

10 Years Later: Did the RSD Make it Better?
Yes, for Students in Selective Charter Schools
Because Disruptive Students Are Not Allowed

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“Is it better?” That is the question 10 years after the state takeover of the failing New Orleans schools. And, the answer is **YES** for students in selective schools, which the Recovery School District (RSD) created after realizing that teachers alone cannot solve the problems of undisciplined students. Rather than allowing disruptive students to interfere with the education of other students, the RSD provided for the creation of selective charter schools where students who disrupt the education of others are not allowed to attend. Thus, this 10 year experiment has shown that teachers alone cannot improve scores. It takes the intervention of restricting enrollment to only well-behaved students to improve schools.

Cohen High School is an example of the RSD realizing that teachers alone cannot solve the education problems. At the time of the takeover, Cohen’s performance score was **21.4**, and after **five years** of being operated by the RSD as an open admission school, Cohen’s performance score only increased to **28.2**. Then it became a charter school under New Orleans College Prep that abolished open admission and removed students for not following the discipline code, *e.g.*, for such behaviors as disrespecting a teacher. By enrolling only well-disciplined students, the performance score rose within a year to **61.0**.

The RSD has created two systems of schools. And, while one group of students has improved academic performance, the other group continues to languish. Moving forward after 10 years means addressing these challenges:

- Enlist home and the community to ensure that all students enter school well-disciplined so they can be enrolled in selective schools with similarly situated students.
- And, for students in non-selective schools, develop innovative strategies or alternate settings for those who are disruptive, not only so that they can be successful but so that their disruptions will not interfere with the education of the other students.

RSD Creates Selective Charter Schools Because Teachers Alone Cannot Solve the Problems of Undisciplined, Unmotivated Students

The Recovery School District (RSD) was bold enough to realize that teachers alone cannot solve the problems of undisciplined, unmotivated students. Such students disrupt the learning of all students in the classroom. Thus, the RSD intervened, allowing charter operators to create schools where disruptive behaviors, such as, cheating, lying, fighting, disturbing class and being disrespectful to teachers, are not tolerated. Students must have acceptable social skills; thus, teachers can focus on academic skills.

After 10 years, the RSD experiment has shown that there are factors outside of the school that have a greater impact on student achievement than in-school factors.

In-school factors, such as class size and teacher quality, do not have as significant an impact on improved school achievement as do out-of-school factors that impact acceptable behavior and motivation to learn. Researchers must isolate the variables that cause children and youth to enter school well-behaved and ready to learn, then integrate their findings into society. Until that time, students with disruptive behaviors will continue to be placed in other schools, both traditional and non-selective charters, where teachers assume the dual roles of teaching students and disciplining them. Parents of well-behaved children and youth in these schools suffer because teachers must attend to the problems of students who are repeatedly disruptive.

The selective charter schools with similar students are not the majority of schools. Most schools are open admission and teachers must handle the problems of having constantly disruptive students. In these schools, students still achieve, but at a lesser rate. These schools face greater obstacles and should not be compared with selective schools.

Teaching and Discipline

All teachers, whether in selective schools or not, have to discipline students. Most students at one time or another break school rules. That comes with being a child or adolescent and growing up. But, serious discipline problems

can be distinguished from ordinary misbehaviors that all teachers handle. In selective schools, students with serious discipline problems or with repeated minor misbehaviors are either not admitted or removed. Thus, teachers in selective schools are able to spend more time engaging their students in learning.

The teacher is the most important **in-school factor** that impacts a child's achievement. However, the most important **overall factor** that impacts the child's achievement is the home. Some students come from homes where they have learned self-discipline; others do not. Some families are successful in teaching their children social skills; other try and are not successful. Whatever the reasons, the issue is that teachers alone cannot solve the problems of educating and this 10 year experiment has shown just that.

Similar Schools for Similar Students

Similar schools for similar students could be the catch phrase for the takeover. Well-behaved, motivated students get to attend schools with other well-behaved, motivated students. Those with behavior problems are not allowed in these schools. Perhaps, there should be more schools for well-behaved, motivated students as those currently in existence have full enrollments.

Does it make a difference if the student is white, black, Asian, or Hispanic? No. Does it make a difference if the student is wealthy or poor? No. The only similarity among the students that is required in the selective schools is that they are well-behaved and motivated to learn. There is diversity in race, creed and socio-economic status. There is singularity in conduct.

Comparing School Performance Scores in Schools that Changed from Open Enrollment to Selective Admission Following the Takeover

Below is an analysis of test scores of three failing, open enrollment schools that were taken-over, and then changed to selective admission charter schools.

<u>Before the Takeover:</u> All open enrollment schools.		<u>After the Takeover:</u> All selective admission charter schools.		
Pre-Takeover School Name	2004-05 SPS	New School Name	SPS 3 yrs. after Takeover	SPS 10 yrs. after Takeover
All open enrollment		All became selective admission charter schools		
Sophie Wright Middle	31.3	Sophie Wright Academy of Academic Excellence	74.3	73.9
Phillips Middle	26.4	E. Phillips KIPP Believe College Prep	98.6	83.5
Lafayette Elementary	44.4	Lafayette Academy	58.8	81.7

The three schools above were all open enrollment schools prior to the state takeover. Following the takeover, each re-opened as a selective admission charter school, either denying admission to, or removing children and youth with disruptive behaviors.

