

Let's Get it Correct:

Takeover Included Successful Schools – Not Just Failing Schools

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Research on Reforms, September 2010

The State Department of Education repeatedly refers to the state take-over of the “**failing schools**” in New Orleans. This is simply not accurate. All of the 107 schools taken-over were not failing schools.

Before Katrina, it was true that only failing schools, or only schools labeled as academically unacceptable, could be taken over.

But, after Katrina, the law changed to purposefully allow for the take-over of One and Two Star schools, and for only those in New Orleans.

It is difficult to understand how a law could be considered constitutional and target only New Orleans. It is even more difficult to understand why those at the state level want to portray the schools taken-over as all failing schools.

The law was called Act 35 and it was so written that it allowed for the takeover of One and Two Star schools only in New Orleans.

The Takeover of One and Two Star Schools

It is absolutely incorrect for a State Department of Education Report to say that “107 of Orleans Parish’s struggling public schools were transferred to the authority of the RSD.”ⁱ

Twenty- seven (27) of the 107 New Orleans schools, which were transferred to the RSD, were **not struggling**. They were One and Two Star schools.

The state ranks schools from Five Stars down to One Star, and then to Academically Unacceptable (AU). Prior to the post-Katrina law, Act 35, only AU schools could be taken-over. Act 35ⁱⁱ changed that and allowed for the takeover of schools below the state average of 87.4, which were schools with One and Two Stars.

| Prior to Act 35, only struggling, “academically unacceptable” schools could be taken over. With Act 35, <u>and only in New Orleans</u> , 27 One and Two Star schools, with scores between 60.0–87.4, were taken-over. | |
|---|--------------------------------------|
| Performance Label (2004-05) ⁱⁱⁱ | School Performance Score (SPS) Range |
| Five Stars (****) | 140.0 or above |
| Four Stars (****) | 120.0-139.9 |
| Three Stars (***) | 100.0 – 119.9 |
| Two Stars (**) | 80.0 – 99.9 (State average: 87.4) |
| One Star (*) | 60.0-79.9 |
| Academically Unacceptable | Below 60.0 |

The twenty-Seven (27) New Orleans Public schools, with One or Two stars that were taken-over by the state, through Act 35, are listed below.^{iv}

| New Orleans Schools Taken-Over by the State That Did Not Have an Academically Unacceptable Label | | | | | |
|--|--------|---|--------|------------------------|-------------------|
| No | Code | Name | Grades | Baseline SPS (2004-05) | Performance Label |
| 1 | 036003 | Henry W. Allen Elementary School | Pk-7 | 65.6 | One Star (*) |
| 2 | 036007 | Thurgood Marshall School | 7-8 | 77.6 | One Star (*) |
| 3 | 036014 | Stuart R. Bradley Elementary School | Pk-6 | 78.5 | One Star (*) |
| 4 | 036019 | Parkview Fundamental Magnet | Pk-6 | 85.7 | Two Stars (**) |
| 5 | 036021 | Mary D. Coghill Elementary School | Pk-6 | 76.6 | One Star (*) |
| 6 | 036032 | John Dibert Elementary School | Pk-6 | 65.8 | One Star (*) |
| 7 | 036038 | Dwight D. Eisenhower Elementary School | Pk-6 | 67.6 | One Star (*) |
| 8 | 036040 | William J. Fischer Elementary School | Pk-6 | 73.8 | One Star (*) |
| 9 | 036048 | Gentilly Terrace Elementary School | Pk-6 | 65.5 | One Star (*) |
| 10 | 036049 | Jean Gordon School | K-6 | 85.6 | Two Stars (**) |
| 11 | 036052 | William J. Guste Elementary School | Pk-6 | 66.2 | One Star (*) |
| 12 | 036053 | Paul B. Habans Elementary School | K-6 | 64.2 | One Star (*) |
| 13 | 036068 | Thomy Lafon School | Pk-6 | 61.5 | One Star (*) |
| 14 | 036073 | Ronald G. McNair Elementary School | Pk-6 | 70.6 | One Star (*) |
| 15 | 036082 | McDonogh15 Creative Arts Magnet School | Pk-6 | 63.5 | One Star (*) |
| 16 | 036094 | McDonogh #07 Elementary School | Pk-6 | 64.6 | One Star (*) |
| 17 | 036097 | Harriet Tubman Elementary School | Pk-6 | 73.3 | One Star (*) |
| 18 | 036099 | N.O. Center for Creative Arts Academy | 6-8 | 83.1 | Two Stars (**) |
| 19 | 036104 | Mildred Osborne School | Pk-8 | 62.6 | One Star (*) |
| 20 | 036110 | Rabouin Career Magnet High School | 8-12 | 61.1 | One Star (*) |
| 21 | 036114 | H.C. Schaumburg Elementary School | Pk-8 | 72.1 | One Star (*) |
| 22 | 036117 | Sherwood Forest Elementary School | Pk-6 | 64.5 | One Star (*) |
| 23 | 036135 | New Orleans Free School | K-8 | 63.6 | One Star (*) |
| 24 | 036164 | Dr.M.L.K. Elem. School for Science & Tech | Pk-6 | 81.8 | Two Stars (**) |
| 25 | 036167 | New Orleans Charter Middle School | 6-8 | 70.5 | One Star (*) |
| 26 | 036176 | Lake Area Middle School | 7-8 | 63.0 | One Star (*) |
| 27 | 036178 | New Orleans New Technology High School | 9 | 61.7 | One Star (*) |

