in that OEA report shows a notable number of students declared “college ready” produced very low Grade Point Averages in their freshman college year. Figure 3.G indicates that 12,164 students entered Kentucky’s public postsecondary system in 2012-13 after being declared college-ready by the Kentucky Department of Education. Of those entering college freshmen, our analysis shows 2,696 students – 22 percent of the total – achieved a grade point average below 2.0 in their freshman year and were most likely just not ready for college.

Of course, if true readiness is lower than the official numbers reported by the KDE, then our calculated Effective High School Graduation Rates computed from that data will be inflated, as well.

The bottom line is the true Effective High School Graduation Rate for Jefferson County is certainly lower than the KDE’s Cohort rate shown in the first column in Table 4. The true Effective High School Graduation Rate is undoubtedly even lower than our calculated rate of 49.8 percent shown in the far right column of Table 4. As with the gap data from Unbridled Learning, are the published graduation rates from the state’s accountability system mostly a management of perceptions for adults?

Individual Jefferson County High Schools’ Effective Graduation Rates

With the basic discussion of the Effective High School Graduation Rate complete, let’s use this new measure of quality to look at how well individual Jefferson County high schools perform in getting whites and blacks ready for either college or a living-wage career. The relevant information is listed in Table 5.

Table 5									
Kentucky and Jefferson County District and High Schools: 4-Year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rates, College and/or Career Ready Rates, Effective Graduation Rates, Effective Graduation Rate Gaps and Differences in Cohort and Effective Graduation Rates, by Race, 2015									
School Name	White 4-Year COHORT Grad Rate	Black 4-Year COHORT Grad Rate	White Percent College/ Career Ready	Black Percent College/ Career Ready	White Effective Graduation Rate	Black Effective Graduation Rate	Effective Graduation Rate Gap, Whites Minus Blacks	Whites, Difference in Reported and Effective Grad Rate	Blacks, Difference in Reported and Effective Grad Rate
Fairdale High School	89.2	83.9	69.0	28.8	61.5	24.2	37.4	27.7	59.7
Fern Creek High School	84.0	79.5	83.1	46.3	69.8	36.8	33.0	14.2	42.7
Atherton High School	95.1	84.6	81.8	53.2	77.8	45.0	32.8	17.3	39.6
Ballard High	94.3	87.8	83.8	53.4	79.0	46.9	32.1	15.3	40.9
Valley High School	80.1	76.5	63.8	26.7	51.1	20.4	30.7	29.0	56.1
Pleasure Ridge Park High	87.9	79.2	60.0	30.8	52.7	24.4	28.3	35.2	54.8
Eastern High	94.3	82.6	69.6	45.3	65.6	37.4	28.2	28.7	45.2
Jeffersontown High School	84.8	80.5	67.1	36.2	56.9	29.1	27.8	27.9	51.4
Butler Traditional High School	98.4	97.4	81.6	57.1	80.3	55.6	24.7	18.1	41.8
Seneca High	87.3	84.8	62.9	38.1	54.9	32.3	22.6	32.4	52.5
Waggener High School	79.7	84.8	65.1	36.1	51.9	30.6	21.3	27.8	54.2
Southern High School	81.8	87.4	65.8	39.6	53.8	34.6	19.2	28.0	52.8
Doss High	78.8	91.0	45.8	21.7	36.1	19.7	16.3	42.7	71.3
Central High School	95.7	95.3	68.2	52.7	65.3	50.2	15.0	30.4	45.1
Louisville Male High School	97.6	97.3	93.9	80.9	91.6	78.7	12.9	6.0	18.6
duPont Manual High	99.4	98.6	94.1	82.4	93.5	81.2	12.3	5.9	17.4
Brown School	100.0	95.5	96.6	90.5	96.6	86.4	10.2	3.4	9.1
Moore Traditional School	78.2	88.5	62.0	45.9	48.5	40.6	7.9	29.7	47.9
The Academy @ Shawnee	60.7	79.7	51.4	34.4	31.2	27.4	3.8	29.5	52.3
Iroquois High	51.4	66.7	46.2	30.8	23.7	20.5	3.2	27.7	46.2
Western High School	54.3	78.2	57.1	43.4	31.0	33.9	-2.9	23.3	44.3
Jefferson Co District Averages	80.1	76.5	74.5	44.8	59.7	34.3	25.4	20.4	42.2
Kentucky Statewide Averages	89.3	80.3	70.4	43.0	62.9	34.5	28.3	26.4	45.8

