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PARENTS, STUDENTS AND TEACHERS HAVE SOLUTIONS AND MUST HAVE POWER TO DECIDE



CHICAGO:
Dyett Hunger Strike Continues p.3



BUFFALO:
Refusing State Takeover p.8

10 YEARS AFTER KATRINA

Defend Resistance and Hold the Government Accountable for its Crimes

This year marks ten years since Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans and the Gulf Coast, with the man-made disaster that followed killing more than 1800 people and forcing more than 1.5 million to leave the region, many still unable to return. The devastation and military occupation that followed, with tens of

thousands forced into detention camps and then scattered across the country, were an example of government failure. So too, the rebuilding of the city has been one of government failure to meet the rights of the people for housing, healthcare, jobs and education. The public school system has been devastated,

the public hospital shuttered and replaced with a publicly funded private one, and unemployment and poverty rates remain high, with state racism forcing African Americans to contend with far higher rates. The right to return has not been met, with many areas, like the Ninth Ward, having only 20-30 percent

of residents returning. This crime of the government to fail to evacuate, then forcibly displace people, then refuse to guarantee their return, remains unpunished. Holding government to account remains a main demand of the people in New Orleans and across the country.

Defend Resistance • 19

September edition of ***Voice of Revolution***

Parents, Students, Teachers Must Decide

- *Parents, Students and Teachers Have Solutions and Must Have Power to Decide* 3

Education is a Right: Chicago

- *Coalition to Revitalize Dyett High School Demands*..... 4
- *Chicago's Dyett Hunger Strikers Resisting Closing and Privatization of Their School* 4
- *Hunger Strike To Stop Forced Closing of Dyett High School*..... 6
- *Black Youth Project 100 Stands with Dyett Strikers* 7
- *New Orleans Collective Supports Dyett Strikers*..... 7

Education is a Right: Buffalo

- *Top Ten Reasons to Refuse Receivership*..... 8
- *Refuse Receivership Rally (photos)*..... 9
- *The Significance of Receivership*..... 10
- *Public Control Solution, Not State Takeover*..... 11
- *Receivership and Power to Fire All Without Cause*..... 12

Education is a Right: Refuse the Tests

- *Private Global Interest Organization Performs Corporate Takeover of Our Education Systems* 14
- *Test Prep for 5-year-olds: Here is What it Looks Like*..... 16
- *Web of Secrecy Surrounds Federal Half-a-Billion Handout to Charter Schools*..... 17

Defend Resistance in New Orleans

- *New Orleans Remembers and Continues Its Resistance* 19
- *A Recovery That Serves Private Interests* 20
- *Private Hospital Replaces Big Charity in New Orleans* 21
- *Charter Schools Flood New Orleans*..... 22
- *The People Are the Only Reliable Force!*..... 24

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EDUCATION IS A RIGHT

Parents, Students and Teachers Have Solutions and Must Have Power to Decide

Parents, students and teachers of Chicago are contending with mayoral control and an appointed school board. Dozens of schools have been closed, state testing increased while the quality of education declines. The public is making clear this is not acceptable, through demonstrations and other actions. For 19 days, as of September 4, twelve people have been on hunger strike to demand that Dyett High School be kept a public, open enrollment school and that the plan devised by the public be implemented. This plan calls for Dyett to be a center for organizing for the Bronzeville community and to have a global and green program. The public is showing it has both general and specific solutions, and the rulers and their politicians do not.



Similarly, in Buffalo, the public has put forward its demand for public control of public schools. And it has defined the content of this demand: Parents, students and teachers must have decision making power in matters of education. The equal right to education for all must be met and can be met by empowering the public to decide matters, including budget matters. It has also met the claim of government, repeated by the media, that since state takeover of public schools using receivership is law, “nothing can be done.” On the contrary, resistance can and is being organized. People bring out that slavery was law, segregation was law, denial of women’s rights and immigrant rights is law, and thus resistance is duty! Through rallies and other means concrete actions are being provided to refuse the unjust powers given to an appointed receiver and the state education commissioner: refuse wholesale firing without cause; refuse separate agreements that divide and decimate the district; refuse state testing starting in September; fight for people’s empowerment and the equal right to education!

In both cases what stands out is that the dictate from government and the rich private interests they serve is not raising the quality of education. Indeed, all their emphasis on testing and so-called “data metrics,” are lowering quality and increasing inequality. They give quantitative figures of various kinds, like those for test scores or graduation rates, that are taken out of context and often arbitrary. None of their “metrics” address quality. None of them are put in the context of aims — what is the aim of education in today’s modern world?

Putting together removal of the public from governance, removal of collective experience and wisdom of teachers, parents and students together and use of testing and teaching to the test, it becomes clear that the rich have the aim of producing drones. They do not want thinking human beings, who demand their rights, like their right to decide. Education to change the world requires very different qualities than those now being imposed. People in Chicago, Buffalo and elsewhere are making clear that they have solutions and are stepping up the fight for the equal right to a high quality education that serves the youth and society.

HUNGER STRIKE CONTINUES - FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 4

Coalition to Revitalize Dyett High School Demands

The recent announcement by Chicago Public Schools to open an arts school with a technology hub is not what thousands of Bronzeville residents said they wanted. There was overwhelming demand for Dyett Global Leadership and Green Technology High School. We are willing to negotiate with CPS, but we will not be excluded from a school we have fought for, suffered for, and struggled to save.

We are committed to the following:

- A School with a global leadership curriculum.
- A School with a green technology curriculum.
- A School with vertical curricular alignment with the 6 feeder schools identified in the proposal.
- Dyett as a community school (open till 7pm daily,

with programs and resources for parents, students and the community).

- Dwayne Turner to serve as the principal of Dyett.
- The immediate elected and fully empowered Local School Council.
- The school must retain the name Walter H. Dyett.
- The Coalition to Revitalize Dyett must be fully represented on the design/planning team of the school.

The hunger strike continues! While it is good that Rahm has committed to re-open Dyett as an open-enrollment, district-run, fully public school; he did NOT accept any other aspect of the Coalition to Revitalize Dyett's proposal.

The #FightForDyett is not over!

ORGANIZING EFFORT

Chicago's Dyett Hunger Strikers Resisting Closing and Privatization of Their School

Black Agenda Report Interview with Hunger Striker

The years long struggle on the part of parents and students and community members around Dyett High school on Chicago's historic south side is an example of long-term community building and organizing.

Black Agenda Report's (BAR) Bruce Dixon interviewed Jitu Brown, a member of the Coalition to Revitalize Dyett High School on August 26, 2015, the tenth day of a hunger strike staged by parents, teachers and community residents resisting the closing and privatization of their neighborhood high school and the intransigence of Chicago's City Hall, apparently determined to disperse and destroy their community and rebuild it for someone else. [With additions, in brackets, from similar interviews by Jitu Brown.]

Black Agenda Report (BAR): Why are parents and community people on hunger strike at Dyett School? What's at stake for your families and communities?

Jitu Brown: We are on this hunger strike because we've done everything else above and beyond what we should have had to do. Since 2009 we have come up with a detailed vision and plan not just to revamp Dyett High School, but to create a K-12 educational system that makes sense for our families and communities. The official response has been ignoring us, lying about us, our demands and our community, hiring paid protesters to discredit us, just years of unbelievable behavior on the part of officials.

We are not just seeing school closings here, we have seen the closings of hospitals and trauma centers, the elimination of grocery stores and more. We are looking at systematic disinvest-

ments in our families, our youth, our elders, our communities. The struggle over Dyett School is the latest unfolding chapter in a decades-long effort to remove our people from those neighborhoods the gentrifiers, the privatizers and the profiteers now covet, and that our mayors and public officials want to give them.

Our response back in 2009 was to come up with the Bronzeville Global Achievement Plan, partnering Dyett High School with 6 local feeder schools, implementing restorative justice and other innovations that resulted in the largest increase in college bound high school graduates anywhere in the city of Chicago, and the biggest decrease in suspensions. Dyett High School beat out 400 schools nationwide to qualify for the 2011 ESPN Rise Up Award which got us \$4 million dollars but the children never got to take advantage of it because the city ordered the school closed the next year. Students remaining in the school had to take their AP and physical education classes online.

Since then we have had scores of public and private meetings with officials and actions, a sit-in at the mayor's office. We took the framework we had developed and expanded it, we brought in allies from around the city, like Teachers for Social Justice, Blacks and Greens, the Chicago Botanic Gardens, and in April we submitted our plan for the Walter Dyett Global Leadership and Green Technology Academy to the school board. We have met with literally thousands of Bronzeville residents. [We have held six town hall meetings, gotten over 3,000 petition signatures. Over 578 people in Bronzeville mailed letters to Mayor Rahm Emanuel saying that we want Dyett Global Leadership and Green Technology High School as the hub for what we call a sustainable

PARENTS, STUDENTS, TEACHERS MUST DECIDE

community school village. And that means that we want feeder schools vertically aligned with Dyett Global Leadership and Green Technology High School. We want the curriculum to be vertically aligned. We want parents and Local School Council members to train together. We want to create a network of schools, so that we have not only relevance but we have relationships.]

But instead of working with us, they issued an RFP (request for proposals) and invited in school privatizers, private charter school operators with political connections and histories of running mediocre schools, rather than working with parents and students and communities with a solid track record of steady improvements.

At a June 17 public meeting we turned out 250 people. There should have been a follow-up meeting on August 10, but city officials stopped returning our calls and giving direct answers when and where it would be. On August 7 they issued a press release on their website canceling that meeting. An August 26 vote on the matter was also canceled as was another hearing scheduled for September 15. That was the straw that broke the camel's back.

The city has no problem working with other neighborhoods that stand up and say no to the charter operators, but not us. We're forced to conclude that City Hall, which calls the absolute shots for Chicago's public schools, is determined to deny us our high school because they want to further fragment, disconnect, break up and destroy the community which has been in this part of the south side of Chicago for almost a hundred years now.

Our elected alderman Will Burns, who does whatever the mayor tells him has overseen the closure of several elementary schools and another high school during his time in office. One of them was nearby Overton School named after a progressive back businessman of the early 20th century. Our elected officials sold the building for a mere \$300,000 to a privatizer who's making artist lofts out of it.

Our alderman, along with our representatives in the state legislature have recognized our efforts by calling our funders, getting us audited, and more. Chicago Public Schools and City Hall have simply refused to work with us because of who we are, because of what community this is, and because they've already decided to break it up, to supplant to move us out and develop this part of the city for some other people and some other purposes.

Our parents and families have decided that we are tired of the runaround. We have jumped through every hoop, we have met with every bureaucrat. We are demanding our school back. The charter operators say they want to put an arts and entertainment school, and a sports school where Dyett is now, as if that's all we can do. We sit right across the street from historic Provident Hospital, the first black operated hospital in the US and all we're good for is sports, arts and entertainment? We will not sit back and allow our high school to be handed over to mediocre charter school operators with political connections.



