

Hello, my name is Patrick Hayes. I'm the Director of **EdFirstSC**.

I understand that some folks have been before you to talk about “**Achievement Districts**” & The New Orleans Miracle.

From your questions, I sensed that some of you were skeptical.

Your skepticism is well-founded.

First – this is a privatizing model.

Typically, a non-profit holds the charter, and hires a **for-profit** Charter Management Organization (CMO) to run it.

The CMO siphons off **10-25% of the school's revenue**.

I expect you heard a lot about:

- **a dramatic decrease in kids attending failing schools,**
- **big gains in school letter grades,**
- **and a skyrocketing graduation rate.**

It might seem like we “have” to do this.

The thing you need to know is that New Orleans achievement data is like a cafeteria vegetable:

It's been **cooked** beyond recognition.

You may hear people say that, “New Orleans went from having **77% failing schools to 29% failing schools.**”

What they don’t tell you is that those two statistics rely on two different definitions of “failing” and two different definitions of “New Orleans”.

When the Recovery School District (**RSD**) was being formulated,

the goal was to **convert an entire district to charters**

to create a showcase for a market-based model of education.

Before Hurricane Katrina, the performance score that triggered a state takeover was 60.

That figure did not give the new charter district enough schools, so **the cut score was raised to 87.**

This allowed the RSD to hand almost every school in New Orleans over to charter chains.

“Failing” was now being defined as **“just below state average”**.

That’s where we get the lie that 77% of New Orleans schools were failing originally.

Even that score excluded a group of **highly-successful (wealthier) schools** that remained under control of the school board.

Now, when officials want to make outrageous claims of success, **they lump those schools back in with the RSD schools** to create bogus statistics for a non-existent entity called “**New Orleans Schools**”.

As in the bald-faced lie: “**Now only 29% of New Orleans schools are failing.**”

If you pull out those non-RSD schools, you end up with **55% failing**...which sounds like great improvement from 77%,

...until you realize that by 2012, the cut score for “failing” had been **dropped back down**

from 87...to 75.

Those cut scores continue to bob up and down as needed.

Today, the cut score for state takeover is 50.

Bingo! Fewer “failing schools”.

At last count, charter boosters were making the absurd claim that, “Only 5% of “New Orleans” schools are now failing.”

School and district letter-grades are routinely manipulated in a similar fashion:

Folks like to crow about how New Orleans RSD

recently rose to a letter grade of “C”.

The main reason is that the state **changed the formula and scale** for measuring school performance.

Had consistent criteria been used, its district letter grade would have remained a ‘D.

The **real stats** for both letter grades and “failing status” are probably **even less encouraging...**

When charter chains fail (as they often do), they leave a 3 yr gap in the data.

They just conveniently disappear, like political prisoners.

They aren’t given a rating for their dismal final year. The new school isn’t given a rating for 2 years.

How big a factor is this?

In 2013, 40% of RSD charters had no rating at all.

Nearly half the schools in that district are invisible...

and by definition, it's the lowest performing half.

Some particularly troubled schools (and their kids) have been handed off several times, and have NEVER appeared in any data set.

That is Waffle House data:

It has been scattered, smothered, & covered.

Grownups should be embarrassed to let things like that come out of their mouths.

Any measure that can be manipulated internally for political ends has been:

school letter grades, state testing data...all of it is best ignored.

So, what really happened?

I suspect you've heard the lie that "New Orleans" graduation rates & ACT scores are now, **"Near the state average!"**

That trick only works if you include those high-flying schools
that were **NEVER seized by the state.**

For RSD charters alone, those stats are **absolutely miserable.**

They've gotten worse as schools have been **weaned off federal aid** and **millions of dollars pumped in by private foundations** to manufacture a success story.

Did anyone tell you that by 2007, this outside money had nearly tripled per-pupil spending in the all-charter district, to \$22,500?

Or that spending stayed well-above state averages for years?

Back in 2011, after years of federal and private **subsidies**, RSD's graduation rate was at 68%.

But that money's dried up now, and the stats have plummeted.

Once you pull out the non-RSD schools, the **graduation rate stands at 59.5%**, nowhere near the state's 75% average.

ACT Scores tell the same story: gains when the extra funding was there, drops since it dried up.

If we're going to insist on drawing **lessons from New Orleans**,

let it be these:

- **Spend more money**
 - **Keep it coming.**
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What did the charters **do** with all their **extra money**?

Much of it went to increased transportation costs as students were **ripped from their neighborhood schools** and shuffled around the city.

Many charters also **lengthened the school day**, starting at 7:30 and ending at 5pm.

Go back to your district and tell parents we're doing all that.

See what people say.

New Orleans parents had **nobody to complain to**. Their school board was essentially dissolved.

Tell me, when speakers came to talk to you about "Achievement Districts",

did they tell you about a federal lawsuit documenting the systematic shunning of special ed students by New Orleans charters?

Disabled students **cost money** and **hurt achievement stats**.

Did they tell you that...

A recent study found that one-third of New Orleans charter leaders admitted selecting and excluding students?

Market-based reforms don't turn kids into customers.

They turn them into **assets & liabilities**.

Like any other business, charter chains prioritize **efficiency**.

We heard today about setting a “Culture of High Expectations” in the classroom, and “Perfecting the Culture” for two weeks at the beginning of the school year.

Has anyone come to talk about the harsh “No Excuses” model of discipline that has become the industry norm in Achievement Districts?

If so, you heard about schools with 66% suspension rates,

and high school students getting demerits for **failure to raise their hand at a right angle** or **walk on taped lines** in hallways,

along with in-school suspension for wearing the **wrong socks or belt**.

No doubt, you were told about the federal Civil Rights complaint these policies triggered, filed by the Southern Poverty Law Center.

How much time did they spend talking about the fact that over 7,000 career teachers were fired without cause or due process of any kind,

and that many were replaced with **cheaper, untrained temporary labor from Teach for America,**

whose recruits attend a **5 week** summer program that supposedly prepares them to handle our most **challenging and vulnerable kids?**

Before the RSD, only **10%** of teachers were in the **first two years** of their career.

RSD now has **33%** of its teachers in that category.

Pre-and-post Katrina comparisons carry **massive caveats** about:

- **outside funding**
- huge, favorable **demographic shifts,**
- **changes** to the federal grad rate formula,
- ...and the fact that the same group of schools literally **doesn't exist** anymore.

Still, what's the **best-case scenario** for such a comparison?

After 10 years:

- **Graduation Rates** soar by 5%
- **and ACT Scores** are up 2 points to 16.4

That's still one of the **lowest averages in the state,** and far too low for admission to any state college.

I'm not so sure SC needs to jump on that Mardi Gras float quite yet.

Nothing that charter chains have done in New Orleans is patented.

If we really think that the best solution is to:

- spend \$22,000 per pupil,
- drive away special ed students and other low performers
- march kids up and down the halls like toy soldiers,
- and keep them there from 7:30 to 5:00 pm,

we don't have to **suspend democratic control** to do it.

If we want to **sack a bunch of teachers without cause** and replace them with cheap, untrained Teach for America temps, **that's tricky**...for a reason.

It should be.