

## RSD's Continuing Failure: High Schools and Crime in New Orleans

Dr. Barbara Ferguson

*bferguson@researchonreforms.org*

Research on Reforms, Inc.

January 2012

Six (6) years following the State Takeover, the Recovery School District has still not been able to improve New Orleans high schools. Prior to the Takeover, students who were unmotivated, uninterested in learning, disruptive, and who came from dysfunctional families filled New Orleans high schools, causing low School Performance Scores. Charter schools were created to develop innovative ways to teach these difficult-to-teach students. Instead, charter schools were granted the authority to simply expel them. New ideas on how to teach disruptive and unmotivated students have not emerged from charter schools simply because charter schools are under no obligation to teach these students. Also, difficult-to-teach students are discarded from the low-performing schools that are closed by the RSD at the end of each year. Newly appointed charter operators for the closed schools are not required to enroll those students who had attended the school when it was closed.

**Whether the difficult-to-teach high school students are expelled by charter schools or whether they attended schools closed by the RSD, they are an outcast group, thrown into an abyss. Their whereabouts are unknown. Neither the RSD nor the State Department of Education tracks these students to determine if they ever enter another high school. However, they are in the community somewhere and the high crime rate in New Orleans is a testament to that. Crime is the symptom of a problem. The problem is the RSD's failure with the difficult-to-teach high school students.**

### What Are Charter Schools For?

Charter schools are for developing new, creative ways to educate the nation's toughest students.<sup>i</sup> Originally, Louisiana embraced the concept of charter schools as the hope through which public education could reach the most difficult-to-teach.<sup>ii</sup> Charter schools originated across the nation because schools in urban areas were failing by nearly every measure. Something had to be done. Thus, the concept of allowing those closest to the failing students, *i.e.*, teachers, principals and the community, to find ways to solve the problem was introduced. Instead of allowing schools to be governed by a large bureaucracy, charter schools were created so that those closest to the students could be involved in the educational decisions. All funds were to go directly to the school site, and governance was to be shared with teachers, principals and community members.

But, this concept has been thwarted by others with a greater interest. The interest in using charter schools for the privatization of public education changed the rules. Charter schools are no longer vehicles through which small groups of teachers, principals and community members can experiment and develop new ways of teaching and learning.

The difference between the two concepts of charter schools is critical. Charter schools were envisioned as the vehicle through which innovative ways could be developed to teach the most disruptive children and youth. This concept of charter schools was in the original Louisiana legislation.<sup>iii</sup> Once the charter school legislation was adopted, it was regularly amended, with the privatization of public schools now its dominate theme. New Orleans charter schools are more like private schools than public schools, as both the private schools and charter schools can develop their own rules for admitting and for permanently excluding students.<sup>iv</sup> Unlike private schools in New Orleans, the charter schools, which are public, must administer the state's standardized tests and be given School Performance Scores. By being able to remove the most disruptive, unmotivated students, charter schools are able to achieve higher School Performance Scores.

Most parents are concerned about the safety of their children and do not want to send their children to school with disruptive students. Many in the community would say that schools should not have to contend with the disruptive, unmotivated students. Where did these students come from anyway? There was a time when education was valued. Students dare not misbehave in school, least they fear going home, for the discipline there was even stronger. Women fought to have the right to be educated, as did every ethnic group. What caused the tide to turn, from students who wanted to learn and were respectful to those who are difficult to teach, is the subject of much discussion, but suffice it to say that the tide has turned.

Yet, this nation has chosen to educate both those who want to be educated and those who are not interested in school at all. The nation has chosen this for a laudable purpose. Education and democracy are related. Thomas Jefferson said that "a nation cannot be both ignorant and free."<sup>v</sup> Communities with citizens who are highly educated have thriving economies and low crime rates.

