

Ben Franklin High School Performs Worse as a Charter School

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When Ben Franklin High School was operated by the Orleans Parish School Board in 2004-05, its School Performance Score was **200.5**. Following Hurricane Katrina in August 2005, Ben Franklin became a charter school, and by 2007-08, its score decreased to **165.2**.

Thus, traditionally operated schools are better than charter schools? Obviously, the conclusions about why some schools are better than others cannot be answered by focusing on governance alone. Yet, this is what a nonprofit organization tried to present as their argument for charter school reform at a recent forum.

At the Educators Stakeholders Forum on March 19, 2009, a group desiring to bash the Orleans Parish School Board in order to promote their agenda for charter schools, distributed the following information:

Scores Pre and Post Katrina for OPSB-Operated Schools

OPSB-Operated	2004-05 Pre-Katrina	2007-08	Change from 04-05 to 07-08
McMain	121.3	81.1	-40.2
McDonogh 35	115.8	76.3	-39.5
Franklin Elem	112.6	107.2	-5.4
Bethune	100.6	108.0	+7.4

The information was intended to show that the **traditionally**-operated OPSB schools were a failure since, between the years 2004-05 and 2007-08, 3 of the 4 OPBS schools decreased in their School Performance Scores.

But, had the group presented the data on the OPSB **charter**-operated schools, during the same time period, the same conclusions would have been reached about the charter schools. They also decreased in their scores. And, the net decrease for the charter schools was even greater than the net decrease for the traditionally-operated schools.

Scores Pre and Post Katrina for OPSB Charter Schools

OPSB-Charters	2004-05	2007-08	Change from
	Pre-Katrina		04-05 to 07-08
Audubon	113.1	108.9	-4.2
Easton	93.6	76.6	-17.0
Einstein	54.9	84.9	+30.0
Franklin Sr	200.5	165.2	-35.3
Harte	96.3	82.9	-13.4
Hynes	109.5	103.8	-5.7
Karr	127.2	77.0	-50.2
Lusher	140.7	135.0	-5.7

Charter vs. Traditional

The issue of charter versus traditional is misdirected. Years of research have shown that governance alone is not the answer to the problems of low achievement of educationally disadvantaged children and youth. Yet, in Louisiana, and especially in New Orleans, governance has become the issue.

Charter school governance is one of several innovations that No Child Left Behind proposed in order to overcome low achievement of educationally disadvantaged children. NCLB and its precursor federal laws are flowing documents, always being amended to incorporate new programs and ideas to improve education. Charter school governance was one of those ideas. It is based on the belief that poor families, whose children attend urban schools with highly bureaucratic centralized governance systems, are helpless to overcome the ills of these systems. Thus, NCLB authorized states to create "innovative schools of choice," so that poor inner-city parents could opt out of the centralized school system.

The NCLB charter schools encourage innovations, targeted to children who are not learning in the traditional schools. NCLB charter schools are specifically "schools of choice," with all children being given an equal opportunity to attend. The NCLB charter schools accept students by lottery if more apply than can be accommodated.

In a recent Times-Picayune article, the Harlem Children's Zone schools in New York City were recognized for their innovations and success in educating Harlem's underprivileged children and youth. These charter schools are modeled after the NCLB definition of a charter school. The article went on to say that students "entered the lottery to get into the Harlem" schools.

That is the intent of the NCLB charter schools; but it is not the intent of the Louisiana charter schools.

Louisiana's Charter School Intent

It is not the intent of Louisiana legislation to create charter schools that provide new and innovative learning opportunities for the educationally disadvantaged.

Rather, it is the intent of Louisiana legislation to create a two-tier system of education under the disguise of being charter schools.

Unlike the NCLB charter schools, the Louisiana's charter schools do not provide equal opportunity and admission by lottery. Unlike the successful Harlem charter schools in New York, which accept students by lottery, most New Orleans charter schools are selective admission schools.

