

State Takeover Not Working for New Orleans -High Schools

Dr. Barbara Ferguson (October 2008)

The 2005 Louisiana Legislature expanded the powers of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) for the purpose of improving the failing public schools in New Orleans through a **State Takeover**.¹ Of the twenty-three (23) New Orleans high schools, eighteen (18) were deemed 'failing' and were a part of the State Takeover. Only five (5) high schools were allowed to remain with the Orleans Parish School Board. In the eighteen (18) failing schools, students were making little or no progress toward meeting the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) goals for proficiency in language arts/English, mathematics and science. Now, with two full years (06-07 and 07-08) under the State Takeover, there is still little or no progress.

As in the past, principals and teachers are being faulted for the lack of progress. Principals are regularly being ousted and replaced with other principals. Yet, the principals and teachers are not the ones who devised the **State Takeover** reform model. The model was developed by state leadership, *i.e.*, BESE and its state agency, the Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE), which subsequently established the Recovery School District (RSD) for the purpose of implementing the model. The State Takeover model rested on improving high schools through charter operators.² But, when charter operators did not come forward for New Orleans' poorest performing high schools, the RSD was forced to operate them. The RSD is now posting as dismal scores in these schools as did the OPSB pre-Katrina. Thus, the question obviously becomes, "Who will 'takeover' the Recovery School District?"

What is School Success?

Achieving Proficiency

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) intends for all students to be proficient in language arts/English, mathematics and science by 2013-14.³ Each state is required to submit a plan to the U.S.

Department of Education, which must include high academic standards, yearly assessments, and benchmarks for students to reach proficiency levels by 2013-14.

Louisiana’s Graduate Exit Exam (GEE) is used to assess high school student achievement. Students receive one of five scores on the GEE. If the student’s score is Advanced, Mastery or Basic, then the student has achieved proficiency. If the student’s score is Approaching Basic, or Unsatisfactory, then the student has not achieved proficiency. These definitions of proficiency are in Louisiana’s Accountability Workbook.⁴

	Terms used in Louisiana
Proficiency means: Exceeding or Meeting the State’s Standards	Advanced Mastery Basic
Not Meeting the State’s Standards	Approaching Basic Unsatisfactory

While the score of Approaching Basic is not high enough to meet the state’s proficiency level, the score of Approaching Basic does allow the student to pass the GEE. Students must score Approaching Basic, or better in language arts/English, mathematics and either science or social studies, in order to graduate, assuming that they have also earned the appropriate number of Carnegie units.

What was our path to creating good schools in New Orleans?

State Takeover to move New Orleans schools toward Proficiency

NCLB recognizes that it will take many years for all students to obtain proficiency, so the target year for achieving this goal is 2013-14. To measure how well students are progressing, the

state calculates an Annual Yearly Progress measure for each school, with student achievement as the primary component. Yearly, each school has to meet a certain progress benchmark. Failing schools are those schools where, at a minimum, the majority of students fail to achieve the proficiency level. Failing school districts are those districts where, at a minimum, the majority of schools are failing schools.

New Orleans became a “failing school district,” and NCLB mandates state action when this occurs. NCLB, however, does not mandate a **State Takeover**. The State has other options, such as, dividing the school district into smaller school districts, each with its own school board. Another option is to remove existing school board members and replace them with appointed members.⁵ In Louisiana, the option decided upon by BESE, and authorized by the Louisiana legislature, was the **State Takeover**. The New Orleans community must ask them to reconsider their choice of this option, which is not working, and to change course.

Unsuccessful State Takeover

GEE Results show little or no growth toward Proficiency Level

The final year that the OPSB operated all of the public schools was the 2004-05 year. The 2005-06 year was the State Takeover year, and scores for this year are not counted as that was also the Hurricane Katrina year. Since then, there have been two full years, 2006-07 and 2007-08, for data collection. During these two years, millions of dollars were spent on reform initiatives, with the expectation of higher levels of proficiency. However, there have been few gains. In most high schools, the number of students not achieving proficiency on one or all parts of the GEE has increased.

