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Councilmember, District "D"

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Councilmember, District "E"

Mr. Paul Pastorek
Superintendent of Education
State of Louisiana
1201 North Third Street
P.O. Box 94064
Baton Rouge, LA 70804-9064

February 10, 2011

Dear Mr. Pastorek,

We would first like to acknowledge the hard work by BESE and the RSD in enacting essential post-Katrina reforms in education.

In District C, recent concerns regarding the charter assignment of the Colton School on St. Claude Avenue highlight the need for further work, discussion and measured reflection on the issue. Members of the surrounding neighborhoods have tried to be engaged by attending meetings and attempting to have their voices heard. They have been repeatedly rebuffed because the building's assignment had already been decided on, without public input. Mr. Paul Vallas had already promised Colton to KIPP, who in turn promised it to their families. This lack of open community discourse resulted in miscommunications and emotions running high on both sides.

We see the Colton issue as a perfect opportunity for a thoughtful dialogue about the role education plays in our communities and our future. Our public school system currently sees 91% of our children bussed outside of their own neighborhoods. Ours is a disjointed system, out of step with the city's deep connections to its neighborhoods.

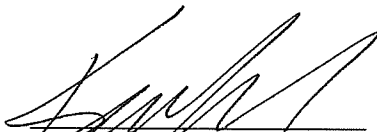
When an administrator for a charter operator tells downtown residents, including families and homeowners who have lived in the area for years, made considerable investments in their neighborhoods, rebuilt homes after Katrina, built their own parks, that they can move uptown and rent an apartment if they do not like their educational options in their own community, the discussion is broken (see Times Picayune Feb. 7, 2011). The passion of these residents for their community and children should not be dismissed and they deserve a voice. "Take us or leave," is not a viable position.

On the other hand, the neighbors are portrayed as anti-KIPP. As you know there are currently two KIPP schools successfully operating in these communities with the support of residents and public servants. If members of the community have a different vision, one that embraces diversity at all levels, they should be allowed to pursue it and create a dialogue; and dialogue cannot occur within a diatribe.

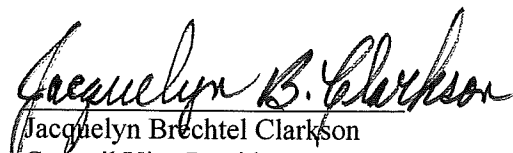
We are respectfully requesting from you a 6 month review period on the Colton school discussion. The school is currently gutted, slated for massive renovations and to reopen in the fall of 2012. We have time for a thoughtful, well-informed discussion on this incredibly important decision. We are proposing that neighborhood groups work with a third party from the RSD to create a community process.

With the Colton school, situated at the intersection of many diverse and historic neighborhoods, we have an extraordinary opportunity to create a school that unites these neighborhoods instead of further dividing them. This decision is too important to be made for expediency sake behind closed doors. Many of the significant and enduring strides made throughout the city over the past five years have been bottom-up initiatives and not top-down decisions by people working outside of the affected communities. We need a real conversation about what the community wants for its own schools. When it comes to our schools and our children, we should be ambitious in our vision, demand excellence and try to provide a landscape of choice for families in every neighborhood.

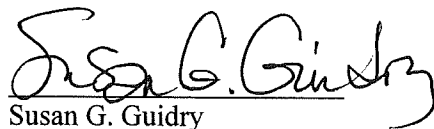
Sincerely,




Kristin Gisléson Palmer
Councilmember, District "C"
New Orleans City Council




Jacquelyn Brechtel Clarkson
Council Vice President
New Orleans City Council



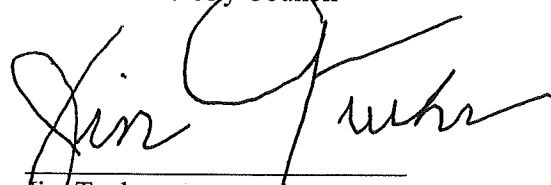
Susan G. Guidry
Councilmember, District "A"
New Orleans City Council



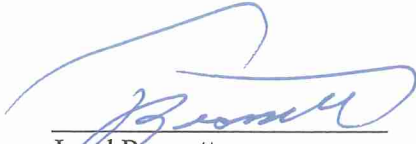
Cynthia Hedge Morrell
Councilmember, District "D"
New Orleans City Council



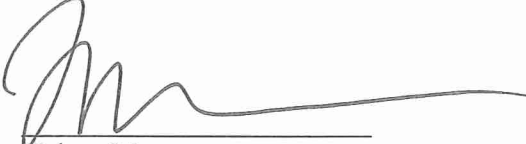
Jon D. Johnson
Councilmember, District "E"
New Orleans City Council




Jim Tucker
Speaker of the House of Representatives
State of Louisiana



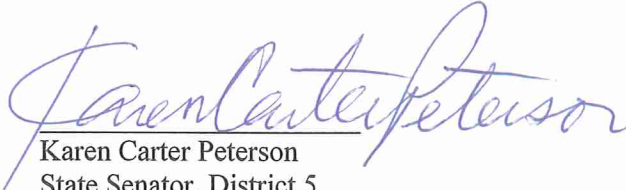
Jared Brossett
State Representative, District 97
State of Louisiana



Helena Moreno
State Representative, District 93
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