Passing Dyett High School out of existence and handing the property off to some privatizer is erasing almost a century of our people's history on the south side. Dyett High School was named after Walter Dyett, a south side Chicago musician and educator who taught at Wendell Phillips and DuSable High Schools. Dyett was an inspired teacher and a ferocious disciplinarian who taught Nat King Cole, Dinah Washington, Von Freeman, Gene Ammons, Redd Foxx, Eddie Harris and many more. [Many others are graduates of Dyett or called Bronzeville home, including Louis Armstrong, Gwendolyn Brooks, Sam Cooke, Bo Diddley, Minnie Riperton, Ida B. Wells, Richard Wright and Dr. Daniel Hale Williams.]

Our vision of Dyett as a Green Global Leadership Academy is worthy of that history. That is why we are here.

BAR: How has the struggle over several years around your specific demands for a Green and sustainable high school served to build leadership capacity among parents, students and members of your community?

Jitu Brown: We come from the Ella Baker school of organizing. [...] Organizers bring people together to make and adjust and execute long term plans, organizers empower and train and raise up new leaders from among the people. Organizers and the leaders they help create are responsible to the people, responsible to communities. We expect to be holding organizing institutes beginning later this year, to show how to confront money power with people power. [...]

We are optimistic and we are out here every day at 555 E. 51st Street. We are not wanting for local support. Hundreds of people come by to see how we are doing every day.

BAR: How can people around the country support you?

Jitu Brown: Call the office of Mayor Rahm Emanuel at 312-744-3300. Tell him the whole world is watching. Chicago's mayor controls the school board. He can decide this afternoon to give us our high school back and have the building keys put in our hand tonight. Call Alderman Will Burns at 773-536-8103 with the same message. You can read, tweet and retweet news about the ongoing hunger strike at #FightForDyett.

Hunger Strike To Stop Forced Closing of Dyett High School

By Michelle Gunderson, Alternet.org

Twelve people sit in a circle under the trees outside Dyett High School in Chicago on a hunger strike. They share stories of their experience with Chicago schools – teachers they have loved, principals they have battled, the times they have been arrested fighting for equality in our schools. Those of us who support this courageous act sit alongside the circle offering our support through our presence and willingness to listen.

The twelve people – parents, grandparents, teachers, a minister, and community members – have committed to withholding food, forming a hunger strike to keep the only open enrollment high school in the Bronzeville community of Chicago.

The demand is simple – the hunger strikers want a public high school designed by the community to re-open at Dyett, not a contract school from a failed supplier or a charter operation. The proposal for the Dyett Global Leadership and Green Technology School comes from extensive outreach in focus groups and town hall meetings with the community. Over a four-year period a coalition of community members and education experts built the plan. It is a vision for a high school that would build a center of learning and justice for our city's children.

This is the point where we need to stop and ask ourselves – how far would we be willing to go to ensure we had an open enrollment high school in our own communities? Why would community members be driven to such a drastic action as to risk their health and well-being?

Slow and Intentional Destruction of a School

There has been a long history of ignoring community needs and input in the Bronzeville neighborhood. In 2012 Chicago's appointed school board voted to "phase out" Dyett High School, but the path of intentional destruction was over a decade in the making.

Rhoda Rae Gutierrez and Pauline Lipman consider Dyett High School a victim of the 3Ds of education reform – destabilization, disinvestment, and disenfranchisement. Dyett experienced destabilizing upheaval in its student population when the Chicago Public Schools decided to "turn around", convert to charter, or create selective enrollment in the 20 area schools near Dyett. Students were sent from school to school with very little cohesion to community, teachers, or curriculum.

There was also considerable disinvestment in Dyett. The school was initially a middle school. When Dyett converted to a high school, no resources were set aside to convert the school – there were no science labs and the school library only had seven books. The Dyett community also experienced disenfranchisement. Decisions about the school were made by a school board appointed by the mayor with no consideration for the outpouring

of commitment from the community to keep an open enrollment high school in the neighborhood.

For those of us who have witnessed the privatization of our school systems, we know all too well what is at stake if Dyett High School is no longer in the hands of the community. Once we have one neighborhood without an open enrollment high school it will be all too easy for subsequent parts of our city to fall like dominoes, creating a system of privatized schools.

Getting the Word Out

If you have not heard about the hunger strike until now, it is not because you were not paying attention. Addressing the circle of hunger strikers, Jitu Brown said, "We are experiencing a local media blackout. Do we all agree that this is true?" Everyone who was fasting in the hunger strike circle nodded in silent agreement. The voice of this community is being silenced and ignored once again.

Many people have asked how they can help. In my mind, the most important work we can do is to keep telling this story. If you are in Chicago, come to sit with the circle and listen. Then tell more of the story yourself. Use your social media networks to share links and photos while letting the local news sources know that you would like this story told.

As a supporter of the hunger strike I sit on the periphery of the circle under the trees of Dyett. I listen to the strikers' stories and am in awe of their courage. It is a courage that sustains us and carries us all forward.

"We can't do any of this if we're scared," says Jeanette Taylor-Ramann, one of the mothers participating in the hunger strike.

As difficult as it is, these are times for bold, courageous actions.

If you would like to support the hunger strike, call the Chicago board of education at 773-533-1500 and ask to leave a message for current CEO Forrest Claypool. State that you support the Dyett High School Global Leadership and Green Technology School proposal and that a decision should be made now instead of the constant postponement.

The coalition includes the following organizations: Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University, Black Metropolis Convention & Tourism Council, Blacks in Green, Chicago Botanic Garden, Chicago Jazz Society, Chicago Teacher's Union, DuSable Museum of African American History, Kenwood Oakland Community Organization, Teachers for Social Justice, The Plant, and University of Illinois at Chicago College of Education.

(Michelle Gunderson is a Chicago teacher and public education activist)

CLOSING SCHOOLS IS JUST ANOTHER FORM OF KILLING

Black Youth Project 100 Stands with Dyett Strikers

Black Youth Project 100 (BYP100) stands in support of the Coalition to Revitalize Dyett, a group of outraged community members, teachers and parents who have been on hunger strike for education justice since August 17th. The hunger strike is in response to Chicago Public Schools' failure to adopt their plan to create Dyett Global Leadership Green Technology High School. Strikers have said they will keep demonstrating until this plan - and this plan only - is adopted by the Board of Education. Dyett, which is currently shuttered, is the only remaining open-enrollment high school in Bronzeville, which is both majority and historically Black. The board's failure not only immediately endangers the lives of the twelve hunger strikers, but points to the city's consistent disregard for Black life in general, and the wellness of Black children in particular.

On August 20th, BYP100, the Dyett hunger strikers, and other organizers and concerned citizens rallied at Chicago Police Headquarters. We packed the Chicago Police Board hearing and outer pavilion to demand that Officer Dante Servin be fired for the murder of Rekia Boyd in 2012. As the hearing went on inside, Dyett protesters took the mic to speak about their

cause, noting that anti-Black police violence, school closings, underfunding in majority Black communities, and a complete lack of accountability for the perpetrators of these destructive acts are interrelated issues. It is necessary that we work from every angle to dismantle the systematic harms that have been inflicted upon us.

"The violence being done to Black communities and families by closing our schools is just another form of killing, just another marker of Black life being devalued by this City," says Janae Bonsu, BYP100 Chicago Chapter Co-Chair.

While addressing the crowd outside CPD Headquarters on the 20th, Jitu Brown spoke on behalf of the Dyett hunger strikers: "We look at our children and see love; they look and see inmates." With that, Brown speaks to how the struggle for Dyett goes beyond just the school's walls. The Dyett campaign represents the lack of jobs, police accountability and overall lack of rights in Black communities. [...] It is with love for our children and commitment to their well-being in spite of the continued assault on their — and thus our — futures that BYP100 stands in solidarity with the Dyett hunger strikers.

New Orleans Collective Supports Dyett Strikers

Urban South Grassroots Research Collective

Dyett High School Hunger Strikers — Aisha, Anna, April, Cathy, Irene, Jeanette, Jitu, Marc, Monique, Nelson, Prudence, Robert —and community allies:

The members of Urban South Grassroots Research Collective in New Orleans stand in solidarity with you. We respect and understand the struggle for an open-enrollment neighborhood high school in Bronzeville. The 3 Ds of Chicago School Reform — destabilization, disinvestments and disenfranchisement — are connected to a fourth D in New Orleans: Disaster Capitalism.

When Hurricane Katrina struck New Orleans in August 2005, policymakers and education "entrepreneurs" seized the opportunity to create an all-charter school system that would serve the interests of white profiteers. Community members were disenfranchised when the state-run Recovery School District took the vast majority of public schools from the locally elected Orleans Parish School Board. Advancing historic forms of state disinvestments, public schools were shuttered in black neighborhoods, which made rebuilding homes all the more difficult. Veteran teachers in New Orleans, most of them African Americans, were terminated and replaced by transient, inexperienced recruits through Teach for America and similar corporate outfits. All of

this served to further destabilize our communities.

Now a decade later in New Orleans, it is clear that there is nothing "natural" about this disaster: The same forces that have sought to destroy public education in New Orleans are in Chicago and other cities across this nation.

We will not stand for it. We cannot stand for it. The lives of our children are at stake.

Your struggle for Dyett High School is ours. For the past ten years, the Lower 9th Ward School Development Group in New Orleans has organized and insisted that master planners rebuild a high school in the neighborhood. We prevailed, as you will prevail. The so-called reformers are wealthy globetrotters: they move from city to city and their money gives them an advantage. What they do not have, and will never have, is a sense of place. We will not allow them to betray our historic neighborhoods, take our homes and our schools, or disrespect the blood that has been shed by our ancestors to ensure justice for our children. [...]

This is a struggle that must be waged. There is not a storm — natural or man-made — that is strong enough to take us down. We are with you.

Visit our website: usmlo.org

STATE TAKEOVER IN BUFFALO

Top Ten Reasons to Refuse Receivership

The Buffalo public has demanded:

1) Public control of public schools, where we the public, the parents, students, teachers, staff and community members, decide. We are the experts, we know what is needed, like smaller classes, music and physical education for all now.

2) Equal Right to Education for All. *We reject the inequality and segregation of Buffalo schools* and demand that the state take immediate action to fully fund all the schools based on their needs. It is the state that is failing, not our children and teachers.

3) Raising the quality of the public schools, by raising the quality of democracy. Concentrating power in the hands of appointed individuals solves no problem. We need to enhance and expand the power of the public. *Our Schools, We Decide!*

For these reasons we firmly oppose state take over using receivership for 25 Buffalo public schools. Receivership is an undemocratic assault on elected governance, with the appointed state Education Commissioner given great powers over the local appointed receiver, who in turn has power over such matters as budget, curriculum, hiring and firing, discipline, class size, teaching conditions, and more.