The NCLB goal is for all students to achieve proficiency by 2013-14. NCLB is forthright; students meet the standards and achieve proficiency, or they do not meet the standards.

Each state, independently, develops its own standards and assessments, in accordance with NCLB guidelines. Students in 10th grade are tested in language arts/English and mathematics; students in 11th grade are tested in science and social studies. If the student meets or exceeds the standards, he/she receives a score of Advanced, Mastery or Basic. If the student does not meet the standards, he/she receives a score of Approaching Basic or Unsatisfactory.⁶

It can be argued that comparing the high school students Pre and Post-Takeover is not valid since the schools are comprised of different students. However, with or without the State Takeover, there would be different students in each grade for the years 2004-05 and 2007-08. That is a fallacy of No Child Left Behind, which tracks school performance rather than individual student performance.

Even without examining each school separately, when all of the GEE testers are lumped together, the data shows that there has been no uniform performance improvement. New Orleans high school student enrollment has returned to approximately 60% of the 2004-05 population with regard to GEE testers. Examining the total performance of all students, rather than by individual schools, reveals no significant achievement increases, even though millions of dollars have been expended on reform initiatives.

Table 1: Total GEE Testers in 2004-5 and 2007-08 (Includes the “Initial Testers” and the “Retesters.” “Retesters” are those who retake the GEE in the subject(s) they failed the previous year.)⁷

	English	Math	Social Studies	Science
2004-05	5225	5560	3784	3760
2007-08	3236	3425	2196	2072
2007-08 as % of 2004-05	62%	62%	58%	55%

Table 2: Total GEE Testers and % Not Meeting State Standards* in 2004-05 and 2007-08⁸

04-05 English	04-05 Math	04-05 Science	04-05 Social Studies
Approaching Basic and	Approaching Basic and	Approaching Basic and	Approaching Basic and

Unsatisfactory			Unsatisfactory			Unsatisfactory			Unsatisfactory		
Total	#	%	Total	#	%	Total	#	%	Total	#	%
5225	3572	68%	5560	3892	70%	3784	2557	68%	3760	2417	64%
07-08 English											
Approaching Basic and Unsatisfactory			Approaching Basic and Unsatisfactory			Approaching Basic and Unsatisfactory			Approaching Basic and Unsatisfactory		
Total	#	%	Total	#	%	Total	#	%	Total	#	%
3236	2277	70%	3425	2302	67%	2196	1465	67%	2142	1263	60%

**Not meeting State Standards means a score of Approaching Basic or Unsatisfactory.*

The 2007-08 year did not show a decrease in the percentage of students who were failing to achieve proficiency in English/Language Arts, but it did show a decrease in the other subject areas. However, the decreases were not sufficient enough for the state to move adequately toward meeting its proficiency goal by 2013-14. We have six years before 2013-14 and we have a failure rate ranging from 60%-70% in each subject. This would mean that we need to reduce the failure rate by at least 10% each year for all students to be proficient in 2013-14. Yet, during the two years reported, the failure rate was only reduced by a maximum of 4%.

New Orleans High School GEE Results since State Takeover

Prior to Hurricane Katrina and the State Takeover (04-05), there were 23 high schools in New Orleans that administered the GEE to its students. The State Takeover occurred in the 2005-06 year. During the following years (06-07 and 07-08), 13 of the 23 high schools re-opened. Some are system-operated schools and others are charter schools.

Of the 13 high schools that re-opened, five (5) are under the Orleans Parish School Board, and eight (8) are under the Recovery School District. In addition to these 13, there are 8 “new” high schools, “new” in that these schools did not administer the GEE prior to the State Takeover. There are 4 “new” schools with the OPSB; and, there are 4 “new” schools with the RSD.