Thus, the education of all children and youth is essential to perpetuate democracy. And, charter schools were created to develop innovative ways to educate the most difficult students. But, in New Orleans, unfortunately, they have turned into havens for students who adhere to their rules, and whose parents are motivated enough to go through stringent application processes. Such havens of education are needed. There is nothing wrong with these magnet type charter schools. But, if this continues to be the charter school agenda, if the problems of educating the most difficult children and youth

are ignored, then the crime rate and other symptoms of a non-inclusive school system will continue to plague the community.

## **The Differences Between Students in High Schools Before the State Takeover and Students in Charter High Schools Now**

Before the State Takeover, New Orleans high schools accepted and retained all students. No matter how difficult the student was to educate, the student was enrolled in a New Orleans high school.<sup>vi</sup> Students who were repeatedly disciplined at one high school were eventually moved on to another high school. Students with guns or weapons violations were placed in alternative schools. No matter how difficult the student was to teach, no matter how disruptive the student was, no matter if the parent cooperated with the school or not, the student remained in some New Orleans high school.

Keeping these difficult students in high school was often to the chagrin of the teachers and principals because these students lowered the school's test scores and the school's rating by the state. However, keeping these difficult students in high schools benefited the community by keeping them involved and off of the city streets.

Prior to Katrina, there were some magnet schools that did not have to accept and retain unmotivated, disruptive students. They could select students, and could remove under-performing students. All of the traditional high schools were required to take those removed by the magnet schools. Such a system worked well for the magnet schools, but the school system did little to address the difficult-to-learn students in the traditional schools.

If a student were expelled from a magnet school pre-Katrina, the student was enrolled in a traditional school. Now, if a student is expelled from a charter school, no one ensures that the student is subsequently enrolled anywhere.<sup>vii</sup> With two school systems in the city, the RSD and the Orleans Parish School Board, the concept of educating, and especially ensuring that all students are all enrolled in a school, is lost.

The RSD continues to change the failing high schools into charter schools. However, instead of the charter operator taking over the failing high school students, the charter operator takes over the building and then gets to select its own students. For example, Fredrick Douglass High School on St. Claude Avenue has consistently been a failing high school. Douglass opened the 2009-10 year with 291 students.<sup>viii</sup> The RSD closed Douglass at the end of that school year, turned it into a charter school and authorized KIPP as the charter operator. However, KIPP took over the school building but did not take over the Douglass students in the building. KIPP selected its own students. The Douglass students did not become KIPP students. There are no records as to where

the Douglass students were enrolled the year of the KIPP takeover, if, in fact, they enrolled in any other school at all.

KIPP then introduced several rules and regulations whereby they could remove the students that they accepted, if these students became problem students.<sup>ix</sup> KIPP gave itself the authority to expel students for 1) rude or disrespectful behavior, 2) classroom disturbance, 3) skipping class, 4) repeatedly committing minor behavior infractions and/or 5) being absent or tardy for five times. Rather than finding new and innovative ways to correct these behaviors and teach the students, even after they selected these students, KIPP simply removes them.

Other examples of RSD charter schools, with grades 9-12, that have the authority to expel and/or remove disruptive and unmotivated students are:

1. Sci Academy: New Orleans Charter Science and Math Academy (Grades 9-11)
2. Miller-McCoy Academy for Mathematics and Business (Grades: 5-11)
3. Priestley School of Architecture and Construction (Grades 9-12)
4. Abramson Science and Technology Charter School (Grades K-12)
5. Early College High School (Grades 9-12)
6. Sojourner Truth Academy (Grades 9-11)

*(See Appendix A)*

While the answer is not to keep unmotivated, disruptive students in the traditional high schools as occurred prior to the take-over, the answer is not to create charter schools that can remove these students from the school.

The high school students who are dumped out of the charter schools, and who are not tracked by the Recovery School District or by the State Department of Education to determine if they ever enroll in another school, are somewhere in this city. The answer is not dumping them out, or keeping them in school to disrupt other students. The answer for educating the difficult-to-learn students was to have been found through the original charter school concept.

