William Frantz Public School: A Case Study in the Politics of Education

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William Frantz Public School: A Case Study in the Politics of Education

Rowan University, University of Nebraska Omaha, Stockton University

PRESENTED AT:

2020 APSA ANNUAL MEETING & EXHIBITION
DEMONSTRATING, DIGNITY, AND DESTABILIZATION
VIRTUAL MEETING
ABSTRACT

Public education in the U.S. has long been viewed as a fortification against the enemies of democracy. While the organization of public school districts varied from state to state, the basic governing structure—the locally elected school board charged with overseeing public monies—can be found in every state and represents one of America’s most democratic institutions at the grassroots level. What happened to William Frantz Public School (WFPS - site of the effort to desegregate the schools of New Orleans in 1960 when Ruby Bridges entered the all-white school) and the other public schools in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina in 2005 reveals the potential dangers an all-charter school district may pose to democracy at its most basic level.

This poster uses a place-based narrative derived from extensive research in multiple archives to convey the story of WFPS before and after Hurricane Katrina (there is no existing scholarly work focused on WFPS). The poster will reflect the years of neglect in the wake of desegregation, including the impact from decades of white flight to the suburbs, urban poverty and disenfranchisement, underfunding of public education, racialized school disciplinary practices, and distrust of public officials and the resulting disparagement of public education. Although many schools did not survive the storm, the badly damaged WFPS building was not demolished, in part because of its pivotal role in the Civil Rights Movement. However, the price-tag for the recovery of New Orleans’ public schools was beyond the capacity of the state, much less the city. The pressing need for funding to reconstruct the district’s buildings and educational infrastructure, recruit teachers and administrators, and meet the academic and social needs of its diverse student population provided a means for the advocates of privatization to advance their agenda. As a result, the building which once housed the WFPS is now called Akili Academy, just one of eighty-some charter schools found throughout New Orleans.

Proponents of charter schools assert that public schools lack the competition, innovation, and financial efficiencies found in the private sector. They argue that choice and accountability ensure that only schools offering relevant curricula while producing graduates who succeed academically will operate, and failing schools will lose their charters, and like businesses in the private sector, close their doors. But in New Orleans, often held up as a model for the charter school movement, questions regarding equity and accessibility have arisen as the faculty and administration at some charter schools seem to be ill-equipped to serve the student population in the city. While such schools that are unable to turn around these deficiencies are closed, the effects can be disruptive to the lives of their students and families. Some charter schools, whose founders recognized that their success might be hampered by accepting disaffected students, negotiated a charter agreement that allowed the school to have selective admission criteria. Furthermore, the traditional functions of the school board, such as determining curriculum, have been ceded to the charter school boards, who are not elected. These private boards are given authority to oversee public monies creating a murky private-public amalgamation distanced from the constituents, many of whom are African American, of the city. Following Hurricane Maria, officials instituted a similar school governance structure in Puerto Rico, again separating constituents of color from those making decisions about public education.

Support—and disdain—for charter schools crosses party affiliations and is a contentious political issue involving fundamental questions of school governance. Proponents view charter schools as a way to stabilize a failing education system; however, this poster will show that a market-based school system has the potential to become a destabilizing factor that threatens democratic principles of representation as well as the public education system that is fundamental to maintaining a literate and empowered populace.
1. THESIS/PURPOSE

To show that a market-based school system, commonly known as a charter school system, has the potential to become a destabilizing force that threatens democratic principles of representation as well as the education system that is fundamental to maintaining a literate and empowered populace.

“Here in this kingdom of learning our children will learn right from wrong, to repel any foreign efforts to destroy our country.”

Martin E. Kranz, OPSB Secretary, October 6, 1938 – Times-Picayune.
2. WHY DID WE USE THIS SCHOOL AS A CASE STUDY?

William Frantz Public School is a familiar public school to many Americans and of historic importance in the advancement of civil rights (and hence, democracy). The school represents the entwinement of race, education, and market-based influence on public institutions within our democracy.

In 1960, 6-year-old Ruby Bridges was the first Black student allowed to attend the all-White school of William Frantz, located in one of the mixed-race neighborhoods of the Ninth Ward in New Orleans.
The vast majority of Louisiana's White residents and government officials opposed the court-ordered desegregation. Ruby Bridges and her family faced intense resistance from White parents who refused to send their children to the newly desegregated school.

