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POLICY BRIEF:

Should Louisiana and the Recovery School District receive accolades for being last and nearly last?

August 28, 2015

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INTRODUCTION

In 2003, the Louisiana legislature created the Recovery School District (RSD). With this law, schools that did not meet "minimum academic standards" were to be taken over by the state.[2]

Then came Hurricane Katrina.

Striking the coast on August 29, 2005, Katrina destroyed not only New Orleans, but also much of the Mississippi Gulf Coast. Soon after, in November 2005, the Louisiana legislature passed Act 35.[3] The new law lowered the academic criteria that made a school eligible for takeover and empowered the state to takeover 100 plus "low performing" schools. The RSD was given the vast majority of New Orleans public schools, leaving

just a few high-performing schools to be run by the Orleans Parish School Board.[4] In 2010, U.S. Secretary of Education and "education reformer" Arne Duncan infamously

referred to Hurricane Katrina as "the best thing to happen to the education system of New Orleans."[5] Repeatedly, the RSD has been acclaimed as a positive "game changer for New Orleans"[6] and has been held up as a model for school reform by various "education reformers," politicians, foundations, think tanks, and lobbyists in states across the nation. More recently, the "education reformers" have recently parlayed a single research study as demonstration of success in the RSD.[7]

For the 10th anniversary of Katrina, this brief seeks to provide an overview of Louisiana and RSD data ten years after the implementation of widespread "education reform" in New Orleans.

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)

The NAEP is the largest nationally representative and continuing assessment of what America's students know and can do in various subject areas.[8] This analysis will focus on the 8th grade 2013 NAEP Reading and Math— currently the most recent NAEP data available. For a pre- and post- Katrina comparison, 2003 8th grade NAEP is included.

Bottom US States: 2003 NAEP Math Grade 8[9]

	2003 Scale Score	2003 Rank		2013 Scale Score	2013 Rank
Louisiana	266	47	Louisiana	273	47
New Mexico	263	48	New Mexico	273	48
Alabama	262	49	Mississippi	271	49
Mississippi	261	50	Alabama	269	50
District of Columbia	243	51	District of Columbia	265	51

In math, Louisiana increased its scale score 7 points, reflecting longer term rising NAEP scores across the nation. However, relative to all states, it remained ranked at 47th in the nation.

Bottom US States: 2003 NAEP Reading Grade 8[10]

	2003 Scale Score	2003 Rank		2013 Scale Score	2013 Rank
Louisiana	253	46	Louisiana	257	47
Nevada	252	47	West Virginia	257	48
New Mexico	252	48	New Mexico	256	49
California	251	49	Mississippi	253	50
Hawaii	251	50	District of Columbia	248	51
District of Columbia	239	51			

In reading, Louisiana also increased the average NAEP scale score. However, its ranking relative to other states dropped from 46th to 47th in the nation.

Reform in New Orleans has been heavily focused on charter schools. However, to our knowledge a comparison of traditional and public schools in Louisiana has not been conducted using student-level NAEP data. Using HLM statistical techniques, Dr. Francesca Lopez and Dr. Amy Olson used restricted data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) to compare the achievement between charter schools and public schools.[11] This technique allowed the researchers to compare similar students in similarly demographically situated schools. For the sake of consistency, we have included the 8th grade NAEP Reading and Math analyses in this brief.[12]

Charter versus Traditional School NAEP comparison

The five states demonstrating the largest gaps on the 2011 NAEP 8th Math between traditional schools and charter schools were LA, RI, TX, DC, and MA. Lopez and Olson's statistical models show the largest disparities in the US between traditional and charter schools exist in these five states as traditional public schools significantly outperform charter schools with moderate to large differences (d = 1.45 to 2.92).

Grade 8 Mathematics					
STATE	COEFFICIENT	SD	SE	p	d
LA	-30.99 ***	10.60	6.35	<0.001	-2.92
RI	-15.55 *	7.13	7.75	0.051	-2.18
TX	-15.96 ***	8.20	4.92	0.001	-1.95
DC	-15.88 ***	9.99	3.26	<0.001	-1.59
MA	-11.39 ***	7.84	3.52	0.002	-1.45

Lopez and Olson also calculated the disparity in NAEP 8th Reading scores between traditional and charter schools: LA, DC, IL, FL, and MA showed the largest differences with the magnitude of the effects (d) ranging from 1.10 to 2.24.

