

Why Isn't Anyone Checking

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When the Orleans Parish School Board regained some authority over the charter schools, one of its first actions was to stop the practice of so many students being kicked out of charter schools. Thus, the Board enacted a policy prohibiting charter schools from expelling students directly from the school level. Instead, the school was required to make a recommendation for expulsion to the district hearing office, which would then determine whether the student was to be expelled or not.

The difference between expelling from the school level or from the district hearing office is simply this: If expelled from the school level, the student is on his own to try to find another school, which is nearly impossible since most charter schools cap enrollment. But, if expelled from the district level, the district then places the student into another school.

Legally, each state is required to educate all students in that state until they reach a certain age. That age is 17 in Louisiana. But, when a charter school expels a student, the charter school is not obligated to (and does not have the authority to) place the student into another school. Thus, most of the expelled students simply become dropouts.

Expulsion at the site level is a major fallacy of the charter school movement. Expelling at the site level leaves the student without enrollment in a school. In addition to not having the authority to place the student into another school, the charter school is not required to report the expulsion to any entity that would have the obligation to place the student into another school. That is a broken system. And we wonder why so many teenagers are simply hanging out in the neighborhoods.

So, when the district (the Orleans Parish School Board) regained some oversight of the schools, it enacted a policy to halt expulsions from the site level and required schools to recommend students for expulsion to the district's hearing office. If the district decided on expulsion, then at the same time, the district would assign that student to another school.

This change was supposed to stop the mass exodus of students being kicked out of charter schools. By removing their worst students, charter schools increase their test scores, and ultimately get their charters renewed. But this is wrong and the policy by the Orleans Parish School Board was intended to stop this school level expulsion practice.

But, what good is a policy if it is not enforced? Or, if no one even checks to see that schools adhere to it? One simply can look at the websites of two charter high schools to see that these schools still have language that authorizes expulsions at the school level.

If it is this easy to find that some schools are still expelling students from the school level, then why isn't something being done? Research on Reforms, Inc. will not name these schools because expelling at the site level is not the only way charter schools egregiously remove students. There are numerous other destructive ways that charter schools remove students, as written in "Outcomes of the State Takeover of New Orleans Schools (Chapter 5)."

Oftentimes charter school policies that allow for removal are well disguised. While schools have handbooks, not all information about removal is contained in those handbooks. Many schools issue rules directly to parents and faculty in other formats. Some schools, prior to admittance, have home visits with parents and have them sign contracts, the contents of which are not disclosed. Charter schools that engage in these unethical practices to remove students are a discredit to those charter schools that diligently strive to educate all children and youth.

It does not take rocket science to determine if a school is unscrupulously kicking students out. It simply requires comparing the student enrollment at the beginning of the school year with that at the end of the school year, and then evaluating the exit codes which cite the reasons for exits. During the first few years after the state takeover, Research on Reforms did conduct such research and reported on the great attrition rates in some charter high schools. But the Department of Education (governed by the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education) did not want this analysis of charter schools to continue, so the Department immediately stopped providing Research on Reforms with the data, while still providing the data to other researchers selected by the Department.

Thus, Research on Reforms, Inc. sued – and won. The Louisiana Department of Education was found guilty of violating Louisiana’s public records law and paid to Research on Reforms a judgment of \$18,121.

Louisiana’s charter school law asserts that the purpose of charter schools is “to serve the best interests of at-risk” children and youth. Are we serving their best interests? Why isn’t anyone checking?

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