Data in Plain Typeface from KDE, Data in Bold Typeface Calculated by Author

The four columns of data just to the right of the schools', district's and state's names contain the officially published 2015 Four-Year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rates for each school's whites and blacks and the College and/or Career Readiness Rates for each school's whites and blacks, which can be found in the Kentucky Department of Education's 2015 School Report Card "Data Sets" Excel Spreadsheets. (Updated versions of spreadsheets downloaded on January 18, 2016 were used to create Table 5.)⁸

The officially reported data in Table 5 is shown in standard typeface. The data listed in bold typeface in Table 5 have been calculated by the author using the official Cohort Graduation Rate and College and/or Career Readiness Rate data.

The first two columns of calculated data, highlighted in light blue, list the Effective High School Graduation Rates for whites and blacks in each Jefferson County high school along with the district wide and statewide averages.

The next data column, highlighted in yellow, shows the Effective Graduation Rate Gap for whites minus blacks (the table is sorted on this column). Notice that – in contrast to what's shown in Table 3

using the officially reported Cohort Graduation Rates – only one school, Western High School, has a slightly negative gap favoring black graduations when we consider Effective High School Graduation Rates. Also note that the largest white minus black Effective High School Graduation Rate gap, for Fairdale High School, is a disturbingly large 37.4 percentage points. This is far larger than the very small 5.3 percent gap we see when we only examine Fairdale’s officially reported Cohort High School Graduation Rates in Table 3. It’s also notably higher than both the districtwide and statewide figures.

Next, consider the last two columns of data in Table 5, shaded in light pink. The first column in this last grouping shows the difference between the white students’ officially reported Cohort Graduation Rate and their calculated Effective Graduation Rate. The differences here range from a low of just 3.4 points for the Brown School to a high of 42.7 points for Doss High School. The 2015 districtwide average difference between the officially reported and effective high school graduation rates for Jefferson County’s white students is 20.4 points.

According to the KDE’s Four-Year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate, Doss High officially graduated 78.8 percent of its white students. However, the effective graduation rate shows the proportion of Doss’ entering white freshman who actually received an effective education was far lower at only 36.1 percent. This points to a lot of social promotion to hollow diplomas for whites at this school.

The differences in Table 5 are even more dramatic when we look at the black results in the far right column. The differences here range from a low of 9.1 points in the Brown School to an astonishingly high 71.3 points, also found at the Doss High School.

If Doss’ social-promotion-to-graduation problem is significant for whites, it’s clearly out of control for the school’s black students.

If Doss’ social-promotion-to-graduation problem is significant for whites, it’s clearly out of control for the school’s black students.

For Doss’ black students, the officially reported Cohort Graduation Rate is a rather impressive looking 91.0 percent. However, after we account for the proportion of the entering black ninth graders in this class that got an effective education, only 19.7 percent of those entering ninth grade blacks got prepared for college or a career. The fact that fewer than one in five of Doss’ 2015 black graduates were prepared for life – even using KDE’s fairly undemanding requirements to be considered College and/or Career Ready – is dispiriting!

Table 5 indicates that many other schools besides Doss are doing a lot of social promotion of black students to a hollow diploma. Across the Jefferson County school district, the average difference for black students between the Cohort Graduation Rate and the Effective Graduation Rate is 42.2 points, more than twice as high as the white’s difference of 20.4 points. The situation statewide isn’t much different, indicating the problem of disproportionate social promotion to diplomas for black students isn’t limited to Jefferson County.

The bottom line: While officially reported Cohort Graduation Rates look fairly good, the value of the diplomas that undergird those rates varies greatly. To adopt Hensley's quote, these numbers seem largely just ***"more about managing perceptions for adults."*** The lack of real educational success for far too many students is being hidden by these perception-manipulating graduation rate numbers while far too many students are receiving only hollow diplomas. This is a serious problem – one that's much more serious for blacks in both Jefferson County and across Kentucky.

