



*Deep South Center for Environmental Justice
Public Policy Task Force*

Education Committee Research Paper Report

*Public Education Reform in New Orleans:
Still Plagued by Equity and Access Issues*

April 14, 2010

Presenter

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Innovative Community Development Systems



Research Paper Objective

The paper expands existing research on the national movement to privatize public education in America. It highlights the intent of the proponents of this movement to make the age old issues of equity and access politically correct in the 21st century, thus creating a monumental challenge for poor and minority school communities. The research paper concludes with offering recommendations to the Deep South Center for Environmental Justice in their effort to establish an equity institute.



Presentation Highlights from October 8, 2009

In our last meeting the objective of the presentation was to extend the equity question beyond the expansion of charter schools in New Orleans to the privatization of public education in America.



DSEJ Meeting October 9, 2009

Presentation Highlights

- * Public Schools
- * New Orleans Public School Reform
- * Privatization of Public Education
- * Equity
- * Charter Schools driven by “Mission or Profit”?



Education Committee Recommendations for
Research Paper (October 9 , 2009)

Equity and Access

- * Lack of Transparency
- * Lack of Accountability
- * Failure to accommodate Special Needs Population
- * Unequal funding
- * System of reporting and sharing successful innovations and results



Education Committee Recommendations (October 8, 2009)

Public Purpose

- * Assessment
- * Curricula
- * Hiring policies
- * Collaborative responsibility
- * Inclusion vs. Exclusion
- * Sustain the community



Education Committee Recommendations (October, 2009)

Public Ownership

- * Full community governance
- * Compliance with “sunshine laws”
- * Buildings
- * Transportation/Infrastructure



Education Committee Recommendations (October, 2009)

Short-term Recommendations

- * Set up educational forums for the public
- * Set up educational forums for legislators
- * Make recommendations to mayoral candidates (within candidates' forum)
- * Devise a timeline related to charter school implementation



Research Paper Summary

While there is no argument that fundamental problems with education in this country do exist, the reform movement recommended by many state legislatures and the U. S. Department of Education misses the mark, deepens the problems, and exacerbates the educational dilemma facing millions of poor and minority school children in American public schools.

The primary problem facing American public education is how to provide quality public schools for poor and minority children. The data clearly document the failure of public schools to adequately educate poor and minority children and the failure to provide what those children need to become productive members of our society.



Research Report Summary

The movement to privatize public education has a broad range of supporters whose motives appear to be quite varied. The result of those varied motives has a common nexus; when played out in the arena of public education, they do not provide meaningful benefits to the children. The public education privateers criticize public schooling utilizing several themes: lack of school choice; ineffective large bureaucratic systems; corruption; poor student achievement; teacher unions that protect poor performing teachers; and ineffective operations.



Research Report Summary

Over the years corporate leaders have supported radical changes in public education, claiming that drastic action is needed to make the America worker competitive in the global market. One such study entitled *America's Choice: High Skills or Low Wages* was released by the Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce in 1990. That document has served as a blue print for today's education privateers. The report argued that Americans could compete in the global capital and jobs markets only if public education adopted a standards-based approach that used standardized tests to enforce accountability of students and teachers. The standards-based, high stakes testing approach presented in by this report and codified in the *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) legislation has failed miserably. It is interesting to note that the report concluded that emphasis on a standards-based approach discouraged creativity in favor of rote learning.



Research Report Summary

Another report released by the New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce in 2006, *Tough Choices or Tough Times*, was published by the National Center on Education and the Economy. That report called for, among other things, making all public schools into something beyond charter schools, something called “Contract Schools.” The same report called for ending high school for many students after the 10th grade; ending teacher pension plans, cutting back on teacher health benefits, introducing merit pay and other pay differentials for teachers, and eliminating the powers of local school boards (with the “public” schools to be owned by private companies and all regulation done by the states). In effect, all public schools would be run like today's charter schools—run by private companies, with "flexible" hours, longer school days, longer school years, no teacher seniority rights.



Research Report Summary

The U.S. is the only economically advanced nation to rely heavily on multiple-choice tests. Other nations use performance-based assessment where students are evaluated on the basis of real work such as essays, projects, and activities. Ironically, because these nations do not focus on teaching to multiple-choice tests, they even score higher than U.S. students do on those same multiple choice. A review of published data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reveals that students were less likely to reach a level of "proficient" or higher on the NAEP math or reading tests in states which had mandatory high school graduation tests.

(The National Center for Fair and Open Testing, 2007).



