

Myth or Fact: Only 18% of RSD's Students Attend Failing Schools

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According to the new Recovery School District (RSD) superintendent, John White, "Five years ago, there were 62 percent of the youngsters attending failing schools. There are now only 18 percent of those youngsters who attend failing schools ...so what exists, works."¹ What a stupendous claim! If true, it would signify extraordinary student progress that the RSD has made since Katrina. Conversely, considering that the RSD and its proponents are so adept at manipulating data and misleading the public to support their cause, Research on Reforms (ROR) decided to investigate these claims more closely. The data for this commentary were all obtained from the 2009 and 2010 School Performance Scores (SPS) and student enrollment data from the website of the Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE).²

Since the RSD took control of the vast majority of New Orleans schools in 2005, one of the challenges confronting ROR in comparing the percent of students attending failing schools is the changing definition of a "failing school." In 2005, a failing school was defined as a school that was in a district that was in "academic crisis" and whose 2005 baseline SPS was below the state's 87.4 average SPS.³ This resulted in the takeover of schools that were not only labeled as an Academically

¹ "Bills to roll back New Orleans education changes defeated in Legislature," *The Times Picayune*, June 02, 2011

² http://www.louisianaschools.net/data/school_accountability_reports.aspx

http://www.louisianaschools.net/offices/infomanagement/student_enrollment_data.html

³ - **In 2004, Louisiana Revised Statute 17:10.6 (R.S. 17:10.6)** established the criteria for a school district in crisis: "...'Academically in crisis' means any local system in which more than thirty schools are academically unacceptable or more than fifty percent of its students attend schools that are academically unacceptable". <http://law.justia.com/louisiana/codes/143/285616.html>

- **In 2005 after Katrina, Louisiana Revised Statute 17:10.7 (R.S. 17:10.7 - ACT 35)** established the criterion that if a school fell **below the State's average**; was in a school district in "academic crisis" as per R.S.

Unacceptable School (AUS), but also schools that had the higher performing labels of 1 and 2 Stars. Although the entire state had the same failing criteria until the law expired in November 2009, only schools in New Orleans were taken over. St. Helena Parish was also declared as a district in academic crisis since over 50% of its students attended failing schools. However, no schools were taken over by the state for that parish. ROR has consistently maintained that the implementation of the law for only New Orleans was discriminatory. Now, the criterion for labeling a school as failing is back to below 60 for the state. It should also be noted that the criterion for failing or AUS will be raised to 64.9 for the 2011-12 school year and to 74.9 for the 2012-13 school year.⁴

Let's take a closer look at White's claim that only 18 percent of RSD students are attending failing schools using the current failing criterion of below 60. The following analysis is based upon data from only the RSD schools. Therefore, the results will not be inflated as the RSD proponents consistently do by combining data for both the RSD and the Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB) in order to mislead the public on the achievement progress of the RSD.⁵ Also, only the number of schools in the RSD that had baseline SPSs and performance labels for the 2009-10 and 2010-11 school years were used in this analysis. For example, the RSD had a total of 59 schools reported as operating in 2009-10. However, only 55 schools had a reported baseline 2009 SPS and performance label. That 55 number was used as the base for calculating the percent of failing schools. The number of students attending those 55 schools was used as the base for calculating the percent of students attending failing schools. After carefully analyzing the LDOE's 2009 and 2010 SPS and enrollment reports for the RSD, the following conclusions are warranted:

1. **2009-2010:** The LDOE reported that there were 55 RSD schools that had a 2009 Baseline SPS or performance label. Approximately 23,008 students were enrolled. Twenty-nine, or 53%, of these schools were classified as failing. Approximately 11,900, or 50%, of the RSD

17:10.6 as Stated above; and at least one school was eligible to be transferred to the RSD, was declared a failing school and was transferred to the RSD. <http://law.justia.com/louisiana/codes/143/330380.html>

⁴ For the 2010-11 school year, schools with a 2010 baseline SPS between 60.0 - 74.9 were labeled not as 1-Star but as AW. These schools were considered in danger of failing in 2011 if their SPSs didn't dramatically improve. Schools with a 2010 SPS between 65.0 - 74.9 were also considered to be in danger of failing in 2012 unless their SPSs dramatically improved. The 2011 SPSs should be available later this fall.

