

Teacher Union Dons Sing 'Charter School Blues'

End of NEA/AFT Monopoly Fosters Education Reform in New Orleans

In New Orleans' French Quarter, where bandleader Kid Ory and his teenaged trumpeter, Louis Armstrong, once performed classic numbers such as the "Society Blues" and the "Savoy Blues," teacher union bosses are now singing the "Charter School Blues."

Over the past two years, the teacher union hierarchy in New Orleans has endured what is almost certainly the steepest decline ever in any U.S. jurisdiction of its monopoly-bargaining power over teachers and other school employees.

Before Hurricane Katrina flooded the Crescent City, there were 64,000 students in its public school system. Because much of the city's population has relocated, perhaps permanently, the number of students has fallen by half; 32,000 are now enrolled.

Meanwhile, the United Teachers of New Orleans (UTNO), a subsidiary of the giant American Federation of Teachers (AFT/AFL-CIO) union and by far the largest teacher union in New Orleans, has lost its grip over the city's public school teachers.

According to UTNO President Brenda Mitchell, before Katrina her union had 4700 members and wielded "exclusive" (monopoly) bargaining power over an additional 2000 school employees who had refused to join the union.

But as of late this summer, Ms. Mitchell recently complained to the pro-forced unionism *Nation* magazine, the UTNO had only roughly 500 members.

Thus, in a public school system that has shrunk by 50%, the monopolistic UTNO union has shrunk by 90%.

Union Monopoly Bargaining Undermines Schools' Ability To Educate Children

More than 30 states currently authorize and promote union monopoly bargaining over teachers and other public school employees. Though Louisiana law does not explicitly authorize monopoly bargaining, many school districts, especially in the state's larger jurisdictions, have long acquiesced to it.

This abusive system grants the bosses of one teacher union monopoly power to negotiate over the pay, benefits, and working conditions of all teachers -- including teachers who don't wish to join or have anything to do with a union.

Right to Work supporters have for decades argued that, in addition to violating teachers' freedom as individuals, monopoly bargaining undermines schools' ability to educate children. Right to Work supporters have also argued that eliminating monopoly bargaining paves the way for overall school reform.

Now the public "charter" schools that have sprouted up in New Orleans since Katrina are furnishing what may be the most definitive demonstration yet that Right to Work supporters have been correct all along.

Charter schools are public schools that are run by private, usually nonprofit organizations rather than a school district.

Although charter schools may legally be unionized, up to now teacher union officials have secured monopoly-bargaining power in only a handful of the 3500 charter schools, enrolling over a million students, nationwide.

Because charter entrepreneurs were far more nimble in reestablishing schools after Katrina, and because Louisiana public officials generally didn't stand in the way, today 42 of New Orleans' 81 public schools are charters.

And of the 20 top-performing schools in the city, 17 are charters, according to an August 1 article in the New Orleans *Times-Picayune*.

Emblematic of the charters' evident success is the McDonogh 15 School for

the Creative Arts in the French Quarter.

School For the Creative Arts Is Bringing Hope To Recovering City

Unshackled by restrictive union work rules, teachers at McDonogh 15 put in long and intense days, but they also get the satisfaction of seeing their students, overwhelmingly African Americans from low-income families, make great strides.

When McDonogh 15 opened in August 2006, about 85% of kids grades three through eight "began the school year two or more grade levels behind, on one reading evaluation," according to a recent article in *Forbes* magazine.

"Now," reports *Forbes* Senior Editor Kerry Dolan, "all but 29" of the school's 420 students "are at grade level or better."

"New Orleans teacher union bosses may be singing the blues, but tens of thousands of schoolchildren, parents, taxpayers, and dedicated teachers have ample reason to be pleased," said National Right to Work Committee President Mark Mix.

"The Crescent City offers a compelling example of how breaking the teacher union monopoly facilitates education reform. And Right to Work members and supporters nationwide will see to it that elected officials are mindful of this example." 📌



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Union-free teachers at McDonogh 15 in New Orleans' French Quarter are helping low-income schoolchildren

excel in math and reading as well as music and painting. Teacher union bosses aren't pleased.