Top Ten Reasons to Refuse Receivership

1) Receivership will take power from the public (parents, students, staff, teachers). Receivership is an undemocratic state take over of the Buffalo public schools, that concentrates power in the hands of unelected individuals, accountable to the state, not the Buffalo public. It opens the way for privatizing public schools and using our public tax dollars to pay private companies.

2) Receivership does not address the great inequality in our schools and indeed is again increasing it. The law, passed as part of the budget, does not provide sufficient increased funding to meet the *needs of all public schools*. The schools targeted for takeover are minority and impoverished and again being forced to suffer the most.

3) Receivership will likely mean fewer teachers of color in our schools, as the receiver can hire and fire as he decides.

4) The receiver has power to fire all teachers and staff without cause, at each of the 25 schools. This causes anxiety and uncertainty now, especially for younger children, and great chaos and instability when it happens. There could be a revolving door of teachers, and potentially use of individuals not certified in schools where stability and continuity are most needed. *We say organize now to demand the receiver not use such disruptive and unjust powers* and take further action if the receiver goes ahead with firing all, or many teachers, staff and administrators at any one of the 25 schools.

5) Governance, collective bargaining, school leadership and staffing, parent and community engagement are not “barriers” to improving schools. The Commissioner says that all of these are

“barriers” and the intent of receivership is to remove them. Thus the intent is to attack rights and remove the public from governance. Public control of public schools that increases the role of the public in deciding is needed and the state that is the barrier.

6) The receiver and state Education Commissioner can split up and divide our district by imposing separate “receivership agreements” at each school — even if teachers and staff have voted no. These agreements will mean worse working conditions for teachers, which mean worse learning conditions for children. It also separates these students, parents and teachers from the district and weakens the ability of all to raise the quality of our public schools. We say join efforts now to oppose firing without cause and to take further action if the receiver decides to impose “receiver agreements.”

7) Receivership will increase use of the Common Core state testing and evaluation regime and the narrow curriculum that goes with it. Hundreds of thousands of parents statewide have rejected the state testing as unfair, developmentally inappropriate and a form of child abuse. Receivership is a tool of the state to impose the Common Core regime — as the receiver decides all such matters. Commissioner Join the *Refuse the Tests* efforts now and mobilize others to do the same.

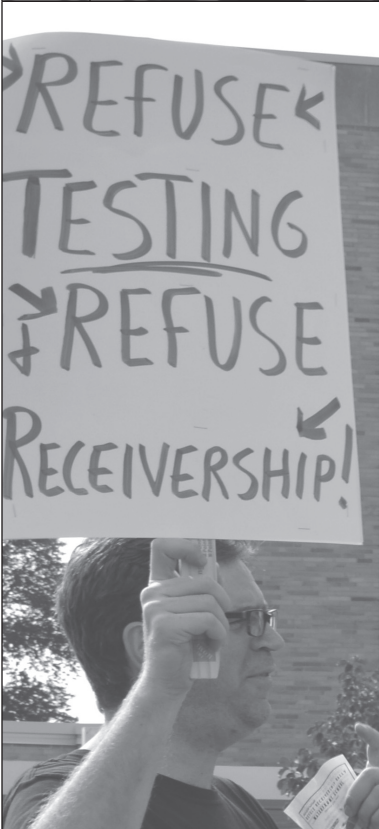
8) The “measures for success” are rigged and unfair. The state Commissioner decides what constitutes “demonstrable improvement,” with state test scores a main basis for many indicators. She also has power to say a school did not succeed and must remain in receivership, or that progress was made but receivership remains. Schools have long experienced the unfair and arbitrary use of state tests. Even with improvement in graduation and attendance rates, schools are still branded as failing. *The data used is not reliable or accurate and diverts from the responsibility, and failure, of the state to guarantee the equal right to education for all.*

9) Receivership was passed using bribes and blackmail. This legislation was passed quickly, as part of the budget, with Cuomo using the blackmail of withholding all state education funds, and then the bribe of \$75 million for only 20 of the 144 schools statewide in receivership. Blackmail and bribes are the tools of gangsters.

10) Receivership aims to block resistance and public involvement. Apart from New York City, Buffalo has the most schools targeted, almost half the district. Governor Cuomo said our public schools deserve the “death penalty,” and he is using the force of receivership and blackmail to kill our public school district. The Buffalo public has been engaged and active and fighting for rights and raising the quality of our schools. We have solutions! *We say step up the organized resistance, and fight for district-wide unity of all!*

Our Schools, We Decide!

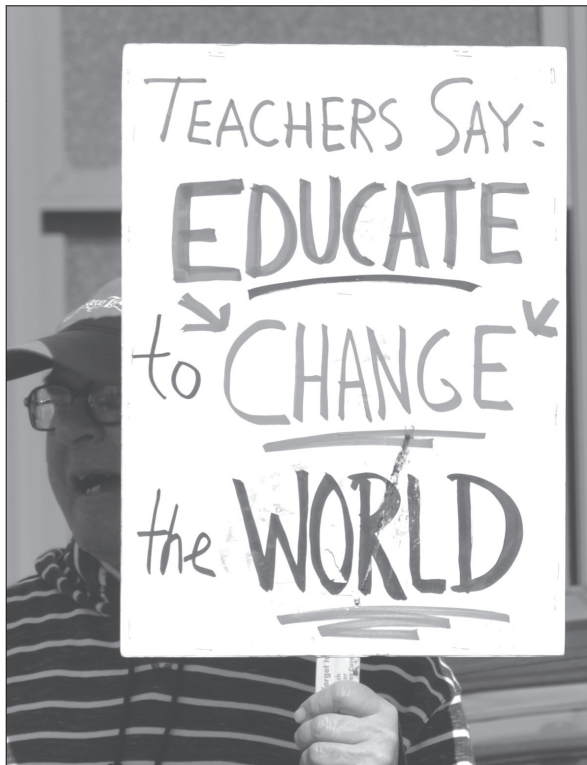
PARENTS, STUDENTS, TEACHERS MUST DECIDE



The Significance of Receivership

Dr. Mark Garrison, markgarrison.net

As new law granting executive powers to the Commissioner of Education is used to seize control of more than two dozen Buffalo Public Schools — a law that appears to be in violation of the democratic governance provisions of Buffalo’s Charter — parents, teachers, community activists and others are organizing to oppose this receivership law through a variety of methods, including a rally at McKinley High School September 2.[1] While it should be obvious to even casual observers that Governor Cuomo, the new State Education Commissioner MaryEllen Elia and her hand picked Superintendent, Dr. Cash, are autocratic in both their manner of speech and their actions when referring to Buffalo, its public and its schools, there is more at stake here than might first appear.



Receivership replaces collective bargaining with merit and performance pay ideology based on pseudo-scientific “metrics” designed to produce failure and justify mass firings. Receivership aims to establish a “new normal” that eliminates due process and other forms of fair employment practices for teachers and administrators. But, receivership not only means the collectives of educators represented in district-wide collective bargaining units are effectively dismissed — as district-wide representation is denied with each individual school “agreement” — it means that teachers and administrators can be fired without cause, at will.

Receivership Means the Dismantling of the Buffalo

Public School District

A key aspect of the receivership law is the manner in which it works to dismantle the Buffalo Public Schools as a district. Dismantling via receivership is accomplished through mandates that the receiver develop separate receivership “agreements” with each of the 25 schools that have been placed under receivership according to the arbitrary metrics established by the state and federal government.

The new Superintendent is currently the receiver, who, as receiver, operates outside the authority of the publicly elected school board, in effect reporting instead to Commissioner Elia. Each individual agreement can cover “the length of the school day; the length of the school year; professional development for teachers and administrators; class size; and changes to the programs, assignments, and teaching conditions in the school in receivership.” Different agreements at each school serve an obvious “divide and conquer” function. And despite appearing to recognize each school’s collective bargaining unit, the law and the commissioner’s regulations set up a timeframe and process that ensures these “agreements” give expression to the will of the commissioner. The receiver is not even required to argue out how these imposed agreements will improve the quality of education.

Receivership Imposes Arbitrary Employment Practices

Receivership Means Privatized Governance

Separate agreements set the stage for “school autonomy,” which, while sounding empowering, the question becomes autonomous or

independent of what? Empowering for whom? The answer is corporate interests want to be free to act independently of public oversight. The arrangement is empowering only for executive authorities who have seized the power of the state and are acting on behalf of private interests. Receivership thus functions to radically restructure the governance of public assets, interests and processes, moving decision-making into the private sphere. This does not solve any of the current problems related to the functioning of the current school board.

Widely recognized as a step toward privatization, such dismantling has already taken place in various forms in cities such as Chicago, New Orleans, New York City and Philadelphia. No improvements in student achievement have resulted.

Dismantling of public institutions is part of the vision of what has come to be called “corporate school reform.” It is also important to note that while such dismantling disproportionately targets working class and minority communities, suburban districts will be increasingly targeted, starting with “first ring” suburban districts. In the place of a district, private interests seek to build “portfolios” — sections of a city seized by financial and corporate interests, mostly via charter school operators and “edupreneurs” in the publishing and technology industries. These are modeled on investment portfolios, serving private gain in both economic and political terms. Mirroring corporate governance structures, those with more shares claim more say, violating the democratic

principle of one person, one vote. This privatizes the governance of public interests and assets.

The so-called community engagement teams mandated by the receivership plan are part of this effort to disassemble a single public and its elected representation in the form of a district school board. Team members are being decided in secret and then decreed by receiver authority. These teams are a means to institute and justify the portfolio model which pits schools and communities against each other, blocking the formation of unified public opinion and collective will.

Privatization of Public Institutions is Against Thinking

Dismantling public institutions functions, among other things, to privatize thinking, thus working to emasculate thinking altogether. A hallmark of thinking, or what is sometimes called “critical thinking,” is in fact decision-making. Thinking is inspired by and developed as individuals and collectives deliberate about and decide important matters that affect their lives. The receivership law places an unprecedented power in the hands of executive authorities, and establishes a process that governs public assets and interests in a manner that is best described as *secret and dictatorial*. The thinking required for decision-making is denied to the public. The law thus functions to block public thinking from occurring by further emasculating the space for public deliberation. Without public deliberation the ability of the body politic to form a view and express its will is severely limited. Separate agreements with each of the 25 schools specifically work against the formation of a unified consciousness or thinking that can serve the public interest. The common good is eliminated from the landscape of consciousness.

Metrics Against Thinking and Having an Aim

The receivership law appears to have no provisions for public redress nor does it appear to have provisions that ensure the receiver is accountable to the public or any of its core constituents:

students and parents. Instead, it imposes the long-discredited corporate management game of metric chasing.