The State Superintendent presented a report, at the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education meeting on September 14, 2010, which stated that: “to be eligible to exit the RSD, a school would have to be performing above the “academically unacceptable level.” Twenty-seven (27) schools were already above the academically unacceptable label when taken-over by the state.

And, Only in New Orleans

The “RSD: Legislatively Required Plan” explains, erroneously, “How Orleans Parish Schools Became Part of the RSD.”^v The following is from page 12 of the plan:

Act 35 included the takeover schools that “had been declared to be in **‘Academic Crisis’—that is, with at least one school labeled as failing for four or more years.** As a result of this legislation, 107 of Orleans Parish’s struggling public schools were transferred to the authority of the RSD.” *(Taken from the Recovery School District –Legislatively Required Plan.)*

Contrary to what is in the above state plan, ‘Academically-in- Crisis’ does not mean a school system where at least one school has been labeled as failing for four years. ‘Academically-in-Crisis’ is defined in La.R.S. 17:10.6(B)(1)^{vi}, and it means “any local system in which **(1)** more than thirty schools are academically unacceptable, or **(2)** more than fifty percent of its students attend schools that are academically unacceptable.” ^{vii}*(Quoted directly from the law.)*

The law on ‘academically-in-crisis’ targets New Orleans schools. It refers to “more than 30 schools.” Only 15 of the 68 school districts have more than 30 schools. Rather than saying “of the large districts, a certain percentage must be academically unacceptable,” the law uses an absolute number which changes the amount of schools that must be academically unacceptable for take-over in each district.

New Orleans had 127 schools in 2004-05, and 30 academically unacceptable schools equaled 24% of its 127 schools.^{viii} For the same year, Shreveport had 74 schools, and 18 of its schools were academically unacceptable.^{ix} Thus, 18 academically unacceptable schools equaled 24% of Shreveport’s 74 schools. Had a percentage been used, rather than an absolute number, Shreveport schools would have been taken-over, also.

Further, the law was implemented with bias. The law requires the takeover of schools in a district that has “more than fifty percent of its students attending schools that were academically unacceptable.” St. Helena parish satisfied this condition, but was not taken-over.^x In 2004-05, St. Helena parish had a total of 1,364 students attending three schools, two of which were rated academically unacceptable with a total enrollment of 770 students, which was greater than 50% of St. Helena parish’s students. Instead of taking-over St. Helena parish, BESE developed a Memorandum of Understanding with local school officials.

Conclusions

This report is not intended to support return to the former governance structure by the Orleans Parish School Board. It is intended for informational purposes and to guide decision-makers. Prior to 2004-05, school governance by the Orleans Parish School Board was a disaster. Studying the cause for the decline would be a worthy undertaking. However, the state-takeover has not resolved the problems with the New Orleans schools. The Recovery School District has been equally as troublesome as the previous Orleans Parish School Board.

This report is intended to alert other school districts to the subjective methods that can be employed at the state level to justify their purpose for a takeover.

And, most importantly, this report must be used to correct the misinformation that all of the New Orleans schools in the take-over were failing schools, or academically unacceptable schools. Rather, the take-over of some of New Orleans finest One and Two Star schools fell to state control as part of the state's elaborate take-over scheme codified in Act 35.

Endnotes:

ⁱ Recovery School District- Legislatively Required Plan, June 7, 2006.

ⁱⁱ Act 35 of 2005. La.R.S.17:10.7 A.(1) "Each school . . . that has a baseline score school performance score below the state average. . .shall be transferred to the Recovery School District. . ." The trick perpetrated was that Act 35 changed the definition of a failing school from an academically unacceptable school to a school with a baseline score below the state average. Since public perception is that a failing school is academically unacceptable, this report refers to a failing school as academically unacceptable.

ⁱⁱⁱ Louisiana Department of Education, Accountability Section.

^{iv} Louisiana Department of Education, District Composite Report, Orleans Parish, 2004-05

^v Recovery School District- Legislatively Required Plan, June 7, 2006.

^{vi} La.R.S. 17:10.6(B)(1)

^{vii} *Ibid.*

^{viii} Louisiana Department of Education, District Composite Report, Orleans Parish, 2004-05, Section 2.

^{ix} Louisiana Department of Education, District Composite Report, Caddo Parish, 2004-05, Section 2.

^x Louisiana Department of Education, District Composite Report, St. Helena Parish, 2004-05, Section 2.