

Dear Abramson Charter School Supporters,

On July 17, 2011, *The Times Picayune* (TP) run a story about Abramson Science and Technology Charter School (Abramson). In this story, the TP outlined allegations about Abramson that were misleading and unreliable. Many of these alleged incidents were more than a year old and the school officials responded successfully to the Louisiana Department of Education about these alleged incidents and the case was eventually closed. However the TP reporter published these allegations as if they were new stuff. In addition, the TP reporter omitted to provide truth about what really happened in the school. Therefore, we decided to provide this document to clarify any misconceptions.

In summary, we would like to emphasize the following important points:

- All the allegations mentioned in the article have satisfying answers supported by a number of records including police reports, incident records, and/or signed personal statements.
- Many of these allegations were surfaced after the school fired three disgruntled employees who were disrupting the healthy learning environment.
- State officials asked Abramson to go through corrective action plans. Abramson officials collaboratively and transparently completed the plan.
- The discipline incident between Kindergarten students was handled professionally. Abramson notified parents, the NOPD and the Child Protective Service.

Since the Pelican Foundation began operating Abramson in 2007, School Performance Scores (SPS) have increased 45 points from 33 to 78. Recently, Abramson has received a Certificate of Recognition by the Louisiana Department of Education for improvement in student success.

- ✓ The graduation rate was increased significantly,
- ✓ The dropout rate was reduced significantly,
- ✓ Attendance rate reached 97%.

Purpose of this document is to provide facts regarding recent alleged incidents and to clarify any misconceptions created by several newspaper articles.

Abramson Supporters

www.ActforAbramson.org

Inci Akpinar, vice president of Atlas Texas, flattered Folwell Dunbar with "a number of compliments" and offered him money:

The allegation linking our school with a bribery charge of a state education official over a year ago is far-fetched and outrageous. The person named in the bribery charge has no connection to our school. The article itself states that the Police Department dismissed the incident for a lack of evidence. It is unfortunate that the article portrays our school as "a school which shares apparent ties to Akpinar's firm" even though this person or her firm has no connection with our school let alone "apparent ties".

Board stopped short of closing down the school, giving it a year to shape up under a "corrective action plan", special education students did not have individual education plans, or IEPs.

First of all, the allegations involving services for special education students are old issues that have been resolved. The school administration followed a state mandated corrective action plan for improvements, about which state education department officials informed us that they were successfully met.

We have taken important steps to improve our special education program to serve our children and our community. The complete list of tasks regarding this corrective action plan along with the due dates are given at the end of this document but here is a summary of actions taken;

- Abramson hired a Special Education Department chair that is highly-qualified and competent to evaluate and determine the ongoing needs of special education teachers and students at the school.
- Currently, our special education team consists of a department chair, two special education teachers and two special education teachers' aides.
- Abramson also hired external evaluators/consultants to review our special education program and provided additional recommendations.
- We also entered into an agreement with the RSD to provide additional special education services such as gifted and talented, speech, PT, OT, and ongoing evaluation of the students.
- We also hired The Sun Center to provide professional development opportunities to help our special education teachers and all teachers better meet the needs of our special education students.

There is only one special education teacher for 600 students:

There were 420 students during these visits in 2008-2009 school year. 600 students is the number of expected number of students for next year. In this allegation alone, there is a couple of disinformation: 1) The number of students are exaggerated to make the situation seem worse, 2) Even though the reporter was informed that this issue is a past issue and was corrected along with others within the corrective action plan, he chose not to mention any of those but to repeat the two-year-old issues as if they were new.

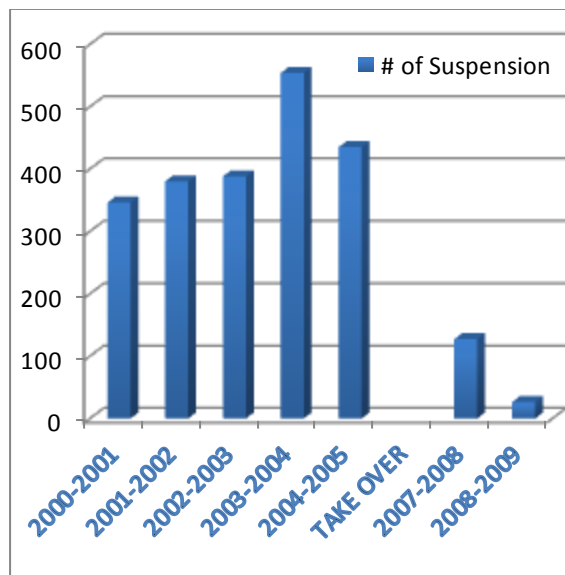
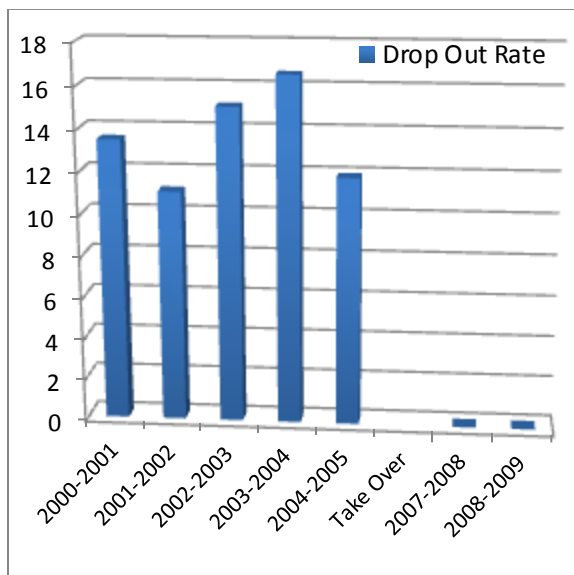
In accordance with the state approved Corrective Action Plan, new special education teachers were hired. Our current Special Education team consists of two teachers and two teacher aides. These changes were praised by Mr. Dunbar himself during our Board Meeting dated October 23, 2011, where he also stated that all issues had been handled and Abramson was among the few good schools in whole

New Orleans district that were both financially and academically sound. The article keeps referring this only as “school claims to have bulked up its special education staff” even though those facts were provided to him.