This metric chasing game — that is organizing teachers and students to improve test scores — is at best a sad comedy, and at worst a mechanism for disabling the human brain from producing rational thought in the service of socially meaningful aims. Everywhere they are imposed, these “metrics” or targets quickly cease to be a way of measuring performance and become ends in themselves. If students are less skilled and knowledgeable today it is because their education has been reduced to preparing for tests that are increasingly irrational in their design and administration, as they ignore pressing social problems like poverty. Receivership increases this irrational practice when in fact this practice needs to be completely abounded.

For decades, these “metrics” have been a key tool used by corporate deformers to impose aimlessness on students and teachers, so that they do not develop their own thinking, aims and thus agency. Aimlessness is an outcome of treating students as products to serve corporate interests: products have no will, conscience or aim; they have no values, no desires nor wisdom. These “metrics” — a technology developed by Eugenicists in the early twentieth century — are not a tool by which to come to know the world or the state of public schools. They are instead a means for imposing dictate, a means to regulate and control teachers, students and administrators. None of the so-called metrics reflect the aims for education that are already widely supported: citizenship, preparing youth to solve social problems, support for the well-rounded development of students in the social, emotional, physical, artistic as well as intellectual domain. They serve to divert public will and public demand for a well-rounded, broad and engaging education that prepares youth for the future. Thus, these “metrics” are not a means to improve, but a weapon of mass destruction. They are as far away from serving the purpose of accountability as Governor Cuomo is from acting in the service of democracy.

Public Control Solution, Not State Takeover

Buffalo Forum

The Buffalo Board of Education held a Community Meeting recently about the state takeover of 25 Buffalo public schools, using receivership. Forced into a smaller room at Performing Arts High School, though the auditorium was available, the meeting was packed with more than 130 people, many forced to stand. All were concerned about what state takeover will mean for the public schools. The presentation given by Interim Superintendent Darren Brown utilized material from the state. It provided information about how the state has organized the takeover and the sweeping powers given to state Education Commissioner Elia and the local receiver, now Superintendent Cash. However no evidence, information or even rational argument for how this takeover will in any way deal with providing the equal right to education for all was presented.

The public on the other hand, at board meetings, rallies,

forums and elsewhere has shown that it has rational arguments and solutions. This includes a broad curriculum, with music, art, physical education, history, social studies and more, not the narrow Common Core curriculum focused on English and math. It includes recognizing poverty and inequality as key issues to address, issues that receivership ignores. It includes the need to increase the decision-making role of parents, teachers, students and staff.

The various questions raised by teachers and parents in the short time allotted brought out the widespread concerns with state takeover. Some people brought out that while additional limited funds were available for 5 of the 25 schools, it is not enough and such funding for only a few schools generates more inequality in the district, not less.

Others raised concerns about the powers of the Commissioner

and her abilities to arbitrarily keep schools under state takeover and put more schools on the takeover list. The Buffalo public already has considerable experience in how arbitrary and unjust the state is when it comes to refusing to approve positive re-design plans and refusing to support students by providing the funding needed. Use of state testing as a main indicator is also arbitrary, as the test scores do not reflect the learning levels or abilities of the students. No answer was provided as to what will stop such arbitrary and unjust actions in the future. Indeed, when one participant raised that the entire set up was designed to ensure failure, the crowd applauded in support. This further indicated that the aim of receivership is not to improve the schools, but rather to further undermine and wreck public education.

The power of the receiver to impose separate “receiver agreements” and thus begin the destruction of the district was also raised, with no response provided. The Commissioner can impose such agreements even when teachers and staff think they are harmful to students and vote no. These agreements are a state effort to weaken the ability of parents, teachers and students *district-wide* to make demands for *all* children (like music and physical education) and raise the quality of all schools by defending rights. Parents and teachers alike are calling on the elected Board of Education (BOE) to join in opposing any individual “receiver agreements” as unjust and harmful to the district.

Many other questions went unanswered as the meeting ended as the meeting with now Superintendent Dr. Cash began in the

auditorium. Among other concerns are:

1) Why is a single appointed receiver, accountable to New York State Education Commissioner Elia a better solution than public control of public schools, where parents, teachers, staff and students together decide?

2) Teachers, parents, students, staff and administrators are far more able to design ways to assess students and teachers and schools. There is no evidence the state has any solutions for this problem. On the contrary, its testing and assessment regime is recognized statewide as child abuse, arbitrary and not a legitimate measure of anything. If the state was actually serious about improving the schools, it would empower parents, teachers, students and staff to *decide*.

3) The Buffalo City Charter calls for elected governance of the public schools. The receiver is not elected. Commissioner Elia is not elected. The Buffalo School Board (BOE) is losing power over these 25 schools. The BOE and all elected officials should be opposing this takeover as contrary to the Charter and New York’s home rule statutes.

The school board and new Superintendent Cash need to address how engaging parents and teachers in supporting state takeover will solve any problem. The evidence here in Buffalo, is that these state efforts serve to embroil people in developing plans and solutions, only to find the state refusing them and imposing its own. Evidence here and elsewhere, like Newark and New Orleans is that state takeovers solve no problem while undermining and eliminating public schools and districts.

Receivership and Power to Fire All Without Cause

One of the main powers given to the receiver that generally is either being ignored or greatly downplayed or misrepresented by material from the state is the power to fire, without cause, all teachers and staff at a receivership school. While power-point presentations often include one or two phrases on these matters, they do not address the significance of this power attacking the collective rights and strength of teachers, students and parents alike. Or the great harm, disruption, and chaos such firings will cause. Confusion has also been spread that it only applies to an independent receiver, not a superintendent receiver. The superintendent receiver “is vested with all the powers granted to an independent receiver,” and has “sole judgement” (with Commissioner approval) on hiring and firing.

Power to Fire All

The power-point presentations given at public meetings by the



state often have 2-3 pages on Community Engagement Teams, even though these have *no decision making powers*, especially as concerns wholesale firings. Reference to the receiver’s power to fire all is usually just a phrase like “require all staff to reapply

for their positions.” Or another says simply “Restaff (one time).” This too is a false statement, as the Commissioner can allow it more than once at her discretion. Both phrases imply that staff need only reapply for their jobs and they will get them. The law and regulations, however, state the following.

1) In terms of using the power only one time, that is up to the Commissioner. Her regulations state: “Upon completion of the abolition and rehiring process...no further abolition of the positions of all members of the teaching and administrative and supervisory staff assigned to” the receivership school “shall occur without the prior approval of the commissioner.” So, the wholesale firing can occur as often as the Commissioner decides (Commissioner Regulations 100.19, p.33, June 23, 2015)

2) Both the law and regulations state, “a school receiver may abolish the positions of all members of the teaching and administrative and supervisory staff” and “terminate employment of any principal” of a receivership school and “require such staff members to reapply for their positions if they so choose.” (ibid, p.32). The receiver determines “the specific positions to be abolished and the timeline for such abolition and for the rehiring process.”

The law further states: “The receiver shall have full discretion regarding hiring decisions but must fill at least fifty percent of the newly defined positions with the most senior former school staff *who are determined by the staffing committee to be qualified,*” (emphasis BF). The receiver determines the qualifications. The staffing committee is the receiver, his two appointees and two people from the union — meaning the receiver has a majority. Thus he could decide there are not enough qualified teachers to rehire 50 percent.

Further the law states that for those not rehired, they “shall not have any right to bump or displace any other person employed by the district, but shall be placed on a preferred eligibility list.” This is said to mean they could be rehired at another receivership school, as long as they do not bump anyone else.

Thus “abolishing positions” is a backhanded way of conducting wholesale firing without cause and eliminating senior teachers and staff, especially those rejecting receivership. It also eliminates the use of seniority *district-wide*, another step toward destruction of the district. It is a further example of efforts to weaken the *collective* strength of the teachers and students.

30 Day Written Notice

The regulations also provide for a timetable and certain requirements that can readily be met. These include that the receiver has to conduct “a comprehensive school needs assessment;” state how the planned firing will “result in improved student performance” and the expected “impact” of the firings on the “educational program of the school.” While words can readily meet these requirements, no mention is made of addressing the impact such chaos would impose on students and teachers.

The receiver “shall provide to the school staff and their



collective bargaining representatives,” and the Board of Education written notice of the specific positions to be abolished and include the above requirements. This is to be done “no later than 90 days prior to any planned abolition.” The phrasing “no later” rather than “no less” means it could be done in less than 90 days. The regulations also state that “No later than 30 days following issuance of the written notice,” the receiver “shall inform the school board in writing of the determination...whether to implement the plan for abolition of positions.” Thus the wholesale firing could be carried out in 30 days or slightly more.

This two-step process means for 30 days everyone is placed under great insecurity and anxiety, having received written notice, as to whether the firings will occur. It remains unclear if this law supercedes the New York WARN law, which requires 90 days written notice whenever there are “mass layoffs.” It is notable that the usual terms of termination and lay-off for teachers and staff are not used. Given that the law and regulations provide these broad powers, it is likely they will be utilized first and subject to court battles later, after the wholesale firing and disruption has occurred. When Superintendent Cash was asked if he planned to use these powers, he said firing all might be extreme, but he intended to use the power to put what *he decides* is “an excellent” teacher in front of every classroom.

Private Global Interest Organization Performs Corporate Takeover of Our Education Systems

Anna Brix Thomsen, The Hampton Institute, September 3, 2015

A discourse of paranoia is slowly but surely creeping into the core of our education systems and if you are a parent who has a child in school, you will know that education today is not like it was even 10 or 20 years ago and that a significant difference is the increase of standardized testing.

What you may not be aware of is that this increase in standardized testing is spearheaded by a private global interest organization called the OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) who runs a program called PISA (Program For International Student Assessment).

The OECD has with its PISA program become one of the most influential organizations when it comes to setting the agenda for the future of education, and is rapidly working towards standardizing the world's school systems into one streamlined one-size-fits-all model.

In a mere 20 years, the OECD has become one of the world's leading forces with regards to affecting education policies and currently, more than 70 countries solicit OECD to test its students through international comparative tests and accordingly give 'expert advice' based on the results of these tests on how each country can optimize its education system.

It is for example based on results from the PISA tests that Finland's education system in the early 2000's was glorified and appraised and it is because of their high rankings in PISA that South Korea and Singapore currently are seen as having some of the best education systems in the world, (despite the fact that South Korea for example also has the highest suicide statistics among young people in the world).

How has a private economic interest organization like the OECD been able to penetrate the very fabric of our education systems?

There are two ways in which OECD with PISA is slowly but surely monopolizing educational policies all over the world:

The first is the seemingly innocuous ways in which our education systems are changing through the ways standardized testing are affecting schools and curriculum all over the world on a rather ubiquitous level.

