




Fulton County Taxpayers Foundation

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

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The APS State Investigation: How We Got Here and What's Next



From February 10th when the Governor's Office of Student Achievement (GOSA) announced 256,779 wrong-to-right erasures on the 2009 state-achievement tests (CRCT), the Taxpayers Foundation was urging a state investigation because the magnitude of the erasures and the large number of Atlanta schools cited (58) clearly indicated to many of us that system-wide cheating existed in the Atlanta Public Schools. Much to his credit, Governor Perdue announced such a state investigation on August 18th, designating two former top-notch prosecutors as joint special investigators: former State Attorney Mike Bowers and former DeKalb County District Attorney Bob Wilson.

How We Got Here and What's Next

Although the Atlanta Public Schools Investigation Blue Ribbon Panel Report was due in May, the Panel completed its “investigation” on August 2nd, an “investigation” which found *“more than half the 58 schools did not show significant anomalies and only 12 Atlanta schools had statistical evidence of a school-wide problem.”*

The Fulton County Taxpayers Foundation has – during the past six months - uncovered facts that belie the report of the Investigation Panel:

Superintendent’s Representative Sitting In On Each Interview: The Taxpayers Foundation was informed by teachers and principals that Superintendent, Dr. Beverly Hall, arranged for a representative of her office to be present at each of the interviews with suspected teachers and principals. This constituted intimidation of witnesses, since suspected teachers and principals would not testify openly and freely, with a representative of the Superintendent sitting in the interviews.

Investigation Panel “Stacked” With Conflicts of Interest: The Chairman of the Investigation Panel, Gary Price of PricewaterhouseCoopers, does business with Atlanta Public Schools and has recently said *“Superintendent Hall is a reformer whose efforts are good for business.”* Another member of the Panel, John Rice of General Electric, also does business with APS and has recently said *“GE remains committed to Superintendent Hall.”* Four other members of the Investigation Panel were part of the 2009 Board of EduPAC – funded by the Metro-Chamber of Commerce – which has always been a strong advocate for Superintendent Hall. Six other members of the Investigation Panel were on the Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce’s Education Committee which has strongly supported Superintendent Hall.

APS Test-Cheating Goes Back For Many Years: APS has been suspected of test-cheating since the Superintendent was appointed in 1999. A retired Administrator in APS’ Central Office informs the Taxpayers Foundation that he well remembers massive wrong-to-right erasures in 2005, 2006, 2007, and 2008, prior to his retirement.

2010 Test Scores Significantly Decreased In 53 Out Of 58 Schools: The Investigation Panel looked for suspicious increases in CRCT scores between 2008 and 2009. However, if the massive cheating occurred in 2005, 2006, 2007 and 2008, there could not have been suspicious increases. The 2010 CRCT tests – carefully monitored by the State – showed significant decreases in 53 of the 58 schools cited.

The Secret Intrusion of Sam Williams, President, Metro Atlanta Chamber: In a memo dated February 26th, just two weeks after the State’s announcement of the massive cheating, Sam Williams, President of the Metro Atlanta Chamber, stated that *“On Monday, March 1, the APS Board will introduce a resolution that requests the Atlanta Education Fund to commission an independent investigation and create a Blue Ribbon Task Force.”* In the same email, dated February 26th, Sam Williams stated that *“The Blue Ribbon Task Force will be chaired by Gary Price of PricewaterhouseCoopers. The Task Force is scheduled to hold its first meeting on Wednesday, March 3rd. Other Task Force members tentatively include John Rice, La-Chandra Butler Burks (Chair of the Atlanta School Board)...”* Sam Williams goes on to name nine additional members. Finally, Sam Williams states *“A firm will be selected on March 3rd to perform the investigation and make recommendations.”*

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The conclusion of Sam Williams' email dated February 26th is *"We will let the facts from this investigation guide us in our support of Dr. Hall."* This memo from the President of the Metro Atlanta Chamber clearly indicates that the investigation was a sham, pre-directed by Sam Williams of the Metro Atlanta Chamber, *"in our support of Dr. Hall."*

The Blue Ribbon Commission, in its report dated August 2, 2010, contained the following fallacies:

Test Security, Page 4: "The security analysis of written APS testing policies and procedures indicated a 'tight' environment, which did not contain significant policy gaps." However, the 256,779 wrong-to-right erasures clearly indicate a breakdown in test security which must be carefully investigated in the state investigation.

