

# Teachers Union Hamstrings Efforts To Fix Newark's Schools

America has no shortage of cities plagued with failing schools. But Newark stands out—not just for its especially tragic education situation spawning the recent billboard wars, but also for a populace newly determined to do something about it. Last May, voters said “no” to the political status quo and installed a slate of reformers committed to changing the city, schools and all.

But some people would rather attack reform with billboards than offer to make any real change.

No one is more invested in keeping things the way they are than the Newark teachers union. Last year, mayoral candidate Ronald Rice launched his campaign from union headquarters. More recently the union rented the now-infamous billboards attacking Rice's victorious opponent, reform-minded Mayor Cory Booker.

The union's enforcement of the status quo begins with political campaigns and ends with underperforming kids. It's a disgrace.

Our Web site, [ProtectingBadTeachers.com](http://ProtectingBadTeachers.com), provides the first comprehensive look at the damage the teachers union has wreaked on the city's schools. Concerned citizens can see how well individual schools are faring in the face of union obstruction.

Here's a summary: 30.6 percent. That's how many kids have graduated from Newark schools with a normal high school diploma the past four years.

Teachers unions are notorious for

preventing tenured teachers from being fired, no matter how bad their performances. And in Newark, the size of this problem is astonishing.

Out of almost 4,000 tenured teachers in Newark, the school district fires about one a year.

The Newark school district has many hard-working, committed educators. But can it be true that in any given year only one or two tenured teachers are unfit to teach?

Put another way, in the past four years, less than one-third of Newark seniors graduated with a regular high school diploma. If nothing else, that's evidence of the need to upgrade more than just a few teachers.

The unions know these bad apples are in the system but protect them.

Between 2001 and 2005, the Newark school district challenged the tenure of 15 teachers. One of them reportedly slapped a student in the face so violently her nail went into his eye. A gym teacher reportedly could not stop talking about his female students' bodies, recommending to one boy: “You should get that now before she gets older.” And another teacher reportedly hit a student with a door—twice—and refused to let other students enter his classroom, despite written orders from an administrator.

How many of these teachers were fired on the spot? Not one. The gym teacher received more than four months of additional salary to leave, plus a promise the district wouldn't explain to future employers why he

had left—even if he were working with young girls again. Every teacher who settled, including those mentioned above, was allowed to draw on average an additional six months of pay on the way out the door.

Having negotiated so many settlements like these, the union's typical response to the district's incredibly low firing rate is that most problem teachers are pressured into leaving before getting fired. But the research that's available on [ProtectingBadTeachers.com](http://ProtectingBadTeachers.com) shows that of all the tenured teachers charged between 2001 and 2005, only 13 left the district for any reason, including termination, resignation and retirement.

That's still less than one in 1,000.

Newark's children deserve better than the fiction that tenured teachers are universally doing a good job, and they deserve better than a teachers union that would rather rent billboards than ensure quality teaching. Last year, voters handed a crushing defeat to the would-be mayor who launched his campaign at union headquarters. Now the people need to speak up again and tell the union to loosen its stranglehold on their kids' future.

Ending the knee-jerk protection of bad teachers is a great place to start.

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