The other is how OECD with PISA has positioned itself as a global overseer of quality in education with which it penetrates the education system to further a specific economic and ideological agenda. Countries are literally basing educational reforms on directions from OECD, in some countries with what some would call devastating effects.

See, the thing is: Standardized testing is not simply a "tool" as the OECD presents it, which is used to optimize the quality of our education systems. It is in itself changing the way education is carried out, addressed and seen.

It is not a passive tool for measuring the quality of education at a school because it requires students' active participation and

at many schools the result of PISA and other tests are included as part of the students' final grading. Teachers have to change their curriculum to "teach to the test" and local budgets are set based on competitive results between schools in the same area.

This is not simply adding an innocuous tool — it is pervasive in nature and it is changing our education systems more rapidly than we realize.

This is seen no more than in how students experience having to take one standardized test after another. One of my 7th grade students for example experiences perpetual stress over having to do tests close to every week. She is a young, bright woman with an immense drive and creative ambition. [...]

Another example of the effects that standardized testing has on students can be seen on the American art teacher Mrs. Chang's blog. She gave her 10 - 12th grade students the task to illustrate how they felt about taking tests. You can see the outcome of that project at: <http://www.mschangart.com/home/students-create-art-answering-the-question-how-do-you-feel-about-standardized-tests>.

Assessment of Quality Needed

In 1998, Noel Wilson, a scholar from the Flinders University of South Australia, wrote a paper in the journal EDUCATION POLICY ANALYSIS titled Educational Standards and the Problem of Error on the devastating effects that standardized testing has on students that is as relevant today as it was 20 years ago. A summarized and updated version was added by someone called Duane Swacker in the comment section of this article, which I also recommend reading in relation to a critical perspective on PISA.

In it, Wilson criticizes the entire notion of standardized testing in schools and asks:

"So what does a test measure in our world? It measures what the person with the power to pay for the test says it measures. And the person who sets the test will name the test what the person who pays for the test wants the test to be named.

"So the mark [grade/test score] becomes part of the story about yourself and with sufficient repetitions becomes true: true because those who know, those in authority, say it is true; true because the society in which you live legitimates this authority; true because your cultural habitus makes it difficult for you to perceive, conceive and integrate those aspects of your experience that contradict the story; true because in acting out your story, which now includes the mark and its meaning, the social truth that created it is confirmed; true because if your mark is high you are consistently rewarded, so that your voice becomes a voice of authority in the power-knowledge discourses that reproduce the structure that helped to produce you; true because if your mark is low your voice becomes muted and confirms your lower

position in the social hierarchy; true finally because that success or failure confirms that mark that implicitly predicted the now self-evident consequences. And so the circle is complete.”

Paraphrasing Wilson on the epistemological error of the notion of testing, Swacker writes: “A quality cannot be quantified. Quantity is a sub-category of quality. It is illogical to judge/assess a whole category by only a part (sub-category) of the whole. The assessment is, by definition, lacking in the sense that “assessments are always of multidimensional qualities. To quantify them as one dimensional quantities (numbers or grades) is to perpetuate a fundamental logical error” (per Wilson). The teaching and learning process falls in the logical realm of aesthetics/qualities of human interactions. In attempting to quantify educational standards and standardized testing we are lacking much information about said interactions.

A major epistemological mistake is that we attach, with great importance, the “score” of the student, not only onto the student but also, by extension, the teacher, school and district. Any description of a testing event is only a description of an interaction, that of the student and the testing device at a given time and place.

The whole process harms many students, as the social rewards for some are not available to others who “don’t make the grade (sic).” Should American public education have the function of sorting and separating students so that some may receive greater benefits than others, especially considering that the sorting and separating devices, educational standards and standardized testing, are so flawed not only in concept but in execution?”

It is indeed highly problematic that testing is seen as a benevolent tool to improve and optimize education, when it in fact appears to have an oppressing effect on students subjected to it.

The question is then whether this oppressing cookie-cutter effect of standardized testing is an innocuous but problematic side effect of a benevolent project regarding educational reforms or whether it is actually part of a much more sinister agenda to propagate a certain mindset in students graduating from schools around the world?

Serving Global Competition of Monopolies

Professor Yong Zhao, presidential chair and director of the Institute for Global and Online Education in the College of Education, University of Oregon wrote a four-part series of articles titled “How Does PISA Put the World at Risk.” Zhao argues that [...] “Virtually all PISA products, particularly its signature product, the league tables, are intended to show winners and losers, in not only educational policies and practices of the past, but more important, in capacity for global competition in the future.

“While this approach has made PISA an extremely successful global enterprise, it has misled the world down a path of self-destruction, resulting in irrational policies and practices that are more likely to squander precious resources and opportunities than enhancing capacity for future prosperity.” [...]

In a 2014 article for the UK-based TES (Times Educational Supplement) newspaper titled “Is Pisa fundamentally flawed?”

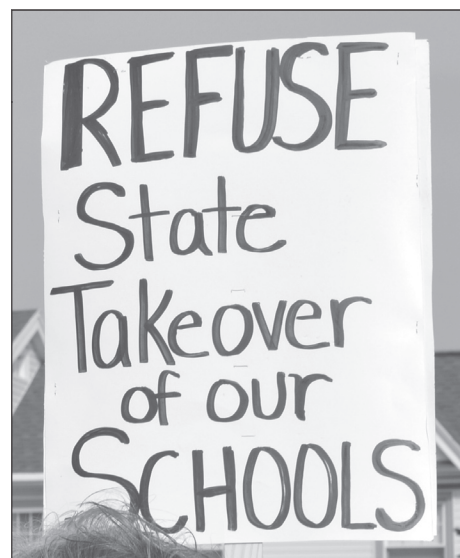
educational reporter William Stewart outlined the scope of influence that the OECD has gotten over the past decade: “Politicians worldwide, such as England’s education secretary Michael Gove, have based their case for sweeping, controversial reforms on the fact that their countries’ Pisa rankings have ‘plummeted.’” [...]

In the past 20-30 years a discourse of global competition has become ubiquitously part of the conversation in media and in political sphere. Global competition for profit and resources (where knowledge is one of the most valuable assets a country can mine) is seen as a natural outflow of the processes of globalization and it is in that discourse that the OECD positions itself within and from which it gains its self-proclaimed relevance. PISA is presented as a tool that governments can (and must) use to optimize their educational policies to not fall back in the global competition. [...]

It seems as though the increased focus on global competition in our education systems has done nothing but decrease the actual quality of education, which is in itself an irony of massive proportions. It seems as though an undercurrent of paranoia based on an ethos of “survival of the fittest” is governing our education systems and the question is: Who stands to gain from a system that is set up to make students fail? [...]

Education is about learning how to navigate the world, how to live together and how to take care of the world and each other in the best way possible. Education is about learning from those who came before us, both from their experiences and examples, but also from their mistakes. Education is about developing and living one’s utmost potential so as to best contribute to a world that is best for all, and so for oneself. This is not the type of education that is promoted by the OECD, nor by our countries officials when they so desperately follow the OECD’s recommendations without questioning its political agenda.

If we are not interested in an education system designed by a private economic interest organization, whose goal it seems to be to increase paranoia to encourage competition — it is important that we come up with sound alternatives. At the very least, we ought to question the starting point with which we send our children to school: Is it to teach them to compete and survive in an absurd real-life version of Lord of the Flies or is it to become the best people they can possibly be, so that they may leave a world that is better than the one they came into?



Test Prep for 5-year-olds: Here is What it Looks Like

Phyllis Doerr, Kindergarten Teacher, New Jersey

As a kindergarten teacher, I find the trend to bring more testing into kindergarten not only alarming, but counter-productive and even harmful.

In the kindergarten at my school, we do not administer standardized tests; however, hours of testing are included in our math and language arts curriculum. In order to paint a realistic picture of the stress, damaging effects and colossal waste of time caused by testing in kindergarten, allow me to bring you to my classroom for our first test prep session for 5-year-old children during the 2014-15 school year.

The test for which I was preparing my students was vocabulary. It worked this way: I said a word that we had learned in our “nursery rhyme” unit and then read a sentence containing that word. If the sentence made sense and the word was used correctly, the student would circle a smiley face. If the word was used incorrectly, they would circle a frown. This task requires abstract thinking, a skill that kindergartners have not yet developed — a foundational problem for this type of test.

My first sample vocabulary challenge as we began our practice test was the word “market,” from the nursery rhyme “To Market, To Market.” After explaining the setup of the test, I began.

“The word is market,” I announced. “Who can tell me what a market is?”

One boy answered, “I like oranges.”

“Okay, Luke is on the right track. Who can add to that?”

“I like apples. I get them at the store.” We were moving in, closer and closer.

A third child said, “It’s where you go and get lots of things.” Yes! What kinds of things? “Different stuff.”

Another student chimed in: “We can get oranges and apples and lots of other types of food at the market.” “Excellent! Everyone understands market?” A few nodded.

“Now, I will give you a sentence with the word ‘market’ in it. If the sentence makes sense, you will circle the smiley face, but if it is a silly sentence and doesn’t make sense, you circle the frown.” A hand went up. “Mrs. Doerr, what’s a frown?” I explained what a frown is.

Next, I read the sentence: “I like to play basketball at the market.” Now, does that sentence make sense?”

The students who were not twisting around backward in their chairs or staring at a thread they had picked off their uniforms nodded their heads. I said: “Please, class, listen carefully. I will tell you the sentence again: ‘I like to play basketball at the market.’ That makes sense? Remember we said a market is where we shop for food.”

A hand went up. Terrell said, “I like soccer.” “Okay, Terrell, that’s great! But did I use the word ‘market’ correctly in that sentence?” “I don’t know.”

Another hand. “Yes? Ariana? What do you think?”

“My dad took me to a soccer game! He plays soccer!”

“Thank you for sharing that, Ariana.”

The students picked up on something from the sentence and made what seems to be, but is not, a random connection.

“Girls and boys, look at me and listen,” I said. “I want you to really think about this. Would you go to a market and play basketball?” At this point everyone seemed to wake up. Finally! I was getting somewhere! “YES!” they cried out in unison.

Of course! It would be a total blast to play basketball in the market!

Unencumbered Imagination and Testing

So here we find another huge problem with such a vocabulary test: a 5-year-old’s imagination. A statement that uses a word incorrectly sounds okay to a child whose imagination is not limited by reality. It is the same reason Santa and the Tooth Fairy are so real to kindergartners — unencumbered imagination.

After explaining why we might not play basketball in the market, I called on a volunteer to come up and circle the frowning face. She went straight to number 3 on my giant test replica, skipping 1 and 2, and circled the frown. Why? She was 5 and had never seen anything like this. Give the same student a floor puzzle of ocean life and she and her friend will knock it out in 10 minutes, strategizing, problem-solving and taking turns with intense concentration.

The rest of my “test prep” for the 5-year-olds went about the same.

