



Fulton County Taxpayers Foundation

Non-Profit Advocate Of Lower Property Taxes In Atlanta/Fulton County

APS Series Vol. 8, August 2010

A stylized, grayscale illustration of a city skyline with various skyscrapers and buildings. In the foreground, there are curved lines representing roads or highways, with small white circles indicating lights or traffic. The overall style is modern and graphic.

It's Time For the Governor To Authorize a Forensic Audit of the APS CRCT Erasures!

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On February 10th, the Governor's Office of Student Achievement announced that 256,779 wrong-to-right erasures occurred in 58 Atlanta schools in the 2009 CRCT state achievement tests. Of the 58 Atlanta schools, 43 were classified by the Governor's Office as "severe." The sheer magnitude of the number of erasures and the large number of Atlanta schools would indicate systemic cheating in Atlanta Public Schools. The investigation was turned over to Atlanta Public Schools which appointed an APS Investigation Panel.

On August 2, the APS Investigation Panel released its long-awaited report. The Atlanta School Board, by a vote of 5-4, refused to accept the report and several members of the State Board of Education question whether the State should accept the report.

What Is The Essence Of The Report?

Instead of a detailed report on the 43 Atlanta schools classified as "severe" by the Governor's Office, the report said that cheating appeared to be limited to only 12 schools, a small portion of the 43 Atlanta schools classified as "severe". Within those 12 schools cited by the APS Investigation Panel, 38 administration and 109 non-administrative personnel were 'flagged'. The APS Investigation Panel used a different standard to assess test data than the Governor's Office of Student Achievement. The report exonerated Superintendent Hall and her senior staff.

Why The Report Should Be Rejected By The State:

The Taxpayers Foundation feels strongly that the APS Investigation Panel report should be rejected by the State and that the State should conduct its own forensic audit of the 256,779 wrong-to-right erasures. Here is why:

Intimidation Of Witnesses: On the front-page of the July 11th AJC, the lead-article stated that “APS Administrators from the APS Central Office, took part in questioning suspected educators from the 58 Atlanta schools under scrutiny for alleged cheating.” Surely, the mere presence of Central Office Administrators in such delicate interviews has had an intimidating effect on the testimony of suspected witnesses whose jobs are at stake. Such intimidation of witnesses must disqualify the report by the APS Investigation Panel.

The Members of the Investigation Panel Have Serious Conflicts of Interest & Prejudice Toward The Superintendent: APS appointed an Investigation Panel chaired by Gary Price, a partner in the Atlanta Office of PricewaterhouseCoopers, which, according to the AJC exposure on July 11th, “collected \$1.5 million from APS from 2002-2006.” Price is quoted by the AJC “Superintendent Beverly Hall is a reformer whose efforts are good for business.” Another member of the Panel is John Rice of General Electric. The AJC exposure of July 11th indicated that “GE Capital received \$1.9 million in computer lease payments from APS.” Despite the cheating allegations, John Rice is quoted by the AJC “GE remains 100% committed to Superintendent Hall.” Four other members of the Panel were part of the 2009 Board of EduPAC which has been a strong advocate for Superintendent Hall. Finally, most members of the Panel, according to the AJC, “served on the Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce Education Committee boosting APS and Superintendent Hall.” Such conflicts of interest and prejudice towards the Superintendent, further disqualifies the report by the APS Investigation Panel.

A Bird's Eye View of the August 2nd Atlanta School Board Meeting.....

Mr. Sherman and I got there with plenty of time to spare. He and his wife Jill found seats in the first row of the back section. The first section was reserved for (we assumed) APS admin and APS parents. The general public or anyone who couldn't find a seat in the front section, made their way to standing room only. The press corp was a wall of human and camera, which virtually blocked the meeting from the view of the back section.

Our agenda was on our seat. We noticed the Blue Ribbon Commission meeting would last from 2-2:30pm. The only agenda item was the vote on submitting the final draft, one of many, to the Atlanta School Board, which, according to the agenda, would take 15 minutes. Huh, we wondered. Will they discuss the report? When the meeting came to order and roll call was taken, *the meeting took no more than 7 minutes*. At that point, the standing room only crowd exuded a rumble and instead of being silent and still, feathers began to ruffle, including ours.

LeChandra Butler-Burks, Chair, *who also sits on the Blue Ribbon Commission*, informed the audience that because of the public notice laws for meetings, the Atlanta School Board meeting could not start until the *posted* time, which was 2:30. Was this a maneuver to see if they would lose any audience members or critics? Why would an agenda be created that boasted a half-hour meeting that took not much more than 5 minutes to fulfill?

During this wait, we observed old friends hugging each other, people networking, laughing and catching up. How nice. Forty-three schools were flagged by the State of Georgia, and this crowd was treating it like any other day; like this wasn't the most important meeting to take place in Atlanta since the days of Bill Campbell. Later, we noticed that these same folks made up the small contingent of 'constant applauders', supporting the Commission, their report and Dr. Hall. Thankfully, the other portion of the crowd, the *larger* portion of the crowd, did NOT applaud the Commission, their report or Dr. Hall.

