

New Orleans Charter Schools: A Failed Experiment

Dr. Barbara Ferguson
Research on Reforms, Inc.
April 2024

Following Hurricane Katrina, a newly enacted state law identified schools that scored below the state average as failing and subject to take-over. The state then took-over 107 of New Orleans' 120 public schools and turned them into charter schools. Last year's scores showed that 56 of New Orleans' 68 public schools had scores below the state average.* Thus, after nearly twenty years, over 80% of New Orleans schools are still below the state average. This charter school experiment has been a failure.

Of the five worst performing high schools taken-over, only one now scores above the state average. Two are still below the state average. Another was closed and then reopened as a campus to expand the Willow selective admission charter school. The status of the other, Walter Cohen, is unclear. Recall that the New Orleans College Prep Charter took-over Cohen High School, operating its selective charter school on one floor, while leaving the failing Cohen students on the other floors. Thus, we learned that the take-over of a failing school simply meant taking-over the building, not the failing students in the building.

Of the five highest performing high schools taken-over, they continue to be the highest performing except for one, McDonogh #35, which is now below the state average. These schools, except for McDonogh #35, collectively received over \$5 million in Charter School Grant Funds. The five worst performing high schools received nothing in Charter School Grant Funds following the takeover.

The Louisiana law, which termed charter schools "an experiment," also stated that they were to "serve the best interests of at-risk" children and youth. But the legislative auditor found in 2022 that for the past six years, more than 1 in 5 charter schools failed to meet requirements on enrollment of children from low-income families.

Louisiana's "state takeover" law required schools below the state average to be taken-over. Thus, half of the schools should have been taken-over because half are below the state average and half are above. Yet, only the New Orleans' schools below the state average were taken-over. Targeting New Orleans seems to again be popular with our new governor.

Research on Reforms, Inc. consistently reported on the status of the state-takeover through its website and a published book, "Outcomes of the State Takeover of the New Orleans Schools." This will be the final of its outreach, which ends with hope that our legislature will one day enact laws that provide equity and excellence in education for our New Orleans children and youth.

**Louisiana Department of Education –School Performance Scores*

Barbara Ferguson, Attorney and Co-founder
Charles Hatfield, Co-founder
Research on Reforms, Inc.