## **Recovery School District Improves Its District Performance Score by Closing Ten (10) Schools**

Ten RSD schools that opened at the beginning of the 2010-2011 year were closed by the Recovery School District at the end of the year.<sup>x</sup> The October 1<sup>st</sup> official enrollment count for each school is provided below in Table 1. Each school operated throughout the school year, with the exception of Rabouin that closed during the year. According to the State Department of Education, schools that are closed are not given a School Performance Score. Nine of the ten schools that closed were not given School Performance Scores. Thus, the Recovery School District was able to improve its overall

performance score by not including these schools. Of the ten schools that closed, six had high school grades, *i.e.*, grades 9, 10, 11 and/or 12. (See Table 2)

**Table 1: RSD schools that closed at the end of the 2010-11 school year.**

| RSD Schools Closed at end of 2010-11 Year |        |  |        | Total Enroll |
|---|--------|--|--------|--------------|
|   | Code   | Name   | Grades |              |
| 1   | 389001 | Abramson Science and Technology Charter School | K-12   | 591          |
| 2   | 395006 | Harriet Tubman Elementary School               | Pk-8   | 500          |
| 3   | 396002 | Joseph S. Clark Senior High School             | 9-12   | 353          |
| 4   | 396016 | Rabouin Career Magnet High School              | 12     | 12           |
| 5   | 396021 | Sarah Towles Reed Elementary School            | K-8    | 533          |
| 6   | 396025 | Carver Elementary School                       | 4-8    | 180          |
| 7   | 396028 | Fannie C. Williams Elementary School           | Pk-8   | 494          |
| 8   | 396043 | Greater Gentilly High School                   | 9-11   | 258          |
| 9   | 396044 | Hope Academy                                   | 7-12   | 160          |
| 10  | 396045 | New Orleans Career Academy                     | 8-11   | 89           |
|   |        | Total  |        | 3170         |

**Table 2: 9<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> Grade Enrollment in schools that closed at the end of the 2010-11 year.**

| RSD Schools Closed at end of 2010-11 Year- Grades 9-12 only |        |  |              | Enrollment in Grades 9-12 Only |                  |                  |                  |       |
|---|--------|--|--------------|--------------------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|-------|
|   | Code   | Name   | Total Grades | 9 <sup>th</sup>                | 10 <sup>th</sup> | 11 <sup>th</sup> | 12 <sup>th</sup> | Total |
| 1   | 389001 | Abramson Science and Technology Charter School | K-12         | 44                             | 36               | 20               | 29               | 129   |
| 2   | 396002 | Joseph S. Clark Senior High School             | 9-12         | 107                            | 69               | 95               | 82               | 353   |
| 3   | 396016 | Rabouin Career Magnet High School              | 12           | 0                              | 0                | 0                | 12               | 12    |
| 4   | 396043 | Greater Gentilly High School                   | 9-11         | 72                             | 119              | 67               | 0                | 258   |
| 5   | 396044 | Hope Academy                                   | 7-12         | 60                             | 29               | 11               | 16               | 116   |
| 6   | 396045 | New Orleans Career Academy                     | 8-11         | 73                             | 8                | 3                | 0                | 84    |
|   |        | Total  |              | 356                            | 261              | 196              | 139              | 952   |

**Table 3: 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Enrollment in schools that closed at the end of the 2010-11 year.**

| RSD Schools Closed at end of 2010-11 Year |        |  |        | 8 <sup>th</sup> grade enrollment only |
|---|--------|--|--------|---------------------------------------|
|   | Code   | Name   | Grades |                                       |
| 1   | 389001 | Abramson Science and Technology Charter School | K-12   | 46                                    |
| 2   | 395006 | Harriet Tubman Elementary School               | Pk-8   | 42                                    |
| 3   | 396002 | Joseph S. Clark Senior High School             | 9-12   | 0                                     |
| 4   | 396016 | Rabouin Career Magnet High School              | 12     | 0                                     |
| 5   | 396021 | Sarah Towles Reed Elementary School            | K-8    | 54                                    |
| 6   | 396025 | Carver Elementary School                       | 4-8    | 37                                    |
| 7   | 396028 | Fannie C. Williams Elementary School           | Pk-8   | 27                                    |
| 8   | 396043 | Greater Gentilly High School                   | 9-11   | 0                                     |
| 9   | 396044 | Hope Academy                                   | 7-12   | 44                                    |
| 10  | 396045 | New Orleans Career Academy                     | 8-11   | 5                                     |
|   |        | Total  |        | 255                                   |