Research Report Summary

The opposition to the use of high stakes testing in K-12 schools is overwhelming, below is a partial list of organizations that have taken a very definitive position against the misuse of these tests:

[American Evaluation Association \(AEA\)](#)

[Alliance for Childhood](#)

[American Association of School Administrators \(AASA\)](#)

[American Association of University Women \(Wisconsin\)](#)

[American Educational Research Association \(AERA\)](#)

[American Society for Ethics in Education](#)

[Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development](#)

[Association of Childhood Educator's International \(ACEI\)](#)

[American Psychological Association](#)

[Applied Research Center](#)

[Center for Collaborative Education](#)

[National Association of Elementary School Principals](#)

[National Association of Secondary School Principals](#)

[Harvard Civil Rights Project](#)

[International Reading Association \(IRA\)](#)

Harvard Civil Rights project

National Academy Press

National Association of Young Children

National Council of Social Studies

National Council of Teachers of English

National PTA

National Research Council

National Women's Law Center

Center for Law and Education



Research Report Summary

Much of the original intent of charter schools was articulated by Joe Nathan of Minnesota who launched the first modern-day charter option:

Charter are public schools, nonsectarian, free and open to all without admissions tests or criteria.

The charter school will follow all civil rights laws and analogous democratic restraint.

The Charter frees up the school from rules about curriculum, management, and teaching in return for transparent accountability.

The school is a school of choice; no one, student or teacher, is force to attend.

The school is a discrete entity, with its own board and site management.

Employees have the right to organize and bargain collectively.

The full per-pupil allocation of funds follows the students to the charter.

Teachers who join the charter are given the flexibility to return to the regular system and participate in programs such as state teacher retirement systems.

(Sizer and Wood, 2008)



Research Report Summary

How Have We Fared in New Orleans?

A recent report by the LA State Dept of Education reveals that the percentage of students performing below grade level in the Recovery District now stands at 71.3%. The state average percent of students performing below grade level in all the other schools in the state stands at 37.2%. After 5 years of operation, only 13 of 58 schools in the Recovery District now have a baseline SPS above 60. (Deshotels, 2010)



Research Report Summary

How have We Fared?

Recovery School District schools have received an average per pupil allocation in excess of \$18,000 per student in recent years; yet, local school systems that receive less than half that amount have been more successful this past year in improving the performance of low achieving schools (41% success for local schools compared to 33% for RSD schools). What if the local school systems had been given the \$18,000 per student for their underperforming schools? Would they have achieved an even higher success rate in improving performance? (Deshotels, 2010)



Research Report Summary

The lack of performance of charter schools has been documented in numerous studies. The *New York Times*, in an editorial titled “Exploding the Charter School Myth,” uses statistics from the National Assessment of Educational Progress to argue that fourth-graders in freestanding charter schools showed worse performance than their public school counterparts in math and reading scores. (The data were different; however, for those students in charter schools affiliated with public school districts.) As the editorial argues, “the problem with failing public schools is that they often lack both resources and skilled, experienced teachers. While there are obvious exceptions, some charter schools embark on a path that simply recreates the failures that they were developed to replace.”

(New York Times, 2006)



Research Report Summary

What if?

What if we had kept the mission in mind and took all the resources and energy that we have used in the last ten years to wage an aggressive campaign to reduce the dropout rate, rather than merely working to improve standardized test scores? What benefits would have accrued to the children and the state of Louisiana:

If the more than 26,500 high school dropouts from the Class of 2008 had earned their diplomas instead of dropping out, Louisiana's economy would have seen an additional \$6.9 billion in wages over these students' lifetimes.

If the high school dropouts who currently head households in Louisiana had earned their diplomas, the state's economy would have benefited from an additional \$1.5 billion in wealth accumulated by families.



Research Report Summary

What If?

If all of the students in Louisiana who are estimated to drop out of school this year earn diplomas instead, the state could save more than \$227 million in health care over the course of those young people's lifetimes.

If Louisiana's high schools and colleges were to raise the graduation rates of Hispanic, African-American, and Native-American students to the levels of white students by 2020, the potential increase in personal income in the state would add more than \$3.1 billion to Louisiana's economy.

Were Louisiana to increase the graduation rate and college matriculation of its male students by only 5 percent, the state could see combined savings and revenue of almost \$204 million each year.

(Alliance for Excellence in Education, 2009)



Research Report Summary

Louisiana must begin the long process of thinking differently conceptually about public education and move philosophically to the major underlining principals of public education as described by Sizer and Wood:

Equity – a value enshrined in our nation’s founding documents, requires this country to provide children with a public, “equal opportunity” education.

Access – an equitable system that gives all participants access to the best the educational system has to offer.

Public Purpose – schools are places where all children gain skills for lifelong learning and engaged citizens.

Public Ownership – the integral relationship between public ownership and local control: “public schools to be governed closest to the people they serve.



Research Report Recommendations

In developing and making this new paradigm shift a reality the DSEJ should begin a campaign to gather support from community members, education groups and leaders around the importance of educational equity and excellence.:

Start an awareness campaign that will correctly inform the public of the school reform movement happening in New Orleans post Hurricane Katrina.

Encourage policymakers to immediately terminate the proliferation of charter schools and institute the same accountability policies for the RSD as used for other school districts.



Research Report Recommendations

Encourage policymakers to immediately begin an evaluation of all activities by the Louisiana Department of Education regarding the reopening of schools in the parishes affected by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

Encourage policymakers to establish commission that would be responsible for transitioning control of public education back to local control. This commission would be comprised of key local stakeholders that would solicit input from all citizens in making its plan. This commission would be a true city-wide community process that outlines the public education landscape for New Orleans.