Comparing School Performance Scores in Schools that Remained as Open Enrollment Following the Takeover

By comparison, schools that continued to be open enrollment schools showed little or no improvement. The three primary examples are three high schools that not only had a failing label at the time of the takeover, but were among the lowest performing high schools in the state.

- Cohen High School had a performance score of **21.4** at the time of the takeover. The RSD operated Cohen as an open enrollment school for **five** consecutive years, and Cohen’s performance score was only **28.2** at the conclusion of those years. The RSD then contracted with a selective charter operator, New Orleans College Prep, which selectively admitted students, and removed students who were repeatedly disruptive. Its performance score is now **72.9**.
- Douglass High School had a performance score of **21.4** at the time of the takeover. The RSD operated Douglass as an open enrollment school for

two years, at the end of which time Cohen’s performance score was even worse at **17.1**. Then, the RSD contracted with KIPP, which did not admit the Douglass students but selectively admitted other students following personal interviews with the parents. Among other disciplinary measures, KIPP mandates that students can be permanently removed for being absent or tardy on more than five occasions. Douglass had no such authority to remove students. Under KIPP, the performance score is now **61.0**.

- John McDonogh High School had a performance score of **25.1** at the time of the takeover. John McDonogh has remained as an open enrollment school. John McDonogh’s performance score has declined to **16.1**.

The above three high schools were open enrollment schools at the time of the takeover and, following the takeover, continued to be operated for a while by the RSD as open enrollment schools. During the time that the RSD operated the schools as open enrollment schools, two of the three (Douglass and John McDonogh) scored lower than they had scored when operated by the local school board. Only when the RSD changed two of the schools to selective admission charter schools did the schools improve.

Absurd Inequity in Funding

None of the above three notoriously low performing high schools that collectively enrolled nearly 3,000 students at the time of the takeover received any of the federal No Child Left Behind funds following Katrina. But, the three schools that were turned into selective admission charter schools, with a combined enrollment of less than 1,000 students, received a total of 1.8 million dollars. The selective admission charter schools did not have to overcome the depilating effects of disruptive and unmotivated students in the midst of their other students. Yet, the funds went to these selective schools instead of to the schools that faced the greatest barriers to student achievement.

Selective Charters, or Simply “Selective”

Whether the school is a selective charter, or simply a selective school, it outperforms other schools that are not selective.

For the failing schools in the takeover, changing from an open enrollment school to a selective admission charter school improved student achievement and school performance.

For the successful schools not taken-over, all of the successful high schools were selective high schools. They were not selective charter high schools, they were simply selective high schools, having been allowed to be selective by the local school board.

Thus, “selection” in general, rather than simply “charter school selection,” is the determining factor that predisposes a school to significantly higher scores. Whether a traditional school is allowed to select (usually termed a magnet school), or whether a charter school is allowed to select, the results are the same: improved student achievement.

Let’s Continue To Improve

Now after 10 years, the 107 failing open enrollment schools taken-over and placed into the Recovery School District are divided into two groups: those that are selective admission and those that remain open enrollment. Clearly the selective schools are out performing the others. When the RSD’s selective admission and open enrollment schools are combined, the RSD’s overall performance still places the RSD at the bottom of the state ranking.

It is time to address how to improve the schools that are still failing, and this can be done by:

1. Enlisting the home and the community to ensure that all students come to school well-behaved and ready to learn, then increase the numbers of selective schools to serve them, and
2. Developing innovative strategies and/or providing alternate settings for disruptive students in schools that are still labeled as failing schools, so that they can be successful, and so that they will not disrupt other students.
 - Provide additional resources because teachers in these schools have the greatest challenge.
 - Embrace the community and family in identifying alternate models for success.

This 10 year education experiment resulted in the RSD recognizing that teachers alone cannot educate undisciplined children and youth. Not only do disruptive students themselves not learn, but they interfere with the learning of other students. Thus, the RSD's recognition that teachers needed help, and its concomitant intervention of creating selective schools that deny admission to disruptive students resulted in improved achievement for students attending those schools.

While we rejoice for the children and youth who did make it to selective schools, we mourn for those still in a broken system because they were the very ones for whom the reforms were intended.

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For selective admission charter school rules and regulations; for information on federal grant allocations; and for other information referenced in this article, please go to the [Research on Reforms](#) website for the following:

- Federal Charter School Grant Program: Allocations to New Orleans Schools
- *Midyear Loss of High School Students: Concerns About the Same Low-Performing RSD High Schools, and About Charter Schools that Remove Students* (February 2011)
- *New Orleans Charter Schools Can Expel Unwanted Students – Making Test Results Questionable* (June 2011)
- *Expelling Unwanted Charter School Students* (June 2011)
- *New Orleans Schools Should Not Serve As National Model* (March 2012)
- *N.O. College Prep Charter Takes-Over the Cohen Building, Without Taking-Over the Failing Cohen Students* (January 2013)
- *RSD Skews Its Performance By Omitting Nearly 20% of Schools* (January 2013)
- *Closing Schools, Opening Schools and Changing School Codes: Instability in the New Orleans Recovery School District* (June 2014)