

Can We Please De-Personalize School System Failure

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February 11, 2016

[One of a series](#) of *Education Week* articles on the New Orleans School System ten years after Katrina discusses the mass firings of the New Orleans (NOLA) public school teachers. A common theme of the not-rehired, former New Orleans teachers featured in the article is a demand for an apology. That will strike a lot of people as either bizarre or outrageous; perhaps a mix of the two. After all, those teachers were on the frontline of one of America's very lowest performing school systems; in 'good' company. Who should have to apologize to whom? Indeed, as the teachers allege in the article, they are the victims of a corrupt school board. I mostly side with the teachers, but not because NOLA's school board has been corrupt for a long time. This is an interesting sidebar for another time. It is well-known that teachers are typically a dominant force in local school board elections. Teacher unions are known to often negotiate with former union officials they voted into office. How can a school board stay corrupt if not with the permission of teachers as voters?

Back to the main point that '[Nation-at-Risk](#)'-bad school system performance should be blamed on failure to transform a system grounded on [heroic assumptions](#); blamed on failure to address [root causes](#) that, among other things, [make it very difficult](#) to be a teaching professional, and be successful at it. Nearly as much as the students, teachers (not just teachers in traditional public schools) are victims of the dysfunctional public school system process for deciding what shall be taught, how, where, and to whom. I say 'mostly' because I do blame the teachers that actively or passively support their union's resistance to transformational school system change.

Part of the main point of this blog is to highlight the [Education Week](#) article – a featured article in a very prominent venue – as the latest example of utterly, mistakenly personalized school

system failure. If the students are not learning, it must be the teachers' fault or administrators' fault or parents' fault or students' fault. NO!!! As one of the fired teachers asserted, "you would have to believe that black women failed black children." Yes, the NOLA school system was so dysfunctional that black children suffered severe educational neglect in a system where 60% of the teachers were black women. Incredibly, the article did not mention any of the highly likely reasons that black women were prevented from adequately schooling black children; the durable roots of persistent low performance such as rampant out-of-field teaching; discipline-preventing regulations and lawsuit threat; often [unteachably diverse classroom composition](#); teacher micro-management; and politically-correct mish-mash masquerading as curricula and [textbooks](#).