In the schools that closed at the end of 2010-11, the students in grades 8-11 would have been in grades 9-12 in 2011-12. Thus, referring back to the above tables, 255 8<sup>th</sup> graders, 356 9<sup>th</sup> graders, 261 10<sup>th</sup> graders, and 196 11<sup>th</sup> graders would have entered grades 9-12 for the 2011-12 school year. This is a total of 1,068 high school students for this 2011-12 year who needed to find another school to attend since their school had been closed. The charter operator that takes over a closed school does not have to accept all of the students in the school that was closed. Recall the example of KIPP taking over Douglass and the Douglass students did not become KIPP students. Thus, over 1,000 high school students for the 2011-12 year had to find another school. Whether or not they did, no one knows as the Recovery School District does not track student enrollment.

## In Closure

High crime rates are an indication of a deeper social problem, and in New Orleans that social problem is the RSD's governance structure that excludes difficult-to-teach high school students. Prior to the State Takeover, the New Orleans public school system accepted and retained all high school students, even the most disruptive and unmotivated. Now the RSD has creatively ignored these students by allowing charter schools to remove them, and by closing failing schools at the end of the year without regard to where the students will attend in the future year.

The old school system simply kept these disruptive students; the new school system simply removes them. Neither is the answer. Until this community returns to the original concept of charter schools, that is, allowing those closest to the students to be involved in developing solutions for their education, there will be no progress. And, the crime rate will continue to soar, as it has since the RSD gained control over six years ago.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Appendix A

### Other examples of RSD charter schools, with grades 9-12, that have the authority to expel and/or remove disruptive and unmotivated students

|   |                              |   |
|---|------------------------------|---|
| <b>Sci Academy: New Orleans Charter Science and Math Academy</b><br><b>Grades: 9-11</b> |                              | Code: 382001                            |
|   |                              | Type 5<br>Advocacy for Science and Math |
| <b>Reasons for which Students can be EXPELLED (Examples)</b>                            |                              |   |
| Accruing 10 days of suspension in a school year   | Repeated cheating violations | Smoking or possession of tobacco        |

|  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
| Graffiti, defacement, or damage to the building or community or its contents | Fighting or unwanted physical contact: hitting, tripping, or “play fighting” | Refusing instructions when directed to exit or enter a space on campus |
| <i>Source: Sci Academy, Family Handbook, 2010-11</i>                         |  |  |

|   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| <b>Miller-McCoy Academy for Mathematics and Business</b><br><b>Grades: 5-11</b> |   | Code: 384001   |
|   |   | Type 5<br>Miller-McCoy Academy for Math and Business, Inc. |
| <b>Reasons for which Students can be EXPELLED (Examples)</b>                    |   |  |
| Cutting school, class, detention, homework center, or mandatory school events   | Disrupting Class and Prevention of Teaching | Cheating, Plagiarism and copying Other’s Work              |
| Being disrespectful toward a staff member                                       | Being disrespectful toward a student        | Misbehaving inside or outside of class                     |
| <i>Source: Miller-McCoy Charter School: Family Handbook, 2010-11</i>            |   |  |

|  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
| <b>Priestley School of Architecture and Construction</b><br><b>Grades: 9-12</b>  |  | Code: 036073   |
|  |  | Type 3 Charter Operator:   |
| <b>Reasons for which Students can be EXPELLED (Examples)</b>   |  |  |
| Pushing, shoving, kicking (4 <sup>th</sup> offense)  | Malicious jokes, pranks, tricks, games (4 <sup>th</sup> offense) | Disrespect for a staff member, back talk (3 <sup>rd</sup> offense) |
| <b>Reasons for which students cannot return the following year</b>   |  |  |
| Students who refuse to comply with school rules may be asked to leave after the third infraction and may not be invited to attend the school the next school year. |  |  |
| <i>Source: Priestley School of Architecture and Construction, Parent- Student Handbook</i>   |  |  |