Then came the real thing. As testing must be done in small groups since the children cannot read instructions and need assistance every step of way, I split the class into two or more groups to test.

The results of the administration of the test on the first group were mixed. Despite being the higher level students, their very first test was definitely not an easy task. Instructions for anything new in kindergarten are painstaking, but for a developmentally inappropriate task, it is nearly impossible.

For example, making sure my little test-takers have found their place on the page requires constant teacher supervision. I could not just say, “number 2” and read the question. I must say, “Put your finger on the number 2.” Then I repeat, “Your finger should be on number 2.” Then repeat it. And repeat again, since some had difficulty identifying numbers 1 through 10. “Let me see your pencil ON number 2. No, Justin, not on number 3. On number 2.” I walked around and made sure that each child was on the right number — or on a number at all.

If you are not watchful as a kindergarten teacher, it is common to have a 5-year-old just sit there, and do nothing test-related — just look around, or think, or doodle.

Testing and Being Good Thinkers

Next, I tested a second group. During testing, I walked around to see that a few students had nothing written on their papers; one

had circled every face — regardless of expression — on the whole page, another just circled all the smileys and one, a very bright little girl, had her head down on her arms. I tapped her and said, “Come on, you need to circle one of the faces for number 5.”

She lifted her head and looked up at me. Tears streamed down her face. I crouched down next to her. “What’s wrong, honey?” “Mrs. Doerr, I’m tired,” she cried. “I want my mommy.” It was a moment I will never forget. I took her test and said, “Would you like a nice comfy pillow so you can take a rest?” She nodded. I exchanged her paper for a pillow.

So this is kindergarten.

We force children to take tests that their brains cannot grasp. We ignore research that proves that children who are ages 5 and 6 learn best experientially. We rob them of precious free play that teaches them how to be good citizens, good friends and good thinkers. We waste precious teaching and learning time that could be spent experientially learning the foundations of math, reading

and writing, as well as valuable lessons in social studies, science and health.

I support and enjoy teaching much of our math and language arts curriculum. Teaching vocabulary is a valuable practice. However, I contend that testing in these areas at this age is not only meaningless, since it does not accurately measure a child’s academic ability, but it is actually counter-productive and damaging.

Further, I contend that my students are no further along at the end of the year than they would be if we eliminated most of the testing. In fact, they might be further along if we eliminated testing because of the time we could spend engaging in meaningful teaching and learning.

Finally, I believe that a child’s first experience with formal education should be fun and exciting, and give them confidence to look forward to their education, not full of stress and fear because they did not measure up.

PUBLIC FUNDS FOR PRIVATE INTERESTS

Web of Secrecy Surrounds Federal Half-a-Billion Handout to Charter Schools

Jonas Persson, PR Watch, September 4, 2015

The U.S. Department of Education is poised to spend half a billion dollars to help create new charter schools, while the public is being kept in the dark about which states have applied for the lucrative grants, and what their actual track records are when it comes to preventing fraud and misuse.

Already the federal government has spent \$3.3 billion in American tax dollars under the Charter Schools Program (CSP), as tallied by the Center for Media and Democracy (CMD).

But the government has done so without requiring any accountability from the states and schools that receive the money, as CMD revealed earlier this year.

Throwing good money after bad, Education Secretary Arne Duncan called for a 48 percent increase in federal charter funding earlier this year, and the House and Senate budget proposals also call for an increase - albeit a more modest one - while at the same time slashing education programs for immigrants and language learners.

The clamor for charter expansion comes despite the fact that there are federal probes underway into suspected waste and mismanagement within the program, not to mention ongoing and recently completed state audits of fraud perpetrated by charter school operators.

Earlier this year, the Center for Popular Democracy documented more than \$200 million in fraud, waste, and mismanagement in the charter school industry in 15 states alone, a number that is likely to be just the tip of the iceberg.

Insiders Deliberate Far From the Public Eye

The Department of Education is currently deciding what states to award \$116 million this year, and more than half a billion during

the five-year grant cycle.

So who is in the running and what are their track records?

Which states have applied for a grant designed to eviscerate the public school system in the name of “flexibility?” (CMD’s review of state applications and reviewers’ comments from the previous grant cycle exposed “flexibility” as a term of art used by the industry for state laws that allow charter schools to: operate independently from locally elected school boards, employ people to teach without adequate training or certification, and avoid collective bargaining that helps ensure that teacher-student ratios are good so that each kid gets the attention he or she deserves.)

There is no way of knowing.

The U.S. Department of Education (ED) has repeatedly refused to honor a CMD request under the Freedom of Information Act for the grant applications, even though public information about which states have applied would not chill deliberation and might even help better assess which applicants should receive federal money.

The agency has even declined to provide a list with states that have applied: “We cannot release a list of states that have applied while it is in the midst of competition.”

The upshot of this reticence is that states will land grants - possibly to the tune of a hundred million dollars or more in some cases - all at the discretion of charter school interests contracted to evaluate the applications, but without any input from ordinary citizens and advocates concerned about public schools and troubled by charter school secrecy and fraud.

But, if people in a state know that a state is applying they can weigh in so that the agency is not just hearing from an applicant who wants the money, regardless of the history of fraud and waste

in that state.

Charter Millions by Hook or by Crook: The Case of Ohio

Despite ED's unwillingness to put all the cards on the table, state reports tell us that Ohio has once again applied for a grant under the program.

The state, whose lax-to-non-existing charter school laws are an embarrassment even to the industry, has previously been awarded at least \$49 million in Charter School Program (CSP) money — money that went to schools overseen by a rightwing think-tank, and, more worryingly, to schools overseen by an authorizer that had its performance rating boosted this year by top education officials who removed the failing virtual schools from the statistics so as not to stop the flow of state and federal funds.

As the Cleveland *Plain Dealer* put it in an exposé: "It turns out that Ohio's grand plan to stop the national ridicule of its charter school system is giving overseers of many of the lowest-performing schools a pass from taking heat for some of their worst problems."

Another component of this plan, it turns out, was to apply for more federal millions to the failing schools that — by a miraculous sleight of hand — are no longer failing.

The director of Ohio's Office of Quality School Choice, David Hansen, fell on the sword and announced his resignation in June. But Democratic lawmakers suspect that this goes higher up the chain of command, and have called on State Superintendent Richard Ross to resign.

Did the scrubbed statistics touting the success of Ohio's charters find its way into the state application for federal millions, signed by Superintendent Ross?

What about other states, such as Indiana, with a similar history of doctoring data to turn failing charter schools into resounding success stories?

After Abysmal Results, States Re-apply for More Money
While the known unknowns are troubling, the known knowns — to paraphrase Donald Rumsfeld — are equally disturbing.

For example, Colorado applied for grant renewal this year.

But, the last time around, in 2010, the state landed a \$46 million CSP grant thanks in no small part to the lax "hiring and firing" rules and the lack of certification requirements for charter school teachers — a reviewer contracted by the US Department of Education to score the application noted.

Look at California

Through meeting minutes from the California State Board of Education we also know that the Golden State submitted an application this year. In 2010, California was awarded \$254 million over five years in CSP money, but as the Inspector General discovered in a 2012 audit, the State Department of Education did not adequately monitor any of the schools that received sub-grants. Some schools even received federal money "without ever opening to students." A review by CMD revealed that a staggering 9 out of the 41 schools that shuttered in the 2014-'15 school

year were created by federal money under CSP.

How about Wisconsin?

Wisconsin received \$69.6 million between 2010 and 2015, but out of the charter schools awarded sub-grants during the first two years of the cycle, one-fifth (16 out of 85) have closed since, as CMD discovered.

Then there's Indiana.

Indiana was awarded \$31.3 million over the same period, partly because of the fact that charter schools in the state are exempt from democratic oversight by elected school boards. "[C]harter schools are accountable solely to authorizers under Indiana law," one reviewer enthused, awarding the application 30/30 under the rubric "flexibility offered by state law."

This "flexibility" has been a recipe for disaster in the Hoosier state with countless examples of schools pocketing the grant money and then converting to private schools, as CMD discovered by taking a closer look at grantees under the previous cycle:

The Indiana Cyber Charter School opened in 2012 with \$420,000 in seed money from the federal program. Dogged by financial scandals and plummeting student results the charter was revoked in 2015 and the school closed last month leaving 1,100 students in the lurch.

Padua Academy lost its charter in 2014 and converted to a private religious school, but not before receiving \$702,000 in federal seed money.

Have They Learned Anything?

Secretary Duncan has previously called for "absolute transparency" when it comes to school performance, but that is just a talking point unless he releases the applications, or even a list of the states that are in the running, before they are given the final stamp of approval.

As it stands, there is no way of knowing if the state departments of education seeking millions in tax dollars:

- Have supplied actual performance data that reflect the reality for students enrolled in charter schools rather than "scrubbed" or doctored numbers;
- Try to outbid each other in "flexibility" by explaining, say, how charter schools in X can hire teachers without a license and fire them without cause. In its 2010 application, the Colorado Department of Education, for example, boasted of how charter school teachers are "employed at will by the school";
- Have corrective action plans so as to avoid repeating the costly waste and mistakes from the previous grant cycle (such as schools created by federal seed money closing within a few years or never even opening).

Because the federal charter schools program is designed to foster charter school growth, which in turn means that money will be diverted from traditional public schools to an industry that resists government enforcement of basic standards for financial controls, accountability, and democratic oversight, the public has a big stake in this and a right to know more, before their money disappears down black holes.

1 • Defend Resistance

President Obama, in his recent visit to New Orleans, called the city's recovery a "model." He did not speak to whether the military occupation of New Orleans and the mass detention camps are a model for future emergencies. Given the mass detention and separation of families that occurred then, and the similar government actions and detention camps for immigrants and refugees now, there is every indication that such actions will be part of future "emergency response." This is further evident in the fact that the government is increasing the detention camps and holding mock "emergency" exercises, under military command, with first responders and policing agencies. And in the militarized response to protest, such as in Ferguson and Baltimore. The stand of the people then and now is to reject military occupation, to

fully fund first responders and hold government responsible for meeting the needs of the people, not terrorizing them.

In putting forward the New Orleans recovery as a model, Obama is putting forward takeover of public institutions, like public schools and hospitals, by private interests as an answer. The destruction of the public schools and hospital and continued high levels of poverty and unemployment show these private interests have no solutions that serve the public. As people of New Orleans put forward at the time, eliminating the public from governance is not acceptable: "Nothing about us, without us, is for us." It is by rejecting the dictate of private interests and stepping up the fight for the right of the people themselves to govern and decide that solutions can be found.

New Orleans Remembers and Continues Its Resistance

New Orleans marked the 10-year anniversary of Hurricane Katrina and its man-made devastation with demonstrations, second-line parades, street performances and forums. One second line began where the levee wall in the ninth ward failed during Katrina, a levee the government neglected and failed to build strong enough. It unleashed a torrent of water that left the historically African American neighborhood, with many homeowners, in ruins.