⁵ "Test Scores are in, and We Rock!...Again!!" *Educate Now*, May 24, 2011 (<http://educatenow.net/2011/05/24/2011-test-scores-are-in-and-we-rock-again/?ref=titl>).

students were attending these schools at the beginning of the 2009-10 school year. It should also be noted that 9 of those failing schools were eventually closed at the end of that school year (e.g. *Albert Wicker Literacy Academy, Julian Leadership Academy, Frederick A Douglas High School, A.D. Crossman-Esperanza Charter School, John Dibert Elementary School, Harney Elementary School, Gentilly Terrace, Elementary School, Live Oak Elementary School, and Laurel Elementary School*).⁶ They were either closed permanently or converted to new charters for the following school year in 2010-2011. Unfortunately, the LDOE did not report a 2010 baseline SPS for these schools to the public. With one exception (i.e., Gentilly Terrace), all of these schools had an AUS performance label for the 2009-10 school year. Therefore, it is not unreasonable to assume that these schools would probably have had a failing 2010 baseline SPS. These schools had a combined enrollment of about 3,138 students. What happened to these students for the 2010-11 school year? Were they enrolled in the new charters that had no performance labels, thereby contributing to the decrease in the percent of students attending failing schools?

2. **2010-2011:** There were 50 RSD schools that had a 2010 baseline SPS and performance label; 5 less than during the 2009-10 school year. There were approximately 21,353 students enrolled at these schools; 1,655 less than the student enrollment in 2009-10. Seventeen or 34% of these schools were classified as failing. Approximately 28% of the students who attended these 50 RSD schools were attending failing schools (See Appendix A for a comparison of the profile for the RSD schools and students for 2009 and 2010). It is not clear how the 18% figure quoted in *The Times Picayune* was derived by Mr. White. No data were reported in the article to substantiate that figure.

It doesn't take complex calculations to demonstrate that the number of failing schools, and the students attending them, will substantially decrease to the extent that failing schools are closed for the following school year or that the failing schools are reopened as new schools that do not have any performance labels assigned to classify them. Yet, it appears that this is exactly what the RSD is doing in its public relations spin of dramatic decreases in failing schools and the percent of students attending them.

⁶ http://www.louisianaschools.net/data/school_accountability_reports.aspx

At the beginning of the 2010-2011 school years, the RSD had 70 schools operating with approximately 27,064 students:

1. 20 of these schools were either new or transformational charters or former traditional schools that had been closed and converted to charters (e.g. *Albert Wicker Literacy Academy, A.D. Crossman-Esperanza Charter School, John Dibert Elementary School, Harney Elementary School, Gentilly Terrace, Elementary School, Live Oak Elementary School, and Laurel Elementary School*).⁷ Approximately 5,711 students were enrolled. These schools had no baseline 2010 SPSs and, therefore, no performance labels to categorize their achievement levels.
2. 17 of these schools were classified as failing (AUS) with an enrollment count of approximately 6,049 students.
3. 20 of these schools were classified with an Academic Watch (AW) label indicating that they were in danger of failing unless their baseline SPS significantly improved for 2011-12 and 2012-13.

Considering the above factors, how can any objective professional educator proclaim that “...so **what exists, works,**” when over 72% percent of the students who attended RSD schools with achievement labels were attending schools that were either failing or in danger of failing (See Appendix B for a list of 2010-11 RSD schools and their associated performance labels). After five years of existence, how can such mediocre performance by schools be praised to the press and public? The public relations spin by the LDOE, RSD and its major proponent’s publication, *Educate Now*, is more pervasive and misleading than ever before.

ROR does not take issue with the 62% representing the percent of students in Orleans Parish who were attending failing schools prior to Katrina. This was an appalling percentage of students to be attending failing schools. Any school district should have been excoriated for such abysmal performance. However, given the analysis of the data presented in this report, it is rather difficult to believe that this pathetic percentage enrollment figure has dropped to 18% as quoted by Mr. White. The LDOE and RSD and its proponents are so adept at manipulating data to mislead the public in order to support their cause that it is difficult to know what to believe. ROR and the Coalition for Louisiana Public Education will continue to question and expose the propaganda until we are satisfied that any reform movement serves all children equally, equitably and honestly!

⁷ RSD Status Report Submitted to BESE for September 2010

Appendix A

2009 and 2010 Profiles of RSD Schools

Table 1		
Baseline SPS Profile of RSD Schools		
	2009-2010	2010-11
Total Num Schools	59	70
Num Schools with SPS	55	50
Num Schools with no SPS	4	20
Num Schools Failing	29	17
Num Schools Closed	9	?
Pct of Failing Schools	53%	34%
Pct of Schools Closed	16%	?