Effective Graduation Rates – A Powerful Tool

It should be noted that the Effective High School Graduation Rate provides a powerful tool to examine the real quality of diplomas.

For example, if we only examine the gap in the published Cohort Graduation Rates for DuPont Manual High, Louisville's premier high school, we see whites and blacks both have very high and nearly equal graduation rates of 99.4 and 98.6 percent, respectively. However, when we look at the Effective Graduation Rates for this school, whites post a 93.5 percent Effective High School Graduation Rate but blacks in the school only scored an 81.2 percent rate.

Instead of a graduation rate gap of just 0.8 point, the gap is 12.3 points. Given that Manual is Louisville's top magnet high school, these numbers look problematic. It also looks like even in this premier Louisville magnet high school, more blacks than whites are socially promoted to a diploma that doesn't represent the education needed to be equipped either for college or a career.

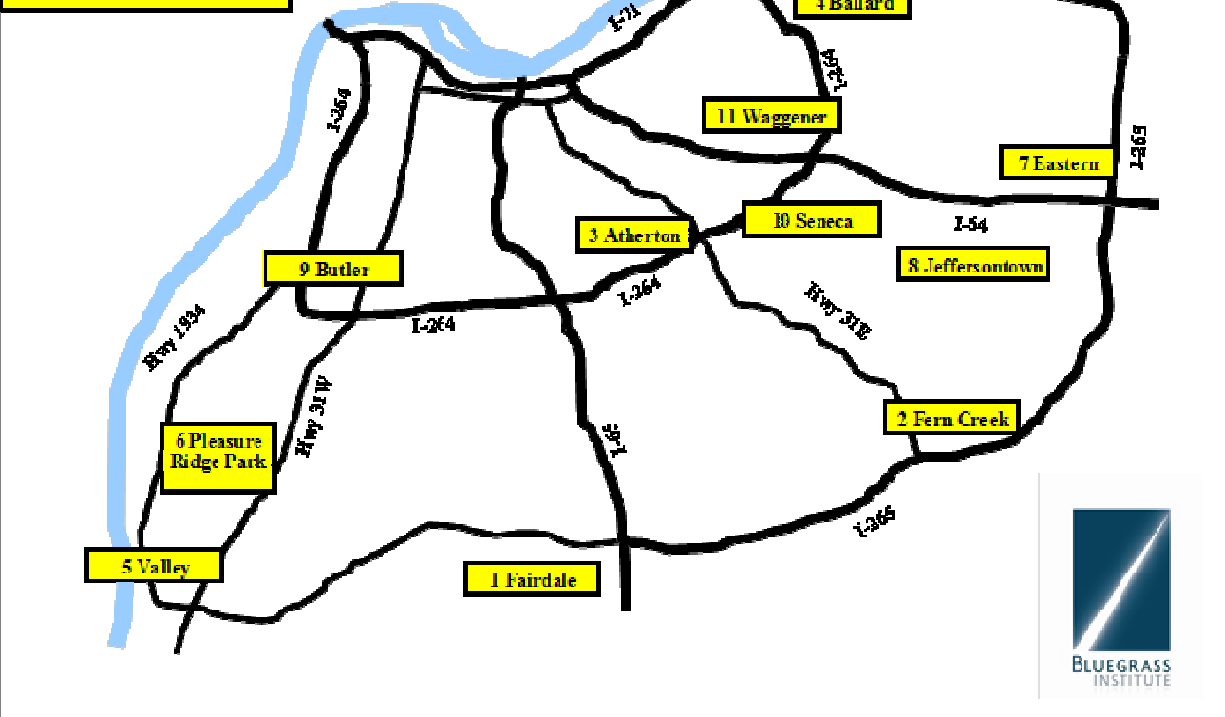
Mapping The Effective High School Graduation Rate Gaps

Figure 4 maps the high schools in Jefferson County where the gap in the Effective High School Graduation Rate for whites and blacks exceeds 20 points. As with the test score maps, we find the larger gaps more frequently located East of I-65.