Schools where students were/ are given the High School Graduation Exit Exam (GEE) (One or all parts of the GEE)				
2004-05		2007-08 (some also were open in 2006-07)		
	All were Orleans Parish School Board schools in 2004-05	Orleans Parish School Board: Schools opened	Recovery School District: Schools opened	Schools That Remain closed
1	Warren Easton Fundamental SH	Easton		
2	Benjamin Franklin SH	Ben Franklin		
3	Edna Karr Magnet	Karr		
4	McDonogh #35 SH	McDonogh #35		
5	McMain Magnet Secondary	McMain		
6	Joseph S. Clark SH		Clark	
7	Walter L. Cohen High		Cohen	
8	John McDonogh High		John McDonogh	
9	Fredrick A. Douglass High		Douglass	
10	Rabouin Career Magnet High		Rabouin	
11	Sarah Towles Reed SH		Reed	
12	G.W. Carver High		Carver	
13	O.P. Walker SH		Walker	
14	Marion Abramson SH			Abramson
15	Alcee Fortier High			Fortier
16	FW Gregory Jr. High			Gregory
17	John F. Kennedy SH			Kennedy
18	L.B. Landry H			Landry
19	Lawless H			Lawless
20	Urban League Street Academy			Urban League
21	Booker T. Washington			Washington
22	East NO Education Center			East NO Educ
23	NO High Signature Center			NO Sign. Center

The following are “new” schools: Schools that are “new” to administering the GEE following the State Takeover.

Orleans Parish School Board		Recovery School District
Lusher Charter		P.A. Capdau
NO Science and Math		Schwartz Alternative
Orleans Parish PM School		Algiers Technology
Priestley Architecture		Livingston High

Thus, by 2007-08, there were 21 schools that administered the Graduation Exit Exam:

- Orleans Parish School Board: 5 re-opened schools and 4 new schools.
- Recovery School District: 8 re-opened schools and 4 new schools.

The analysis below examines the GEE scores prior to and after the State Takeover, distinguishing the schools according to those under the Orleans Parish School Board and those under the Recovery School District. Both the OPSB and the RSD have system-operated schools and charter schools.

Table 3: The 5 OPSB schools that re-opened: GEE scores in 2004-05 and 2007-08.⁹

- Excluding Ben Franklin that consistently scores high; none of the remaining schools improved scores in all 4 subject areas.
- In 3 schools (Karr, McDonogh #35 and McMain) fewer students achieved proficiency in all 4 subject areas.

Code: AB = Approaching Basic Unsat.= Unsatisfactory
 “AB or Unsat.” mean “Not meeting the State Standards,” i.e.,
 “Not achieving Proficiency.”

No.	Orleans Parish School Board		English		Mathematics		Science		Social Studies	
			# Tested	% AB or Unsat.	# Tested	% AB or Unsat.	# Tested	% AB or Unsat.	# Tested	% AB or Unsat.
1	Warren Easton SH	04-05	339	48%	345	49%	331	54%	330	42%
		07-08	234	47%	247	42%	223	70%	223	55%
2	Ben Franklin SH	04-05	225	0%	225	0%	214	0%	214	0%
		07-08	119	1%	119	0%	161	0%	161	0%
3	Edna Karr Magnet	04-05	179	6%	178	4%	157	15%	157	5%
		07-08	217	44%	227	43%	199	52%	197	35%
4	McDonogh #35 SH	04-05	286	22%	286	23%	247	18%	247	13%

		07-08	169	54%	182	49%	213	53%	213	41%
5	McMain Magnet Sec	04-05	193	7%	193	8%	208	17%	208	15%
		07-08	138	49%	151	58%	119	38%	119	26%

Table 4: The 8 schools that re-opened as RSD schools in 2007-08.¹⁰

- None of the schools improved scores in all 4 subject areas.
- In three schools (Cohen, Rabouin, and Reed), fewer students obtained proficiency in all 4 subject areas.