Grade 8 Reading					
STATE	COEFFICIENT	SD	SE	p	d
LA	-24.71 ***	11.03	7.46	0.001	-2.24
DC	-16.81 ***	10.19	3.48	<0.001	-1.65
IL	-12.44 **	8.46	4.93	0.014	-1.47
FL	-12.25 *	8.81	6.28	0.055	-1.39
MA	-8.44 **	7.67	3.96	0.036	-1.10

The data demonstrate that Louisiana had the ***largest disparity*** in student achievement between charters and traditional schools in the nation, with charter school students underperforming on average by 2 to 3 standard deviations compared to public school students for both NAEP reading and mathematics.[13]

Dropout and Graduation

The RSD graduation rate is *last* in the state of Louisiana at 61.1% out of 72 school systems.[14] The RSD is still the biggest dropout and "push out"[15] factory in the state, with many low performing students leaving school as early as the 7th and 8th grades.[16]

Advanced Placement

Even though many RSD schools tout themselves as college prep in the media and public discourse, only 5.5% of their students who take Advanced Placement courses in the RSD

score high enough on the AP tests to get credit. Again, one of the lowest results in the state.[17]

ACT Scores

In 2004, Louisiana's composite ACT score of 19.8 was ranked 48th in the nation. Ten years after Katrina, Louisiana is still ranked 48th in the nation and the composite score dropped to 19.2 for the state.[18]

Bottom US states: 2004 ACT Scores[19]

	% of Graduates Tested	2004 Average Composite Score	2004 Composite Rank
Georgia	26	20	47
Louisiana	87	19.8	48
South Carolina	36	19.3	49
Mississippi	91	18.8	50
Washington DC	29	17.8	51

Bottom US states: 2014 ACT Scores[20]

	% of Graduates Tested	2014 Average Composite Score	2014 Composite Rank
Florida	81	19.6	47
Louisiana	100	19.2	48
Mississippi	100	19	49
North Carolina	100	18.9	50
Hawaii	90	18.2	51

The 2014 ACT composite scores for the RSD also do not appear to support the narrative that privately controlled, top-down reforms are working in New Orleans.[21] The Class of 2013 ACT composite for RSD was 16.3. A year later, the 2014 ACT composite for all

RSD high schools was 15.6. For RSD-New Orleans high schools, it was 15.7.[22] Out of 70 Louisiana public school districts listed, the state-run RSD ranked 66th in the state of Louisiana's 2014 ACT average composite scores.[23] As a result, the majority of students in the RSD don't qualify to enter 4-year universities in Louisiana.[24]

CONCLUSION

In summary, while NAEP scores have risen in reading and math, Louisiana's ranking relative to the nation has remained the same in math and dropped one spot in reading. The new NAEP research in this brief shows that Louisiana charter schools perform worse than *any other state* when compared to traditional schools. This finding is highly problematic for the conventional narrative of charter success in Louisiana and the RSD. Also, the RSD dropout, push out, and graduation rates are of concern— placing last and nearly last in the state. At 5%, Advanced Placement results have also been a disappointment after ten years of "education reform." The review of data also demonstrates that neither the Louisiana ACT nor RSD ACT scores are positive evidence of success.

In conclusion, the national comparative data suggest that there is a dearth of evidence supporting a decade of test-score-driven, state-takeover, charter-conversion model as was implemented in New Orleans. The predominance of the data suggest that the top-down, privately controlled "education reforms" imposed on New Orleans have failed.
The state and RSD place last and nearly last in national and federal data. These results do not deserve accolades.

CITATIONS

[1]Collated primarily from Louisiana authors. Direct contributions are included in this brief from Jason France, Mike Deshotels, Mercedes Schneider, Francesca Lopez, and Amy Olson.

[2]https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Recovery_School_District

[3]http://beta.lpb.org/images/lps_uploads/lps201009charter.pdf

[4]https://s3.amazonaws.com/gnocdc/reports/TheDataCenter_PublicEducation.pdf

[5]http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/01/29/AR2010012903259.html

[6]https://deutsch29.wordpress.com/2013/03/05/new-orleans-recovery-school-district-the-lie-unveiled/

[7]http://www.npr.org/sections/ed/2015/08/15/431967706/new-orleans-schools-10-years-after-katrina-beacon-or-warning

[8]http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/about/

[9]http://www.nationsreportcard.gov/reading_math_2013/ - /state-performance

[10]http://www.nationsreportcard.gov/reading_math_2013/ - /state-performance

[11]The NAEP achievement analyses included all 8th grade students attending public and charter schools in states with a sufficient sample who took the NAEP reading and/or mathematics assessments in 2011. SPSS version 21.0 was used to manage and clean the data. In order to address the design effects inherent in the complex sampling, we used HLM 7.0 to estimate the two-level models. This version of HLM also permitted us to take the five plausible values of achievement as the dependent variable. Weighting at the student and school level was also applied, given the stratified sampling and to adjust for nonresponse. We estimated a series of 2-level intercepts-as-outcomes models for each subject, grade level, and state. In addition to including Cohen's *d* to denote the magnitude of the difference in achievement between charter and public schools).