New Orleans charter schools and traditional schools could live peaceably side-by-side if it were not for the privilege granted to charter schools to select the better-performing students, omitting the very students for whom charter school reform is intended. This provision in Louisiana law pits local school boards against charter school advocates. Many charter schools are skimming the better performing students, leaving the most needy and the most expensive to educate, on the rolls of the local school system.

Unfortunately, Louisiana's share of the federal charter school funds follows the charter schools, not the educationally disadvantaged. Thus, the funds intended to improve educational outcomes for failing students are being distributed to schools, with admissions criteria, that were never listed as "Failing Schools."

Still, there are several high quality open-admissions charter schools in New Orleans. These schools and other open-admission charter schools are deserving of all federal charter school funds. Selective admission schools are deserving of magnet school funds.

Charter Schools Advocacy

Louisiana has created its own classification of charter schools—schools with admission requirements, *i.e.*, magnet schools. Thus, advocacy for charter schools is not about advocacy for open enrollment schools for educationally disadvantaged students. Rather, it is about creating a separate class of privatized, select-admission schools, which are granted the privilege of ignoring the educationally disadvantaged, while being granted the funds intended to serve these very students.

Advocating for more and more charter schools under the current Louisiana law would only allow for more and more schools that could selectively exclude educationally disadvantaged children and youth. The non-profit group that bashed the traditional OPSB schools was obviously intending to do just that – to advocate for schools that could exclude those for whom the reforms are intended.

I wonder if those who advocate for charter schools would continue to do so if all of Louisiana's charter schools were required to be open to all disadvantage children and youth.

Endnotes

- Stakeholders Forum: Sponsored by Orleans Parish School Board: March 19, 2009. To view presenter's powerpoint, go to www.researchonreforms.org and click on *pdf* of "Stakeholders Forum: March 19, 2009."
- School Performance Scores and Assessment Index: Louisiana State Department of Education: Office

of Student and School Performance, Division of Assessments and Accountability: 2004-05 and 2007-08 Accountability Results, School Level Tables. See also District Composite Reports.

- [Harlem Schools](#): Times-Picayune, May 9, 2009
- [About the Scores](#):

The Pre-Katrina scores (2004-05) are the Baseline School Performance Scores, which include test scores, plus attendance and dropout information. This information was not collected in the 2005-06 year, due to Hurricane Katrina. Then, in 2006-07, the state could not return to reporting Baseline School Performance Scores because the RSD did not submit their dropout and attendance data for each school. The OPSB did provide their attendance and dropout information, but the RSD did not. Thus, the state gave all New Orleans schools an assessment index, comprised only of the school's test scores. The state is now returning to Baseline School Performance Scores.

At a meeting with State Department staff on June 6, 2008, a state department official "gave a detained overview of why the RSD Student Information System data had been lacking for 2006-07 and referenced lack of a working internal RSD centralized data system." The question is remarkable. How could the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education not compel its very own school district, the RSD, to submit the data on attendance and dropouts? Yet, the state official admitted that "everything possible was done to collect RSD data during the collection cycle, including multiple extensions up until the point that no more extensions could be given because of need to use data for State purposes."

- [NCLB Definition of Charter School](#): Public Law 107-110, Title V, Part B, See Section 5210
- [NCLB Definition of a Magnet School](#): Public Law 107-110, Title V, Part C
- [Louisiana Definition of Charter School](#): La.R.S. 17:3991(B)
- [Table of School Names](#) .

Bethune	Mary Bethune Accelerated School
Easton	Warren Easton Fundamental Sr. High School
Einstein	Einstein Charter School (formerly Village de l'Est Elementary)
Franklin Elem.	Benjamin Franklin Elem. Math-Science Magnet
Franklin Sr.	Benjamin Franklin Senior High School
Harte	Alice M. Harte School
Hynes	Edward Hynes Elementary

Karr	Edna Karr Magnet School
Lusher	Lusher Elementary/Middle School
McDonogh #35	McDonogh #35 Senior High School
McMain	McMain Magnet Secondary School
Montessori	Audubon Montessori School