

Today's Schools Are Passing Kids Even When They Fail

Are schools increasingly passing students on to the next grade despite poor performance in class?

That's the issue recently explored by Jay Matthews in the [*Washington Post*](#). Matthews describes the experiences of one parent who knew her daughter was deliberately ignoring her school work, yet was rewarded with a passing grade by her teacher:

"A Fairfax County mother has been telling me about her bewilderment at her bright but school-hating daughter's passing English even though her second-quarter and third-quarter grades were F's and she skipped the final exam.

Having encountered earlier report card mysteries, the parent e-mailed all of her daughter's teachers June 10, asking that she be given the marks she deserved. That didn't happen, but at least the English teacher on July 9 sent her an honest explanation of why the frequently absent student got an A for the fourth quarter and scraped by with a final course grade of D.

The teacher confessed that the student did not earn that fourth quarter A but participated in several class discussions and demonstrated that she understood the bulk of the material throughout the year. Her problems, the teacher concluded, were lack of effort and attendance, not comprehension.

It was breathtaking to the Fairfax parent, as it would be to other mothers and fathers, to learn that the teacher could have justified a final grade of F but didn't think there would be an academic benefit to failing the student. The daughter knew the material better than most of the students,

said the teacher, who let her pass despite her misbehavior.”

Of course, one can't judge based on a single anecdote, but according to Jay Matthews, such an incident is not isolated in his experience. Indeed, recent reports in the last several days alone imply that students in [New York](#) and [Minnesota](#) are also passing courses or graduating regardless of whether or not they know their stuff.

Is such a scenario detrimental to kids? Absolutely! For those students who struggle in school, giving them a passing grade and sending them on to the next level simply produces discouragement and debt when they get to college and find they can't do the required course work.

And for those students who don't try because they're too smart and the curriculum fails to challenge them? Well, the response of the Fairfax student from Jay Matthews' column speaks for itself:

“The Fairfax student was delighted with the results, telling her parents she might hold the world record for getting passing grades despite doing nothing. Her parents want her to grow up. They wonder why the school system won't help.”

[Image Credit](#)