The numbers that this so-called commission reported, the numbers that every media outlet received, are not important here. We dismiss them easily for reasons stated by John Sherman on previous pages.

When the School Board Meeting started, Commission Chair Gary Price gave us what we were all waiting for, "...no evidence of district-wide cheating." His voice loud, speaking in breaks; he might as well have bowed to Dr. Hall. The 20 or so applauders did their best to support the decision, the media was buzzing...we just looked at each other and rolled our eyes. We expected this, it was no surprise.

Upon the completion of the so-called commission report, Board Member Reuben McDaniel, III, immediately put the motion on the floor to accept the report as submitted. Here we go! we thought, another meeting fast-tracked for the good Doctor. The vote was taken and... it...failed 5-4! Omigosh! we said. The crowd was carrying on, the Board Members who voted to accept it were looking stiff—we couldn't believe it, THIS was getting good.

There were three more votes to come down the pike, but only two are valid, unbeknownst to Chair LeChandra Butler-Burks, who clearly did not understand what her role was as Chair. She exhibited a lack of understanding of Roberts Rules of Order that made you feel embarrassed. The second vote was to submit the report to the State, as is. That, ironically, passed 5-4 (see the pattern of votes yet?) It makes perfect sense to us, submit this ridiculously bogus report to the State, let them deal with it. Unfortunately, those board members that lost the first vote, decided it was important to *revisit a vote that had been cast and certified by the Chair*. They bickered and through their bickering, it was easy see who was for the report (and Dr. Hall) and who was not. This fun continued throughout the meeting until the third vote, which detailed how Dr. Hall and her staff would work with the accused principals on an action plan—the same principals that, at the end of the meeting, she vows to put away. This vote also passed.

This is where it got interesting. For the final motion was put forth *again* by Rueben McDaniel, III. He wanted this report to be accepted darn it! We have experts! We have Dr. Hall! We've identified the accused! This prompted Khaatim Sherrer El, probably the most sane person at this meeting, to counter McDaniel's motion, saying that you can't propose the same motion if it has been voted down. Ms. Burks, in her attempt to salvage the report that she and her cohorts submitted, *wrongly quoted Roberts Rules of Order*. According to Ms. Burks, you CAN revisit the same issue. What Ms. Burks did not know is that *only a member on the winning side of the first vote can offer a duplicate motion*. Mr. McDaniels, in *his* feeble attempt to save the queen, WAS OUT OF ORDER; AS WAS THE MOTION AND VOTE. Thankfully, the motion failed, again, 5-4. I can't imagine what it would have been like if it passed and we had to sweetly inform Ms. Burks that she was wrong and ask for a revote.

Dr. Hall then had her say—a slightly nicer version of how Shirley Franklin would address the media when she had to own up to an accusation. At some points during her diatribe, it felt like she was talking to us. If she was, it's about time.

As for the Atlanta Public School Board, well, we get who we vote for. Like the Fulton County Commission, it lacks leadership and cohesiveness. It's split, like the Grand Canyon, and just as hard to maneuver if you aren't wearing the right kind of shoes.

This meeting was a fiasco, a circus, an infomercial for Dr. Hall, the Blue Ribbon Commission and Atlanta Public Schools. We are urging Governor Perdue to throw out the report by the Blue Ribbon Commission and solidify his legacy by approving a forensic audit of APS.

We must start fresh if the children of Atlanta are to have any hope of a real future.

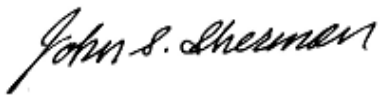
Barbara Payne, E.D.

APS Has Been Previously Cited For Cheating: The scrutiny of Atlanta's CRCT scores dates back to 2008, that showed improbable gains on tests taken in the Spring and then in Summer. The State eventually threw out those scores. In 2009, "Governor Perdue accused Superintendent Hall of ignoring evidence of test tampering." In August of 2009, the AJC reported that "APS investigators sometime left cheating allegations unresolved and were more likely to mark complaints as 'unsubstantiated' than those in other school districts."

Conclusion

In fairness to the students, parents, teachers and taxpayers, the Fulton County Taxpayers Foundation urges Governor Perdue to dismiss the Blue Ribbon Commission report and to authorize a forensic audit of the 256,779 wrong-to-right erasures in the 58 Atlanta schools.

John S. Sherman



President

***Unite the Fight To Bring Better Government
to Atlanta and Fulton County!***

I enclose my annual membership of:

\$25 Senior _____ \$50 Family _____ \$100 Patron _____ \$200 Corporate _____ \$1000 Business Leader _____

In addition, I enclose a **tax-deductible** contribution of: \$100 ___ \$500 ___ Other ___

If you prefer, you can charge your membership or a donation online at www.fctf.org

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FCTF Petition

256,779 ERASURES!!

If apparent massive cheating is confirmed , I feel, by signing the petition below, that the Superintendent and her Senior Staff should resign or be fired by the Atlanta School Board of Education, In addition, the Principals and Assistant of the 43 schools where the massive erasure-cheating took place, should be summarily fired by the Atlanta Board of Education.

Name (PLEASE PRINT)	Address	Phone/Email
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