Unlike in our two earlier reports, however, this year we don't need to show any high schools in black background boxes with white print because once we examine Effective High School Graduation Rates, there are no schools with a gap of 10 points or more favoring black students.

Figure 4
Jefferson County Schools Where the White Minus Black Effective High School Graduation Rate Gap Exceeds 20 Points, 2015

Ranked by Largest Gap (#1) to Lowest Gap (#11)



Implications In The Effective High School Graduation Rate Analysis

Our research into the Cohort and Effective graduation rates in Jefferson County points to some very disturbing conclusions:

- There are indications that a considerable amount of social promotion to a diploma is going on in Jefferson County Public Schools. For a disturbing number of the district's high schools, the differences in the proportion of students getting a diploma and the proportion that actually got the education needed to succeed in the 21st Century economy are significant and problematic.
- Far more blacks than whites appear to be socially promoted to empty diplomas that don't include the skills needed for life readiness. Only use of more sophisticated analysis such as the Effective High School Graduation Rate exposes this problem.
- Consideration of the Four-Year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rates for Kentucky in isolation from the College and/or Career Ready statistics leads to some very incorrect conclusions about school performance.

Clearly, the state should immediately include the Effective High School Graduation Rate in its school analysis and assessment programs.

Why Do The Gaps Continue After Years Of Education Reform?

Ongoing widespread disparities in test scores and graduation rates in JCPS schools offer stark testimony that all efforts to reform the school system to date have not fixed a major problem: the continuing severe gaps in educational performance for Louisville's black population. The dramatic gaps, the equally disturbing geographic relationships and the evidence of unequal social promotion to diplomas outlined above raise a very uncomfortable question:

While Louisville Says Its Schools Are Integrated, Is That Really True?

Even though the racial makeup at the school level might appear acceptable based on "head counts," what happens when you go into individual classrooms? Do black kids get tracked into different, lower-performing classrooms while whites are placed in other, faster-paced programs?

JCPS leadership should begin grappling with these issues. Something must explain the chronic, geographically related gap problems we found in Kentucky's largest school district in three different years of data. If it isn't some sort of classroom-level segregation, then what is it? Answer that question and we might be able to start fixing the problem.

Several things are certain: Louisville's schools need some different answers. Charter schools have been cutting into the gap problem in other states; it seems like it's time to try charters in Kentucky, especially in Louisville.

Furthermore, Unbridled Learning clearly needs more work. It will not achieve credibility if it continues to praise schools with huge achievement gaps. It also faces severe credibility issues if it fails to absorb the message in this report that high school graduation rates are becoming inflated due to hollow diploma awards and that a more sophisticated approach such as our Effective High School Graduation Rate is needed to fairly evaluate what's happening – or not happening – in Kentucky's public school system.

– Richard G. Innes is the staff education analyst at the Bluegrass Institute, Kentucky's free-market think tank. February 2016

Endnotes

¹ All school report cards are online in the Kentucky School Report Cards website at: <https://applications.education.ky.gov/src/>.

² The Excel spreadsheets ASSESSMENT_KPREP_LEVEL and ASSESSMENT_KPREP_EOC used to create the maps were downloaded in October 2015 from the “Data Sets” tab in the Kentucky School Report Cards web site. These spreadsheets were later updated by the Kentucky Department of Education but the October editions are available from the author.

³ Individual school report cards are also available online at the Kentucky School Report Cards website.

⁴ An updated version of the DELIVERY_TARGET_GRADUATION_RATE_COHORT Excel spreadsheet was downloaded on January 18, 2016 from the School Report Cards Database to create Table 3.

⁵ The Jefferson County statistics come from the district’s updated Kentucky School Report Card, accessed January 18, 2016.

⁶ This blog is online at: <http://www.bipps.org/kentucky-educations-shaky-statistics/>.

⁷ Timmel, Karen M., et. al., “A Look Inside Kentucky’s College And Career Readiness Data,” Kentucky Legislative Research Commission, Frankfort, KY, December 10, 2014. Online at: <http://www.lrc.ky.gov/lrcpubs/RR410.pdf>.

⁸ These updated Excel Spreadsheets are online at the Kentucky School Report Cards web site in the “Data Sets” area.



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