[VIDEO] https://www.youtube.com/embed/CoJ1NXeIo4w?feature=oembed&start=3&fs=1&modestbranding=1&rel=0&showinfo=0

Members of the White Citizens' Council immediately established all-White private schools, known as cooperative schools, and the State of Louisiana attempted to use public tax dollars to fund these schools. The attempt to use publicly-funded, private schools to undermine the advancement of civil rights began within days of Bridges' entry into William Frantz.
In 2005 (four months prior to Hurricane Katrina), the building was placed on the National Register of Historic Places. This designation would preserve the building as a symbol of the civil rights era and ultimately save it from post-Katrina demolition. However, William Frantz would find itself amidst a massive shift to charter schools and within an era of unprecedented instability.
3. WHAT LONG-TERM CONDITIONS LED TO THE MARKET-BASED SYSTEM OF EDUCATION IN NEW ORLEANS?

After the court-mandated desegregation of schools in 1960, a number of destabilizing factors and years of neglect led to resegregation. Ultimately, this led to the traditionally elected school board being unable to provide education to the residents of the city.

1. White flight

   Many segregationists transferred their children to private schools or moved to the suburbs. Beginning in 1970, the total number of students enrolled in the city's public schools declined while the number of Black students increased and then leveled off.

![Figure 2. NEW ORLEANS PUBLIC SCHOOL ENROLLMENTS 1960-1980](source: DeVore & Logsdon (1991), p. 265)


   Enrollment continued to fall in the 1990s, and by 2005, it was approximately 65,000 and 93% of the students were Black.
2. Urban poverty & disenfranchisement

- Economic dislocation exacerbated the effects of White flight. Factories closed and unemployment increased. For many Black residents, life in the city grew increasingly difficult, especially for those in public housing. The press often depicted these neighborhoods as dangerous and devoid of any promise.

3. Education underfunding

- As industries left and businesses closed, the tax base shrank, leaving fewer dollars for education.

4. Racialized school disciplinary practices

- In 1988, a study conducted by the district concluded that Black males were overrepresented in suspensions and expulsions.
In addition, the district increasingly used harsh punishments rather than mediation to address disciplinary issues.

5. Distrust of public officials

- Instability due to superintendent turnover (2 permanent and 4 interim superintendents 1999-2005) contributed to distrust.
Financial corruption by district administrators, school board members, teachers, and support staff, bred even more mistrust.
Frequent district insolvency further eroded the public's confidence.

- 6. Federal laws mandating standardized testing

The state of Louisiana extended the use of testing to measure school accountability to the sole measure of individual student academic progress, requiring students in grades 4, 8, 10, and 12 to pass the state standardized LEAP21 test before moving to the next grade level.
7. Disparagement of public education

- Schools and the district faced intense pressure to improve their standing on the state-issued school report cards and stave a takeover from the state. In 2001 this pressure may have led the superintendent and other administrators to misrepresent attendance rates and exaggerate test scores, thus inflating School Performance Scores.
Sample Report Card for parents of students at William Frantz:

### Fall 2003 School Report Card for Parents

**(2002-2003 School Year)**

William Frantz Elementary School  
New Orleans, Louisiana  
(504) 942-3543

- This report contains the results of the Louisiana School Accountability System for your school.
- Your child's school, like other public schools, receives a **School Performance Score (SPS)** every year which shows how well the school is performing.
- SPS is based on the results from LEAP 21, The Iowa Test, student attendance.

#### How Is Your School Performing?

- Your school's SPS is 46.3.
- Your school needs to receive an SPS of 52.5 in Fall of 2004.
- Your school received a Performance Label of **Academic Warning**.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance Labels</th>
<th>SPS Ranges</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Five Stars (⭐⭐⭐⭐⭐)</td>
<td>140.0 and above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four Stars (⭐⭐⭐⭐)</td>
<td>120.0 - 139.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three Stars (⭐⭐⭐)</td>
<td>100.0 - 119.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two Stars (⭐⭐)</td>
<td>80.0 - 99.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One Star (⭐)</td>
<td>50.0 - 79.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Warning</td>
<td>45.0 - 59.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academically Unacceptable</td>
<td>below 45.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### How Much Has Your School Improved?

