

Hatfield Data Opposes Landrieu's Praise of Charter Schools as Reported by Times-Picayune at nola.com

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Sen. Mary Landrieu touts New Orleans charter schools on 'Morning Joe'

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WASHINGTON - **Sen. Mary Landrieu**, D-La., touted the success of New Orleans charter schools on **MSNBC's "Morning Joe"** Tuesday. "Eighty percent of our children in the city are now in public charter schools," said Landrieu. "As my brother said, who is the mayor, we're not rebuilding the city we were, we're rebuilding the city we've always dreamed we could be, building it just better, the old New Orleans but better and that includes a brand new entrepreneurial, public school system that's attracting middle class white and black families, Hispanics, back to the system and seeing extraordinary gains in academics, freeing up our principals to be great and expecting our teachers to be great."



File photoSen. Mary Landrieu tweeted this photo of her recent visit to New Orleans College Prep Charter School.

"New Orleans has really led the way," said **Sen. Lamar Alexander, R- Tenn.**, who served as Education Secretary in the first Bush administration, and joined Landrieu on the show to talk up charter schools. Alexander said "the holy grail" of education reform was to find ways to get great teachers in the classroom, and the way to do that was to pay them more than less able teachers.

Landrieu said "unions can be a part of reform, there is nothing to keep them from it," and, as she has in the past, complemented **Gov. Bobby Jindal's education reform efforts, while cautioning that "our governor's gone a little too far with vouchers."** But, **she said, "charter schools are transforming outcomes for students,** and, at the end of the day, that's what it's all about."

The relative success of the massive charter school experiment in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina has become a source of both local and national debate.

"So sure are New Orleans officials of the work being done to turn around schools that they think they can become a model for urban education reform, proof that students of any color, income level or social background can achieve if schools do their job,' **Jo-Ann Armao, a member of the editorial page staff for The Washington Post,** wrote recently in a piece in her paper, **"The Big Easy's School Revolution."**

Armao wrote that when "the levees broke and the city was devastated ... out of that destruction came the need to build a new system, one that today is accompanied by buoyant optimism. Since 2006, New Orleans students have halved the achievement gap with their state counterparts. They are on track to, in the next five years, make this the first urban city in the country to exceed its state's average test scores. The share of students proficient on state tests rose from 35 percent in 2005 to 56 percent in 2011; 40 percent of students attended schools identified by the state as 'academically unacceptable' in 2011, down from 78 percent in 2005."

But in a recent essay, "How, and How Not, To Improve the Schools," in The New York Review of Books, New York University educational historian **Diane Ravitch**, offered a very different take on the New Orleans experience.

<http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2012/mar/22/how-and-how-not-improve-schools/?pagination=false>

"As for New Orleans, it is the poster child of the corporate reformers because the public school system and the teachers' union were wiped out by Hurricane Katrina," wrote Ravitch. "Now about 70 percent of the students in the district attend charter schools, staffed by TFA (Teach for America) and other young teachers. Reformers have portrayed New Orleans as an educational miracle, and the media have faithfully parroted this characterization as proof that nonunion charter schools are successful. But few paid attention when the state of Louisiana recently released grades for every school in the state and **79 percent of the charter schools formed by the state received a grade of D or F.**"

"Teach for America is a worthy idea," wrote Ravitch, who served as Alexander's assistant secretary of education and counselor. "It is wonderful to encourage young people to commit themselves to public service for two years. The program would be far more admirable if the organization showed some modesty, humility, and realism in its claims for its inexperienced teachers. Many foundations, corporations, and even the US Department of Education treat TFA as a systemic solution to the critical needs of the teaching profession. But it is foolhardy to expect that a profession of more than three million teachers will be transformed by the annual addition of a few thousand college graduates who agree to stay for only two years."

In March, **Charles Hatfield**, the former director of educational accountability for the **Orleans Parish School Board**, issued a **scathing critique** of the successes being claimed for New Orleans charter revolution in a report for Research on Reforms, which he co-founded, entitled, "**Should the Educational Reforms in New Orleans Serve as a National Model for Other Cities?**"

Hatfield wrote that the "**aggregation of achievement data,**" by those **proclaiming success,** "**makes it impossible to determine** whether, and to what extent, the **RSD (Recovery School District)** has provided the poor, disadvantaged, and public school students with the quality education originally promised as justification by the Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE) to dismantle the Orleans Public School System."

What provides a better picture, he said, are the letter grades assigned to RSD charter and traditional schools by the Louisiana Department of Education, which he said "**demonstrate the very low level of academic performance** that still exists in these schools after 6 years of direct control by the LDOE."

On "Morning Joe," Landrieu cited the Audubon Charter School, where, she said, "children are speaking fluent French by the third grade." Audubon gets an A+ on

the state report card, and most of the Orleans Parish School Board charters score relatively well on the state rating.

But, Hatfield writes, "A cursory examination of the RSD schools clearly shows that the **general achievement level of the vast majority of RSD schools, as measured by the assigned letter grades, is pathetic at best.** Some of the major highlights that can be observed from the tables with respect to the current achievement levels of the RSD after 6 years are as follows:

- **100% of the 15 direct-run RSD schools assigned a letter grade received a `D' or `F'** as compared to 20% of the 5 OPSB direct-run schools graded;
- **79% of the 42 charter RSD schools assigned a letter grade received a `D' or `F'** as compared to 0% of the 11 OPSB charter schools graded;
- Of the RSD students attending **direct-run schools** with letter grades, **100%, or 5,422, are attending schools with assigned letter grades of either `D' or `F';**
- Of the RSD students attending **charter schools** assigned a letter grade, **76% ,or 15,040, are attending schools with assigned grades of either `D' or `F';**
- Schools that were **just opened or opened for less than three years** were **not assigned a letter grade** at this time;
- Although the RSD's public relations machine glorifies the tremendous gains made **over 6 years, the overall performance of the RSD in New Orleans remains at or near the bottom in Louisiana, i.e., RSD received an overall letter grade of `D' as compared** to the overall letter grade of `B' received by the OPSB;

The state will raise the failing bar from a SPS (school performance score) below 65 to SPS below 75 for the 2011-12 school years. Unless there is significant improvement among the current `D' and `F' and `C' schools, **there will be a significant increase in the number of failing and poor performing RSD charter and direct run schools.**"