Dependent Variables
Reading and mathematics achievement (Level 1: NAEP student-level variables)

NAEP relies on item response theory and uses matrix sampling from a total of approximately 150 – 200 items, varying across subjects and grade levels. Each participating student answers only a subset of the achievement items, with the testing portion of the assessment taking about 50 minutes for each subject. NAEP uses marginal maximum likelihood and conditioning techniques to generate 5 plausible values that represent an estimate of the student's achievement in a particular subject had he or she answered all of the items and not merely a subset.

Level 1: Student Level Control Variables.

Student lunch program status (0-2). We used student's eligibility for the federal National School Lunch Program as a measure of socioeconomic status (the only one provided by NAEP), coded on a scale of 0 - 2, with 0 = not eligible, 1 = eligible for reduced price lunch, and 2 = eligible for free lunch.

English language learner status (0-1). NAEP includes information about whether a student is currently an EL, formerly an EL, or not an EL. To reduce issues introduced by the variation in the way states determine reclassification of ELs to non-ELs, we included students who were classified as ELs at the time of testing as well as those who had been classified as EL prior to testing ("formerly-EL"), coded as "1."

Individualized education program (IEP) (0-1). A dummy variable was used to control for whether school records showed that the student was in a special education program as evidenced by the filing of an IEP, where 1 = student had an IEP.

Ethnicity. Dummy variables for students' ethnicity was included for Latino, African American, Asian, and Native American students with "White" as the excluded category for comparison. Several states did not have a sufficient number of Asian and/or Native American students for the models to run and were subsequently deleted from all models for comparability.

Independent Variables
Charter or Public school (Level 2: NAEP school-level variables)

A dummy variable was included to examine the differences between public schools (coded "0") and charter schools (coded '1").

Level 2: School Level Control Variables.

Percent racial/ethnic minority (0-100%). We included a measure of percent of enrolled students who are African-American and Latino.

Percent eligible for free/reduced lunch (1-9). We included the percent of enrolled students who are eligible for the federally-funded free or reduced school lunch program. Based on school records, NAEP uses the following categories: 1=0%, 2=1-5%, 3=6-10%, 4=11-25%, 5=26-34%, 6=35-50%, 7=51-75%, 8=76-99%, and 9=100%

[12]While the restrict student-level NAEP data did not allow for Lopez and Olson to identify specific schools in Louisiana, we do know that approximately 70% of all charters schools in Louisiana are located in New Orleans— and thus probability theory suggests that the sample primarily represents RSD charter schools. http://www.charterschooltools.org/charterSchools.cfm?stateID=18.

[13] Lopez and Olson found that Louisiana also leads the nation in the disparity of the proportion of teachers in charter schools who are certified via alternative routes. According to the School and Staffing Survey, almost 66% of teachers in charter schools in Louisiana are alternatively certified compared to 28% of traditional public school teachers. Moreover, Louisiana is ranked among the highest in terms of the proportion of teachers planning to leave the profession and has one of the lowest pay scales in the nation (adjusted for cost of living). In examining teachers' plans to remain in teaching, all states with reporting criteria met demonstrate a clear pattern: teachers in charter schools are planning to leave teaching as soon as they are able to a higher extent than public school teachers. This pattern was particularly salient in Louisiana, where more than 46% of the teachers in charter schools reported plans to leave compared to only 6% in public schools.

[14]http://louisianaeducator.blogspot.com/2015/08/new-rsd-propaganda-machine-whitewashes.html

[15]http://www.njjn.org/uploads/digital-library/resource_1587.pdf

[16]http://researchonreforms.org/html/documents/Tracking9thGradeCohortsFinal.pdf

[17]http://louisianaeducator.blogspot.com/2015/08/new-rsd-propaganda-machine-whitewashes.html

[18]We don't include a similar analysis of Louisiana's SAT scores because only 5% of graduating seniors took the test in 2014.

[19]http://www.act.org/newsroom/data/2004/states.html

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[20]http://www.act.org/newsroom/data/2014/states.html

[21]https://deutsch29.wordpress.com/2015/01/31/louisianas-class-of-2014-act-scores-are-in-this-post/

[22]In January-February 2015, Dr. Mercedes Schneider released this ACT information, which she verified firsthand as originating with the ACT information system. She did so because Louisiana State Superintendent John White refused to publicly release the Class of 2014 ACT composites. Within days of Schneider's initial release of Class of 2014 ACT composites for state-run RSD schools, White released the state's version of scores— an ACT composite of 16.4 for the RSD Class of 2014.

[23]The four districts scoring lower were much smaller than RSD-New Orleans: Madison: 67 test takers; 15.3 average composite for 2014. St. Helena: 53 test takers; 15.4 average composite for 2014. Tensas: 32 test takers; 15.3 average composite for 2014. City of Baker: 115 test takers; 15.2 average composite for 2014.

[24]http://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/23/opinion/sunday/the-myth-of-the-new-orleans-school-makeover.html?smid=tw-share&_r=0