Erasure Analysis, Page 4: "While the Governor's Office of Student Achievement, provided APS with baseline erasure analysis information, which identified schools with unusually high incidences of erasures, the Blue Ribbon Commission conducted further, more statistically detailed erasure analyses to identify schools in which the probabilities of a testing irregularity were the highest." GOSA, in its February 10, 2010 announcement, reported 256,779 wrong-to-right erasures in 58 Atlanta schools on the 2009 State Achievement tests for grades 1-8. Among the 58 Atlanta schools cited, 43 were considered by GOSA to be "severe." APS was asked by GOSA to investigate each of the 58 Atlanta schools, not to seek "anomalies" or "enhanced statistical evidence of a school-wide problem."

Traditional Investigation, Page 4: "Following the enhanced statistical analysis of APS' erasure data, the Blue Ribbon Commission's next step was conducting a traditional in-person interview-based portion of the investigation." The Taxpayers Foundation has learned from reliable sources that a representative of the Superintendent was present at each of these interviews, thereby intimidating the suspected witnesses.

District-Wide Effort to Manipulate The 2009 CRCT Tests: "Neither the erasure analysis nor the traditional investigation revealed any data or other evidence that there was any district-wide or centrally-coordinated effort to manipulate the 2009 CRCT scores and outcome of students in the 58 APS scores."

The Taxpayers Foundation has been informed that the Superintendent and her senior staff over-emphasized the test scores to the extent of rewarding staff at schools with higher CRCT test scores and punishing staff at schools with lower CRCT test scores.

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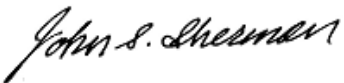
A retired APS Administrator has informed the Taxpayers Foundation that systemic test-cheating was pervasive as far back as 2005, 2006, 2007 and 2008 when he retired.

The Auditing Firm KPMG LLP, Page 7: “The Blue Ribbon Commission engaged KPMG, an independent, nationally recognized auditing firm with significant forensics investigation expertise. KPMG was also one of several firms identified by GOSA as an appropriate selection to conduct the required investigations.” The Taxpayers Foundation has been informed by several reliable sources that KPMG wrote out the questions for the interviews but did not conduct the investigation.

Caveon Index, Page 11: “Using the data provided by APS and GOSA, Caveon Test Security (hired by the Investigation Panel) used four statistical formulas to determine the probability of a testing irregularity for each school, each grade in the school, and each classroom in the school. Based on this statistical review, Caveon created the ‘Caveon Index.’ ” GOSA never requested a “Caveon Index.” GOSA’s investigation requirements were set forth in GOSA’s “Components of A Rigorous District-Level Investigation” known as “GOSA Investigation Guidelines.” Governor Perdue himself on August 20th stated: “I wonder if Caveon were given instructions and directions on how to constrain this investigation rather than explore it.”

Culture Change, Page 19: “Drive culture change throughout the district to create an environment that effectively balances attention to measurable student outcomes with attention to positive, ethical behavior.” If the Blue Ribbon Commission Report is suggesting changing the “culture throughout the district” the inference is that APS culture is an over-emphasis on test scores to a point of massive cheating This “culture change” mentioned by the Blue Ribbon Commission report will require a new Superintendent and a replacement of the School Board Chair as well as the designation of a new President of the Metro Atlanta Chamber.

In the best interests of the students, the parents and the taxpayers, State Investigators Mike Bowers and Bob Wilson will conduct an in-depth investigation of each of the 58 Atlanta schools cited by the Governor’s Office of Student Achievement. The investigation should also include the role of Sam Williams and the Metro Atlanta Chamber in pre-directing the Atlanta School Board to “investigate” and hand-picking- in advance, the Chair and members of the Blue Ribbon Task Force, to “*guide us in our support of Dr. Hall.*”



President

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