No.	Recovery School District		English #tested	%AB or Unsat.	Math #tested	%AB or Unsat	Science #tested	%AB or Unsat	SocStud #tested	%AB or Unsat
1	Joseph S. Clark S H	04-05	205	89%	216	87%	122	93%	121	89%
		07-08	207	92%	218	84%	112	91%	107	91%
2	Walter L. Cohen H	04-05	222	86%	245	86%	136	85%	134	87%
		07-08	233	93%	231	91%	92	99%	85	99%
3	John McDonogh H	04-05	378	92%	382	80%	243	90%	226	93%
		07-08	215	91%	257	84%	111	96%	111	81%
4	Fredrick Douglass H	04-05	278	91%	317	96%	144	92%	136	88%
		07-08	204	92%	207	90%	103	92%	92	91%
5	Rabouin Magnet	04-05	153	67%	176	70%	211	88%	210	84%
		07-08	274	90%	291	87%	185	95%	176	94%
6	Sarah Reed SH	04-05	393	83%	417	85%	269	80%	266	74%
		07-08	246	88%	273	86%	174	89%	161	86%
7	G.W. Carver High	04-05	264	90%	278	90%	172	91%	170	85%
		07-08	123	90%	135	87%	49	88%	45	87%
8	O.P. Walker Sr. High	04-05	285	81%	298	81%	244	90%	245	84%
		07-08	249	82%	241	63%	208	75%	206	73%

The above schools existed in 2004-05 and that were reopened following the State Takeover. Schools that are “new” to administering the GEE are listed in Table 5. With the exception of Lusher Charter, all have significant numbers of students who have not achieved proficiency.

Table 5: Schools New to Administering the GEE¹¹

OPSB- Schools New to administering GEE		Test Year	English #Tested	% AB or Unsat	Math #Tested	% AB or Unsat	Science #Tested	% AB or Unsat	SocSt #Tested	% AB or Unsat
1	Lusher Charter	07-08	131	10%	131	6%	76	7%	76	5%
2	NO Science & Math	07-08	100	45%	114	48%	88	62%	88	48%
3	Orleans Parish PM	07-08	15	93%	29	83%	11	73%	12	83%
4	Priestley Architecture	07-08	105	81%	105	73%	-	-	-	-
RSD –Schools New to administering GEE										
1	P.A. Capdau	07-08	77	56%	77	70%	-	-	-	-
2	Schwartz Alternative	06-07	29	97%	26	100%	-	-	-	-
3	Algiers Technology	07-08	71	68%	85	78%	36	78%	36	64%
4	Livingston High	07-08	80	87%	79	76%	36	72%	34	76%

Conclusion

In conclusion, the GEE results indicate that the **State Takeover** has not been a successful intervention with regard to increasing the number of high school students who score at the proficiency level.

Future articles will analyze the GEE scores based specifically on the various governance models allowed by the State Takeover, *i.e.*, system or charter operated; and, by other variables, such as, non-admissions or admissions criteria. As the scores are presented and studied, it is anticipated that our community and policy makers can use the findings to improve student progress.

Also, a future article will focus on examining three consecutive years of GEE scores (2006-07, 2007-08 and 2008-09). Please submit your comments and observations for use in future articles. All research results will be published because the primary purpose of our research is to disseminate the findings on what works and what does not work, so that successful practices can be replicated and negative practices can be eliminated.

To submit your comments, or for more information, contact Dr. Barbara Ferguson at

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Footnotes:

1. LaRS17:5 et seq.
2. LaRS 17:3973(5)
3. 20USC63(1)(b)(2)(F)
4. Louisiana's Accountability Workbook
5. 20USC6316(c)(10)(C)
6. Louisiana's Accountability Workbook, p.15
7. GEE Spring 2005 GEE Criterion-Referenced Tests. State/District/School Achievement Level Summary Reports: Initial Testers. GEE Spring 2005 GEE Criterion-Referenced Tests. State/District/School Achievement Level Summary Reports: Retesters. GEE Spring 2008 GEE Criterion-Referenced Tests. State/District/School Achievement Level Summary Reports: Initial Testers, pp. 5,9. GEE Spring 200 GEE Criterion-Referenced Tests. State/District/School Achievement Level Summary Reports: Retesters, pp. 4,8
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.