Organizers emphasized that resistance that has long been the culture of New Orleans and was seen following the man-made disaster that devastated the city and since. It is the people themselves who were responsible for rescuing many thousands and for organizing for rights afterward. This included a Tribunal the following year that found the government guilty of genocide and many human rights violations. Various meetings and actions are making clear that the city's recovery efforts have not served the people but rather rich private interests. Many of the million people from the region forced to leave have still not returned, most have not gotten reparations for losses and rebuilding and for the government crime of forcing people to leave at gunpoint. For the ninth ward, barely one third of its residents have been able to return.

The stand that housing is a right was prominent in actions. Before Katrina, there were 12,270 public housing units available in New Orleans, and now there are only 2,006. More than 90 percent of the nearly 15,000 families currently on waiting lists for either public housing or Section 8 assistance are African American families.

Protesters targetted the fact that about 50 percent of Black children in New Orleans live in poverty, more than before Katrina.

The public school system has been decimated, with teachers, mostly African American, fired en mass. Now 92 percent of students attend private charter schools. The unjust and racist



discipline policies at charter schools are denying many students equal access to education. Fifteen charter schools in New Orleans have higher suspension rates than the rest of the nation. Overall, in 2013, there were 46,625 out-of-school suspensions, more than the total number of students in the local school system.

Actions also marched past the jail, infamous for leaving prisoners to drown during Katrina and for its human rights abuses afterward. A prison resistance video was projected across the walls of the jail as marchers went past. There are five times as many Black inmates than white inmates in Louisiana prisons, while the state's white population is double that of the Black population. Resistance to this state racism and demands for accountability for those killed by police, after Katrina and since, continues.

The firm stand and undaunted resistance was evident, as people marched and united in demanding their rights.

OBAMA IN NEW ORLEANS

A Recovery That Serves Private Interests

For the tenth anniversary of hurricane Katrina, and the man-made disaster that followed, President Obama traveled to New Orleans August 27. He spoke at a community center in the ninth ward, one of the areas most devastated by the government failures following Katrina. Obama acknowledged the failures saying, “Families stranded on rooftops. Bodies in the streets... We came to realize that what started out as a natural disaster became a man-made disaster — a failure of government to look out for its own citizens.” He added, “If Katrina was initially an example of what happens when government fails, the recovery has been an example of what’s possible when government works together,” and that the “city is moving in the right direction.”



There are many who reject this assessment. The New Orleans public hospital, Charity, despite broad public demand and efforts to have it reopen, has been shuttered. In its place the federal government has provided more than \$1 billion to private construction, insurance and pharmaceuticals for a private hospital, University Medical Center (UMC) and a new Veterans Administration (VA) hospital. Thousands of families were forced to move to make way for these facilities. Together they provide fewer beds than Charity and the old VA hospital they replaced. Obama also spoke of the public funds used to finance a private “bio-sciences corridor.”

On education Obama said, “Working together, we’ve transformed education in this city.” True, the system of public education has been eliminated, replaced with private charters that are not accountable to the public — but receive public funds. About 92 percent of students attend private charter schools and there is no longer an Orleans Parish school district. Parents have to contend with individually applying to the various charters which are not required to take students, leaving many special needs and English Language Learners out. More than \$100 million in public funds has been handed over to such private interests in Louisiana by the Education Department, since just 2009.

Obama did not speak to the fact that all of New Orleans’ teachers, the large majority of them African American, were fired after Katrina. Most had more than ten years experience. Now many teachers have less than three years and are not certified teachers but rather college graduates working for the private Teach for America. While mentioning that the high school graduation rate is up, a figure often manipulated by these private interests, Obama did not speak to the fact that suspension rates of the mainly African American student body are among the highest

in the country. There were 46,625 out-of-school suspensions in 2013, more than the total number of students in the local school system. As well, in part because of this, about 26,000 young people aged 16-24 are not in school. They are also not working, as there are not enough jobs.

For housing Obama said “We’re providing housing assistance to more families today than before the storm, with new apartments and housing vouchers.” Housing vouchers are a means to provide private landlords with public funds, and to leave people to fend for themselves when it comes to dealing with the landlords. Before Katrina, there were 12,270 public housing units available in New Orleans. Now there are only 2,006. For the ninth

ward, for example, only about 30 percent of residents have been able to return to their homes, in part because the mostly undamaged public housing people once lived in — and fought to stay in — was condemned after the storm.

While calling the recovery a “model,” Obama did not mention the military occupation that occurred, with people rounded-up into detention camps and facing brutality and violence from police. New Orleans, like other cities, has protested police killings and violence against immigrants, an integral part of a recovery serving private interests. Obama chose not to address the issue and not to call for accountability, at the federal state or local level.

This kind of institutional state racism can also be seen in employment. Unemployment for African Americans is nearly three times that of whites and the inequality between black and white incomes has widened since Katrina. The firing of the teachers is one factor in this, as is the failure to rebuild the city transit system and its workforce. Poverty levels for children are at 50 percent. While Obama acknowledged these are problems, he provided no plan or public funds for contending with them.

It is also facts like these that belie Obama’s closing statement that “For all our differences, in the end, what matters is we’re all in the same boat. We all share a similar destiny.” Obama here reflects the effort of the ruling circles to convince the public that having private interests take over public institutions and rob the public treasury is a “shared destiny” to be supported.

For the resilient people of New Orleans, the ten years since Katrina show something very different, which is that only by relying on their own efforts and fighting for their vision of society where rights are respected, will their destiny be a very different one that serves their interests.

Private Hospital Replaces Big Charity in New Orleans

Savecharityhospital.com

Well, ten years later, here it is. Charity's replacement hospital has finally arrived and the New Orleans propaganda machine is in full swing. Ten years ago, LSU and the State of Louisiana — under Governor Kathleen Blanco — shut down Charity Hospital even after it was cleaned and ready to reopen. Today CEO's, politicians and developers celebrate.

However, the *New York Times* took a more sober look in an article posted today as the question was asked — can the new privately operated University Medical Center (UMC) hospital preserve its mission?

“But while University Medical Center is taking Charity's place as the city's main trauma and safety-net hospital, its ambitions go far beyond that, to providing high-end specialty care to privately insured patients from around the state and beyond. For that and other reasons, concerns that began when the state shuttered Charity immediately after Katrina — unnecessarily, critics still say — persist.”

Proponents say that “diversifying the patient mix was crucial to being able to carry on the mission of caring for the indigent.” The reasoning is that with the Affordable Care Act soon to decrease federal funding for uncompensated care, finding new sources of revenue is imperative.

One has to wonder how they knew in 2005 when Charity's doors were locked and patients and staff kicked out to the street, that President Obama would be elected and the Affordable Care Act would be passed.

Critics worry whether the Louisiana Children's Medical Center Corporation [LCMC] will be able to meet its obligation to provide free or reduced-cost care to all indigent and uninsured patients and:

“Unlike Charity, where many a New Orleanian was born, University Medical Center will not deliver babies — another hospital run by its private operator, Touro Infirmary, offers that service. And it will have far fewer beds for psychiatric patients than Charity, which had nearly 100 inpatient beds plus a 40-bed crisis intervention unit. The new hospital will have 60 psychiatric inpatient beds but will use only 38 to start, transferring patients from a facility that had been housing them since the storm.”

Many questions have yet to be answered. Was the price that patients and residents — tax payers — of New Orleans had to pay worth it? In the article, Dr. DeBlieux says “That's far too complex a question for me to answer.”

SaveCharityHospital.com offers readers an archive of information that documents that “price.”

The blog site Inside The Footprint is another great resource for folks who are interested in an intimate look at the razing of 70 acres of the Lower MidCity historic neighborhood to make way for the new UMC and VA hospitals and learning more about the ripping apart of a tight knit community. Documented are the stories of everyday people who did everything they were told to do to rebuild their neighborhood after Hurricane Katrina only to see their houses demolished or mangled in order to be carted off on trailers and dropped into vacant lots in other unsuspecting neighborhoods.

Why were 70 acres of land needed to build two new hospitals that have less hospital beds than Big Charity and the old VA hospital combined? Both of these buildings sit abandoned on about 3 city blocks.

Roberta Brandes Gratz answered that question in her 2011 article: Why Was New Orleans's Charity Hospital Allowed to Die? Seeking government funds for a massive \$1.2 billion new complex, powerful forces blocked Charity's reopening after Hurricane Katrina.

Citizens still wait for some federal investigation on how this was all allowed to happen with taxpayers money.

Why Charity Hospital Matters

Charity Hospital in New Orleans was one of the oldest continuously operating hospitals in the world until it was closed in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Over the years, Charity has become an essential and irreplaceable medical and community institution. The Charity Hospital mission to provide top-notch affordable health care to the citizens of New Orleans is as critical as ever, as the lack of reliable health care continues to be one of the city's biggest challenges since Hurricane Katrina.

The doctors and nurses who stayed at the hospital through the storm and quickly restored it for returning residents embodied the core principles on which Charity was founded. The decision to keep the building, one of the most beautiful in the city, shuttered remains one of the most controversial decisions of the post-storm period. Charity Hospital, the second largest hospital in the country, cradled the births of hundreds of thousands of New Orleans babies, including nearly all of the great musicians, artists, and characters for which this city is most beloved. Memorialized in literature, song, and soul, Charity Hospital is an ubiquitous icon. There is no hospital in the country that means as much to the population it serves as Charity Hospital right here in New Orleans.

Visit our website: usmlo.org

Charter Schools Flood New Orleans

Kristen Buras, The Progressive

Within days of Hurricane Katrina, the conservative Heritage Foundation advocated the creation of a “Gulf Opportunity Zone,” including federal funds for charter schools and entrepreneurs. Slowly but surely, the narrative of disaster turned to one of opportunity, even triumph. We were told that families abandoned in the storm were finding new hope in transformation of the city’s public schools by charter school operators.

Report after report praised New Orleans as a model for urban school districts across the nation. Charter school operators, most of them white, declared “school choice” to be the new civil rights movement.

Now, almost a decade later, New Orleans is the nation’s first all-charter school district. Charter advocates describe the district’s achievements as nothing short of a miracle.

The truth is quite different: Flooding New Orleans with charter schools has been disastrous.