Table 2		
Profile of RSD Students		
	2009-10	2010-11
Total Num. Students	23,682	27,064
Enrolled in Schools with SPS	23,008	21,353
Enrolled in Schools with No SPS	674	5,711
Enrolled in Failing Schools	11,900	6,049
Enrolled in Closed Schools	3,138	?
Pct Enrolled in Failing Schools	52%	28%
Pct Enrolled in Closed Schools	13%	?

Sources: LDOE's website

http://www.louisianaschools.net/data/school_accountability_reports.aspx

http://www.louisianaschools.net/offices/infomanagement/student_enrollment_data.html

Appendix B
Profile of 2010-11 RSD Schools

SiteName	2010 MFP Funded	2010 Baseline SPS	2010 Performance Label
Thurgood Marshall Early College High School	387		
Gentilly Terrace School	369		
Lagniappe Academies of New Orleans	61		
E. P. Harney Spirit of Excellence Academy	374		
Morris Jeff Community School	127		
Live Oak Elementary School	580		
Laurel Elementary School	638		
Arise Academy	241		
Success Preparatory Academy	330		
Benjamin E. Mays Preparatory School	198		
Pride College Preparatory Academy	194		
Akili Academy of New Orleans	219		
Esperanza Charter School	398		
Schwarz Alternative School	130		
L. B. Landry High School	561		
Hope Academy	165		
New Orleans Career Academy	89		
KIPP Renaissance High School	142		
KIPP New Orleans Leadership Academy	110		
John Dibert Community School	398		
Sojourner Truth Academy	248	53.5	AUS
Andrew H. Wilson Charter School	562	59	AUS
Harriet Tubman Elementary School	450	55.4	AUS
Algiers Technology Academy	330	55	AUS
Joseph A. Craig School	489	45.2	AUS
Joseph S. Clark Senior High School	351	22.8	AUS
Walter L. Cohen High School	418	28.2	AUS
Dr. Charles Richard Drew Elementary School	291	46.5	AUS
John McDonogh Senior High School	553	32.2	AUS
James Weldon Johnson School	234	58.6	AUS
Rabouin Career Magnet High School	12	19.8	AUS
Sarah Towles Reed Senior High School	564	34.9	AUS
Sarah Towles Reed Elementary School	480	50.7	AUS
Carver Elementary School	180	41.1	AUS
G.W. Carver High School	401	31.9	AUS
F.W. Gregory Elementary School	223	43.8	AUS

Greater Gentilly High School	258	47.3	AUS
P. A. Capdau School	361	71.2	AW
Nelson Elementary School	371	65.2	AW
Crocker Arts and Technology School	185	67.2	AW
The Intercultural Charter School	361	66.7	AW
Miller-McCoy Academy	533	69.5	AW
NOLA College Prep Charter School	604	73.4	AW
Langston Hughes Academy Charter School	597	74	AW
James M. Singleton Charter School	615	70.1	AW
P. A. Capdau School	361	71.2	AW
Nelson Elementary School	371	65.2	AW
Crocker Arts and Technology School	185	67.2	AW
The Intercultural Charter School	361	66.7	AW
Miller-McCoy Academy	533	69.5	AW
McDonogh #42 Elementary Charter School	523	65.3	AW
William J. Fischer Elementary School	466	62.9	AW
McDonogh #32 Elementary School	523	60	AW
O.P. Walker Senior High School	874	68.4	AW
Benjamin Banneker Elementary School	389	60.9	AW
Paul B. Habans Elementary School	279	62.4	AW
Murray Henderson Elementary School	331	63.4	AW
Fannie C. Williams Elementary School	442	62.1	AW
H.C. Schaumburg Elementary School	572	70.6	AW
Mary D. Coghill Elementary School	508	65.5	AW
Samuel J. Green Charter School	484	73.6	AW
Abramson Science & Technology Charter School	591	78	1 Star
Lafayette Academy of New Orleans	757	77.3	1 Star
A.P. Tureaud Elementary School	248	76.3	1 Star
New Orleans Charter Science and Math Academy	210	89.2	2 Stars
Dr. M.L.K. Charter School for Science & Tech.	667	90.1	2 Stars
Martin Behrman Elementary School	598	99.3	2 Stars
Dwight D. Eisenhower Elementary School	583	80	2 Stars
Sophie B. Wright Inst.of Academic Excellence	405	83	2 Stars
KIPP McDonogh 15 School for the Creative Arts	466	87.7	2 Stars
KIPP Central City Academy	387	85.2	2 Stars
Arthur Ashe Charter School	323	83.8	2 Stars
KIPP Believe College Prep (Phillips)	348	106.5	3 Stars
KIPP Central City Primary	301	120.6	4 Stars

