

POLICY BRIEF

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Pittsburgh and Duquesne: A Match not Made in Heaven

The Pittsburgh Public School District has been contracted to provide management services to the Duquesne City School District for the upcoming school year. The contract is worth \$500,000. Pittsburgh will not only advise Duquesne but will be instrumental in helping them craft a long-term plan for the operation of the school district. While this arrangement raises eyebrows, as the Pittsburgh District is facing its own budget deficit, it is interesting that its board members approved the deal only after criticizing the state for a lack of funding. But the board needs to be reminded that Duquesne and Pittsburgh students' exhibit poor academic performance despite the exorbitant sums of taxpayer money lavished on them.

The State's formula for funding is complex, but it does bestow far more money per pupil on poorer districts than wealthier ones. For example, in the 2004-05 school year the Duquesne School District received more than \$7.7 million from the state and another \$1 million from the Federal government—77 percent of its overall revenues of \$11.3 million. With only 775 students, the per pupil state and federal subsidy is more than \$11,300. In contrast, the state and federal subsidy for the Upper St. Clair School District was \$9 million—18 percent of its revenues. However, with more than 4,100 students, the school district's state and federal funding is just under \$2,200 per pupil. The Pittsburgh School District received more than \$200.7 million or 36 percent of its total revenues from the state and another \$57.5 million from the Federal government. With about 33,000 students, Pittsburgh received more than \$7,800 per pupil.

Keep in mind that this is state and federal revenue, *not* total expenditures. Duquesne's total expenditures were roughly \$13.1 million while Pittsburgh's were more than \$573.2 million—each spending more than their revenue collections. Total expenditures per pupil are approximately \$17,000 for each district. The state and Federal government pick up a combined 66 percent of Duquesne's total expenditures per student and 45 percent of Pittsburgh's. The real outrage is that for their efforts, taxpayers are getting a very poor return on dollars sent to Duquesne because the district's academic performance is abysmal. It should be possible to provide a good educational experience with just the state and Federal per pupil contribution of \$11,300.

Academically, Duquesne is one of the worst performing districts in the state. The following table compares Duquesne and Pittsburgh to state averages.

Percentage of Students Achieving Proficiency

	Duquesne	Pittsburgh	State Average
8 th Grade Reading Proficiency	30.9	49.4	64.1
11 th Grade Reading Proficiency	41.9	51.1	65.0
8 th Grade Math Proficiency	26.4	45.8	62.9
11 th Grade Math Proficiency	16.7	38.4	50.9

While Pittsburgh's academic performance is better than Duquesne's, it is still not to acceptable standards and yet the state wants them to help turn things around? While Pittsburgh's superintendent is trying to make improvements to his own district's performance, it remains to be seen whether anything meaningful will be accomplished.

The state has issued Duquesne an additional \$2 million to help solve its problems. The money will be spent to hire an executive director to oversee day-to-day operations and on the agreement with Pittsburgh. The contract with Pittsburgh requires not only short term recommendations, but a long-term plan as well. One of the options mentioned is for Duquesne to be taken over by a management company. Why not try this solution first?

Regardless of how competent Pittsburgh's superintendent is, fixing the myriad of problems facing Duquesne is not going to be accomplished in one year. The state will pour at least \$10 million into Duquesne for the upcoming school year (including \$2 million for the bailout). Surely that amount, and probably considerably less, could attract a top-flight management company or educational firm to take on the struggling district. As long as they were free to run it as they see fit and not be tied by union work rules and regulations, academic improvement will be achieved a lot faster than under Pittsburgh's management.

But a private solution to this public mess, including vouchers, will not be forthcoming. The teachers' unions along with the rest of the educational establishment will make sure that any long term help will come from another public school district and the academic catastrophe that is the Duquesne School District will continue despite the large sums of taxpayer money thrown at it.

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