- From Fall 2001 to Fall 2003, your child's School Performance Score increased 10.2 points.
- Your school needed to make its Growth Target of 15.1 points.
- Your school received a Growth Label of **Minimal Academic Growth**.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Growth Labels</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exemplary Academic Growth</td>
<td>Exceeds Growth Target by 5 points or more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognized Academic Growth</td>
<td>Meets or exceeds Growth Target by fewer than 5 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimal Academic Growth</td>
<td>Improves, but does not meet Growth Target</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Growth</td>
<td>Shows a change in SPS of 0 to -5.0 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School in Decline</td>
<td>Has a declining SPS of more than -5.0 points</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Your School’s Status

* Your child’s school must make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in both the SPS Component and the Subgroup Component of the Accountability System.
* Schools that do not meet performance and growth requirements are placed in School Improvement (SI). SI ranges from SI 1 to SI 4 this year. The higher the SI level, the more support and assistance the school receives from the district and the state.
* Schools eligible for monetary rewards must show growth for their subgroups (poverty and students with disabilities) and receive a Growth Label of Exemplary Academic Growth or Recognized Academic Growth.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP):</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- SPS Component</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Subgroup Component</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Improvement (SI) Status</td>
<td>SI 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rewards ($) Eligibility:</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The SPS Is Comprised of the Following 3 Parts:

Part 1: LEAP 21 Results for Your School

* These tests measure student learning in the main subject areas and show how well students in your child’s school learned the coursework required by the state.
* Each student is placed at one of five achievement levels, based on his or her test results.

Spring 2003 Grade 4 LEAP 21 Test Results

(Number and percent of students at each level)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Achievement Levels</th>
<th>English Language Arts</th>
<th>Mathematics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Your School</td>
<td>District</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mastery</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>30.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approaching Basic</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsatisfactory</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>42.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Achievement Levels</th>
<th>Science</th>
<th>Social Studies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Your School</td>
<td>District</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mastery</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>26.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approaching Basic</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>32.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsatisfactory</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>30.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The term District refers to the Calcasieu Parish School System.

Please see the Practice Assessment/Strengthen Skills (PASS) internet tool to access practice test questions with instructional feedback at www.LouisianaPASS.org. For more testing information, such as LEAP 21 tutoring lessons, please see "The Tests" webpage accessible from the Louisiana Department of Education website at www.louisianaschools.net.
Part 2: The Iowa Tests

- The Iowa Tests show how well Louisiana students perform compared to students across the nation.
- The performance of the typical student in the nation is at the 50th percentile for any grade level.

![Iowa Tests Chart]

Parts 3: Attendance

- Attendance rates are based on prior year's data.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2001-2002 Attendance</th>
<th>Your School</th>
<th>Your District</th>
<th>State</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attendance</td>
<td>96.1%</td>
<td>92.3%</td>
<td>93.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Subgroup Component - Status of Your School's Subgroups

It is important that all subgroups within a school improve academically and meet the requirements. The following table shows the status of each subgroup at your child's school.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subgroups</th>
<th>English Language Arts</th>
<th>Mathematics</th>
<th>Additional Academic Indicator - Attendance Rate *</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African American/Black</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>Met Requirements?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian/Native Alaskan</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian/Pacific Islander</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economically Disadvantaged (Free and Reduced Lunch)</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students with Disabilities</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited English Proficient (LEP)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Students in the School</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N/A indicates fewer than 10 LEAP 21/GEF 21 test takers for a given subgroup.

* The attendance rate shows how well students are attending school on a daily basis.
Enrollment and Teacher Quality Results for Your Child's School

### Students as of October 1, 2002*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Students</td>
<td>274</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Regular Education</td>
<td>244</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Students with Disabilities</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total on Free and Reduced-Priced Lunch</td>
<td>272</td>
<td>99%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Based on PK-12, Nongraded grade structure.

### 2002-2003 Teacher Quality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Your School</th>
<th>Your District</th>
<th>State</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percent of Core Classes Taught by Highly Qualified Teachers</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Core classes are English, math, science, social studies, foreign languages and the arts.
- Please access "Teach Louisiana" from the Louisiana Department of Education Website to find the certification status of your child's teacher.

For more information, please call the Louisiana Department of Education toll-free at 1-877-453-2721 or visit the website at [www.louisianaschools.net](http://www.louisianaschools.net).

Notes

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### 2002-2003 School Report Card

William Frantz Elementary School

4. WHAT WAS THE TIPPING POINT?

Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans on August 29, 2005, causing cataclysmic destruction of private and public property, in addition to disrupting the school system.