|  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
| <b>Abramson Science and Technology Charter School</b><br><b>K-12</b> |  | Code: 389001   |
|  |  | Type 5 Charter Pelican Foundation                    |
| <b>Reasons for which Students can be EXPELLED (Examples)</b>         |  |  |
| Violating daily classroom rules, such as:                            |  |  |
| Be in assigned seat before tardy bell rings                          | Bring pencils, notebooks, books to class           | Engage in behavior that keeps the class functioning  |
| Follow teacher’s directions the first time they are given            | Stand up when teachers or administrators come into | Raise your hand before talking. If given permission, |

|  |           |                    |
|--|-----------|--------------------|
|  | classroom | stand up and talk. |
| <i>Source: Abramson Science and Technology Charter School: Student Handbook, 2009-10</i> |           |                    |

|  |   |  |
|--|---|--|
| <b>P.A. Capdau Learning Academy</b><br><b>Nelson Elementary School</b><br><b>Early College High School</b><br><b>Gentilly Terrace School</b> | <b>Grades K-8</b><br><b>Grades Pk-8</b><br><b>Grades 9-12</b><br><b>Grades Pk-8</b> | Codes: 300001, 300002, 300003, 300004                        |
|  |   | Type 5<br>New Beginnings<br>(previously UNO charter Network) |
| <b>Reasons for which Students can be EXPELLED (Examples)</b>   |   |  |
| Possession or use of tobacco   | Fighting  | Truancy / skipping school                                    |
| Persistent disrespect to school personnel  | Persistently instigating arguments/ fights  | Persistent Insubordination                                   |
| <i>Source: University of New Orleans Charter Network: Parent-Student Handbook, 2010-11</i>   |   |  |

|  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
| <b>Sojourner Truth Academy</b><br>Grades 9-11  | Code 383001   |   |
|  | Charter Type 5  |   |
| <b>Reasons for which students can be EXPELLED (Examples)</b>   |   |   |
| Fighting   | Threats of Violence   | Cheating (3 <sup>rd</sup> Violation)                                |
| Copying another’s work for use in an exam (3 <sup>rd</sup> violation)  | Allowing another to copy your work in an exam (3 <sup>rd</sup> violation) | Using unauthorized materials in an exam (3 <sup>rd</sup> violation) |
| <b>Reasons for which students cannot return the following year</b>   |   |   |
| If parents fail to attend one (1) parent meeting a month, the administration will determine whether Sojourner Truth is the proper placement for the student. |   |   |

Endnotes:

<sup>i</sup> Diane Ravitch, *The Death and Life of the Great American School System*, 2010, 113-148. Dr. Raynard Sanders, *New Orleans Charter Schools, What is the Problem?*, 2008.

<sup>ii</sup> La R.S.17:3991 *et. seq.*

<sup>iii</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>iv</sup> La.R.S. 17:416 has been interpreted by the State Department of Education to allow for charter schools to develop their own rules for expulsion as long as they incorporate a “model discipline plan” as approved by BESE.

<sup>v</sup> Thomas Jefferson. 3<sup>rd</sup> President of the United States and author of the Declaration of Independence said that “if a nation expects to be ignorant and free, in a state of civilization, it expects what never was and never will be.”

<sup>vi</sup> New Orleans Public Schools, Student Discipline Plan, 2004-2005.

<sup>vii</sup> LA Department of Education, Student Information System.

<sup>viii</sup> LA Department of Education, Data and Reports, Student Enrollment, October 1,2009.

<sup>ix</sup> KIPP Family Handbook.



---

<sup>x</sup> LA Dept. of Education, Data and Reports, Student Enrollment, October 1, 2010, October 1,2011.