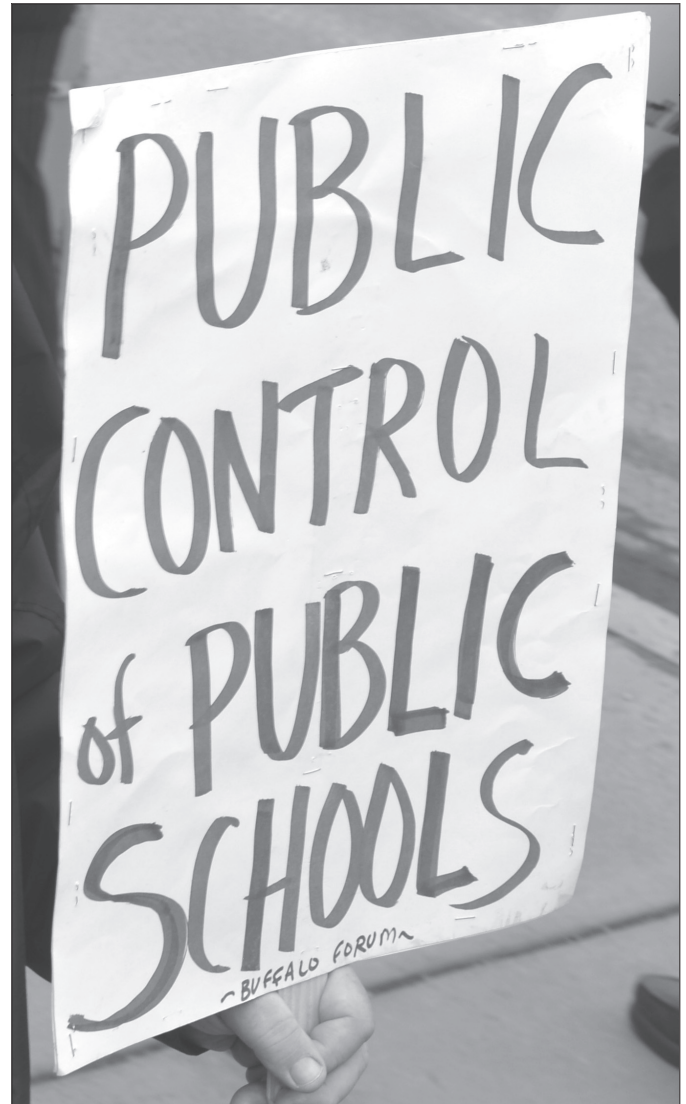
I was born and raised in New Orleans and have been studying education reform there for the last decade. One black veteran teacher told me what transpired in the wake of the storm. Policymakers declared, “You no longer have jobs. The local district no longer exists. We’re going to split it up, make some charters. The state’s going to take control of everything.”

During an exchange with one state legislator, this teacher asked how the legislature could take such drastic action without public input. The legislator’s response was brutally candid: “We called up a few people that we knew were back in town and invited them over to my house, and we sat down and began to dismantle the district.” Justifiably angered, the teacher responded, “These are the kinds of underhanded tactics that were going on while our schoolchildren were still floating in the waters of Katrina.”

In November 2005, barely two months after Katrina, Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco called a special legislative session. This was the occasion for passing Act 35, which changed the definition of a “failing” school from a performance score of 60 (on a scale of 200) to 87.4, just below the state average. This allowed the state-run Recovery School District to assume control of 107 of 128 public schools in Orleans Parish, enabling charter expansion on a scale never before attempted in Louisiana or elsewhere. It was the ultimate public private partnership — state officials serving the interests of private businesses rather than local communities, especially communities of color. [...]

The fact is, white policymakers and education entrepreneurs were hell-bent on chartering New Orleans public schools, populated almost entirely by black students and unionized black veteran teachers. The Orleans Parish School Board had an operating budget of more than \$400 million in 2005-06 — hardly chump change. Most of these monies would be allocated to the state-run Recovery School District and privately operated charter schools, with only a handful of traditional public schools remaining under the locally elected board.

Not unlike the French Quarter, the city’s public schools would



become a playground for outsiders — only instead of spending money, education entrepreneurs would pocket it.

In late 2005, officials announced that all public school employees in Orleans Parish would be fired. That is right — all! There was no due process, no consideration for veteran teachers’ hard work or lifetime of accrued benefits, much less the collective bargaining agreement of United Teachers of New Orleans. The state then claimed there was a teacher shortage, and the Louisiana Department of Education advertised nationwide for positions in the Recovery School District.

Nearly simultaneous with the termination of veteran teachers, who made up a substantial portion of New Orleans’ black middle class, the state Board of Elementary and Secondary Education approved a contract with Teach For America. This edubusiness presents young, mostly white college graduates, without degrees in teaching or any teaching experience whatsoever, as “teachers” for African American and Latino urban school districts. The

10 YEARS AFTER KATRINA DISASTER

state used millions in federal monies to offer signing bonuses and housing allowances to out-of-state recruits.

Reflecting on this, one longtime teacher asserted, “Our rights as teachers have been trampled upon. Reformers say they are revamping the schools. They get rid of everyone, and they rehire whoever they want. In many cases, they replace veteran teachers with first, second, and third year teachers.”

This kind of cost-cutting is done at the expense of black children, taught by people with little experience or connection to the community. In fact, former Recovery School District superintendent Paul Vallas explained to BBC News in 2010: “I don’t want the majority of my teaching staff to work more than ten years. The cost of sustaining those individuals becomes so enormous.” Most Teach For America recruits do not teach for longer than two or three years, and charter school employees are rarely unionized.

Teach For America is a teacher-union-busting machine, and a best friend of charter school operators, who care less about the teaching qualifications of those placed in classrooms and more about their bottom line. In 2005, only 10 percent of New Orleans’ teachers were in their first or second year of teaching. Three years later, 33 percent were. In 2010-11, nearly 40 percent of the city’s teachers had been teaching for three years or less, and the percentage of white teachers had nearly doubled. [...]

The performance of charter schools in the Recovery School District is dismal. In 2011, the state began issuing letter grades. All of the state-run Recovery School District schools received a “D” or “F” and 79 percent of charter schools in the district received a “D” or “F.” In 2014, RSD-New Orleans is still performing below the vast majority of the state’s other districts at the fourth and eighth grades in subjects tested by the Louisiana Educational Assessment Program, including English language arts, math, and science. Charles Hatfield, a statistician with Research on Reforms, a New Orleans-based watchdog group, has been analyzing school performance data since 2005. Results in the “newly reformed” schools of New Orleans have been perpetually disappointing. [...]

There was a public hearing in 2010 on whether or not New Orleans’ schools would be returned to local control or remain under the Recovery School District. Hundreds of people from the city’s African American community attended the hearing, with anti-RSD protest signs dotting the audience.

A respected community activist took the microphone: “What we’re talking about here tonight is a simple question of democracy. We want in Orleans Parish what every other parish has in this state and that is the right to control our own schools. High crimes and misdemeanors have been carried out by the RSD and the people who run these charter operations. We don’t believe that these schools have served the best interests of African American students.”

A veteran of the city’s civil rights movement also spoke, reminding everyone that an earlier generation of activists “went to jail and died for us to have the right to vote for who we want to represent us.” She concluded her comment by pointing to Paul Vallas, underscoring that he was never elected but oversaw most schools in Orleans Parish.

The feeling of disenfranchisement was palpable that evening. But afterwards unelected charter school board members were given the right to determine whether or not schools remained under the Recovery School District. Not surprisingly, almost every charter school did.

That is the name of the game when it comes to charter school reform: disempowering the locally elected school board and communities, while consolidating power and money in the hands of unelected and unaccountable private operators. [...]

A civil rights complaint against Collegiate Academies, a private charter operator in New Orleans, asserts that its schools are based on “a harsh and punitive discipline culture” that “endangers the safety and welfare of students, violates students’ rights under state and federal laws, pushes students out for minor infractions, and ultimately deprives students a right to education guaranteed by the Louisiana Constitution.”

Collegiate Academies has one of the highest out-of-school suspension rates in the city. One of the high schools it operates suspends almost 70 percent of its students. On behalf of students and parents, Loyola University New Orleans College of Law filed a complaint against three charter schools operated by Collegiate Academies. It alleges “out of control suspension practices for trivial matters,” “failure to report injuries to parents,” and “bullying and harassment of children with special needs,” among others.

(Kristen Buras is an associate professor in educational policy studies at Georgia State University.)



SALUTE TO ALL LENDING A HAND IN HURRICANE RELIEF EFFORTS

The People Are the Only Reliable Force!

Voice of Revolution, September 2005

(We reprint below the statement by Voice of Revolution from September 2005, saluting the efforts of the people themselves to provide assistance and relief after the Katrina government made disaster)

* * *

Voice of Revolution salutes all the organizations, affinity groups and individuals coming forward to lend a hand to the people of Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama devastated by government failure to provide the assistance, resources and organization needed in the aftermath of hurricane Katrina. People are bringing to bear all their organizing experience of the many struggles for rights and against imperialist war. They are rejecting the utter anarchy and violence the state has delivered and demonstrating that it is the organized people who are the only reliable force to provide relief. They represent the best of the American people, united to defend the rights of all

Medics trained for demonstrations are heading to New Orleans and the surrounding communities. Food Not Bombs, well known for feeding demonstrators and communities, is setting up kitchens in the region and training local people to do the same. The many military families and others involved in the Crawford Camp Casey at Bush's ranch have sent supplies, a bus equipped with satellite for communications and medicine, and are setting up a new Camp Casey in Covington, Louisiana.

People across the country are outraged that a country where workers have produced tremendous wealth and a high level of production and technology is saddled with a failed government that refuses to take up its social responsibility to human beings both here at home and abroad — while refusing to get out of the way so the people themselves can solve these problems.

There is complete rejection of the government's shoot-to-kill orders in New Orleans. How dare they! How dare they allow even one more person to die by their hands. How dare they brand people organizing to secure food and water and cooking it for families in need as looters. And how dare President George W. Bush choose to meet with segregationist Trent Lott, Senator from Mississippi. Lott was forced to resign as the Senate's Majority Leader for publicly defending segregation, with its long history of state terrorism.

It is the thorough-going racist character of the U.S. state



that guaranteed the blatant government brutality and racism witnessed in New Orleans and the region. It is this same racism that permitted Bush to stand with Lott. It is this racism that is also being rejected.

Through their actions, everyone is showing their rejection of the failed U.S. state and coming forward to show that they are the representatives of the people, they are the new, emerging in the face of this failure. Many have brought out, for example, that the massive efforts to get tens of thousands of people to Washington D.C. by bus for September 24 anti-war actions, with organized pick up points and known destinations, to set up tents and water and bathroom facilities, show the abilities of the people to organize to solve such problems. There is no doubt that, given the opportunity, transit workers could have organized the evacuations before the hurricane hit. Schools, universities, churches and nearby communities, like Algiers in New Orleans, could and can provide housing, and so forth.

It is clear that the only way forward is for the people to utilize all their experience, guided by their principles of defending rights, to organize to themselves govern. The failed U.S. state has only repression and military force in store. Now is the time to step up the work for political empowerment and strengthen all the many efforts to govern ourselves.