- 72% of all occupied homes incurred damages.
- 56% of occupied homes suffered major or severe damage.
- 80% of Orleans Parish school buildings were unusable.
- Initial repairs to schools were estimated to reach $800 million to $1 billion, far exceeding expected tax revenues in a normal year.

As residents returned to the city, the school district could not rebuild without monies beyond its customary tax allocation. Federal and state governments promised significant grants of money to charter schools; without this money, the city of New Orleans had insufficient funds to rebuild, hire, and replace materials lost to the storm. The tax base, which funded the public schools, would take years to recover.

- The federal government pledged $20 million but restricted the money to the expansion of charter schools.

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LAW & GUIDANCE / ELEMENTARY & SECONDARY EDUCATION
Key Policy Letters Signed by the Education Secretary or Deputy Secretary
September 14, 2005
ARCHIVED INFORMATION

Dear Colleague:

The U.S. Department of Education is continuing to work with States and schools to ensure that the children affected by Hurricane Katrina continue their education with the least disruption. In recent days, officials from several States have contacted the Department's Charter Schools Program (CSP) staff, seeking increased flexibility to serve the thousands of students displaced by Hurricane Katrina. Because charter schools are exempt from many State and local education rules, they may be uniquely equipped to serve these students. Accordingly, the Department is prepared to consider requests for statutory and regulatory waivers of various requirements under the CSP and other federal statutes and regulations over which the Secretary of Education exercises administrative authority.

In addition, the Department has identified approximately $20 million of Fiscal Year 2005 funds still available under the CSP, which the Department would like to use to assist States and their charter schools to meet the immediate educational needs of students displaced as a result of Hurricane Katrina.

Enclosed please find guidance on the process for requesting CSP supplemental funds and waivers. Written requests for supplements must be submitted to the Department on or before September 23, 2005, to ensure consideration and allow the Department sufficient time to review the requests and obligate the funds by their expiration date of September 30, 2005.

Thank you for your diligent efforts to assist displaced families and students affected by Hurricane Katrina. If you have any questions please call Nina Rees, Assistant Deputy Secretary for Innovation and Improvement, at (202) 205-4500. We look forward to working with you in the days and weeks ahead.

Sincerely,

Margaret Spellings

cc: State Charter School Program Directors
William Frantz Public School is representative of the devastation school buildings suffered, as well as the inability of the district to repair and reopen. Many homes in the surrounding neighborhood remained uninhabitable for months and for some houses, even years. As a result, the school district did not prioritize renovating the school.

*Photo courtesy Recovery School District*
5. WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS OF A MARKET-BASED SYSTEM (CHARTER SCHOOLS)?

Transfers governance from the historical, locally elected school board to privately appointed charter boards of directors, who now:

- control expenditure of public education funds
- select curriculum for each individual school
- determine licensure criteria for teachers and administrators

Proponents assert the market-based system:

- leads to educational innovations
- increases financial and academic accountability
- allows parents to choose a school that reflects their values and interests

Analysis of a market-based system in New Orleans found:

- Accountability measures that closed charter schools also undermined the identity of neighborhoods and schools.
- Merit-based systems tied teacher evaluations to test scores without consideration of factors outside of school that impact student performance.
- Hiring by individual charter schools rather than a larger district system diminished the influence of the teachers' unions and their advocacy for stability in the teaching profession.
- New approaches to teacher hiring, such as Teach For America and TeachNOLA, eroded teacher qualifications and experience.
- Low-performing students and special needs students were discouraged from applying to some schools in order to keep test scores high.
- Charter school officials, who are not elected, were not accountable to the citizenry.
**Conclusion:** the events in New Orleans, as represented by the transformation of William Frantz Public School into charter school Akili Academy, illuminates the de-democratization or unraveling of democracy at its most basic level.

When you give up on one public school, one school district, one city... it becomes easier to give up on the next and the next and the next.
REFERENCES


Curriculum Vitae of Authors

Connie L. Schaffer graduated summa cum laude with a BS from Kansas State University. She earned her MS and EdD from the University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO). She taught middle and high school and is now a faculty member in the UNO College of Education, Health, and Human Sciences.

Meg White has been an educator for over 30 years. She earned a BA from Marymount University, an MA from San Jose State University, and an EdD from Northcentral University. Currently, she is an Associate Professor of Education at Stockton University.

Martha Graham Viator earned a BA in history from the University of Louisiana at Lafayette and an MA and PhD in history from Auburn University. Recently retired from Rowan University, she taught in the College of Education after teaching high school history in public schools.