Among teachers who have spent time in the building, Abramson has earned something of a black-sheep reputation. Many have wondered about the foreign instructors at the school who appear to be of Turkish origin. State records and interviews show some had trouble communicating in English, which has led to speculation that the school may be taking advantage of a visa program intended to bring highly skilled workers into the country.

First of all, the “black sheep” analogy here suggests that the vast majority of teachers were international whereas for the 2010- 2011 academic school year, there were only 6 highly-qualified international teachers out of 50 teachers at Abramson. This is again an example of exaggeration and disinformation to mislead the public.

Second, if the situation is so bad and there is a serious communication problem between students and international math and science teachers, how can you explain the success of Abramson (shown in the tables below) which was admitted by the reporter as well? Why are these allegations coming from only one or two students who might have prepped by the teacher that was fired and felt some grudge against the school, but not from any other 400+ students and their parents?



Third, while the reporter chooses to use the expression “taking advantage of a visa program” when defining the legal process of hiring international teachers as if it is a wrong practice, in fact this is a long process that involves multiple steps that are overseen by three different Federal Entities including Department of Labor, USCIS and the local consular offices. Abramson’s educational program places a strong emphasis on math, science, engineering, and technology and to achieve this, to the extent possible, we hire Math, Science and Technology teachers who hold at least a baccalaureate degree in those areas. We first recruit US workers for these positions by placing job announcements in major

newspapers, radio channels, and internet websites in each city we serve. For positions, we are unable to locate US workers, we recruit international teachers.

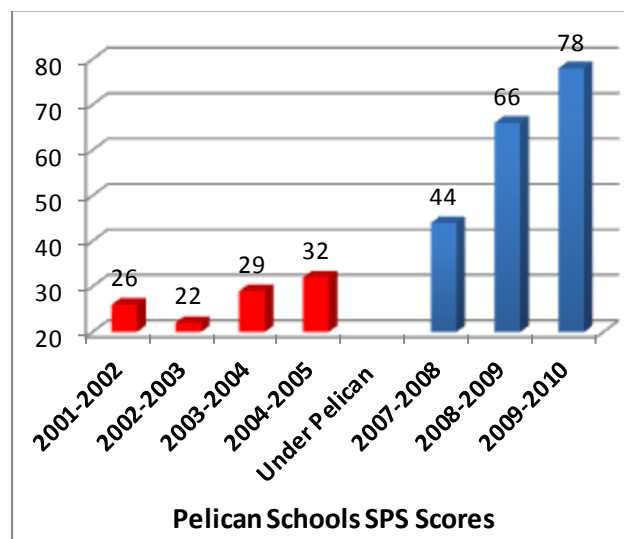
One of her students complained that she had finished her own science fair entry only to be handed a different project by school officials -- one "that could win," DeCoursey said.

We strongly disagree with this accusation. It is certainly not our policy for teachers to prepare science projects for students. In fact, it is our policy that all students - elementary, middle school and high school - participate in the school-wide science fair. We strongly encourage our students to engage in Math and Science learning opportunities both inside and outside the classroom. These projects encourage our students to ask tough scientific questions, brainstorm ideas, conduct research, and ultimately learn new scientific concepts. Throughout this process, our teachers are encouraged to provide proper guidance.

A science fair experiment involves multiple steps such as asking the first question, then constructing a hypothesis, designing, executing, evaluating and writing results and discussion. During this process, students with no prior science fair experience need proper guidance and help. It is our duty to teach our students how to construct a science experiment and guide them instead of doing it for them. Let's not confuse helping and showing with doing.

DeCoursey said the school's special education instructor intervened in her class after the school's principal asked her which students might be in danger of failing the state's LEAP test.

We feel that this allegation does not require an answer but we just wanted to show you how absurd and baseless the accusations are. When the intention is to harm the school, even an innocent act of providing extra help to special education students to better prepare them for the state-mandated test can be characterized as something wrong. It is our promise to our parents that we will continue to do our best to prepare our students for college in a safe, caring, and collaborative atmosphere and will keep going "the extra mile" for our students whenever they need our help.



Abramson teachers on a school-sponsored trip to Turkey received pamphlets on the Gulen Movement.

First of all, our teacher trips are not schools-sponsored and we believe it was intentionally mentioned as such so that readers would be misled. Our school conducts various social events and trips for students, teachers and parents as part of developing an environment that school, teachers and parents work together to improve the lives of our students. We are not in control of what kind of pamphlets or brochures our teachers would receive during those visits since often times people get tons of fliers, pamphlets etc. during those trips.

Redd said she encountered a 5-year-old student from her kindergarten class in a school bathroom, poised in what appeared to be a sexual position with another student who had stripped naked. But she said she hit a wall when she took the incident to the school's administration. When she caught her student pulling the same classmate into a supply closet, Redd said, the school's guidance counselor finally called Child & Family Services.

The detailed explanations of both incidents are given below:

First Incident: This incident was not related to any type of sexual conduct as alleged by the reporter. Two kindergarten students got into a fight when one of them was using the bathroom. The other one wanted to use the bathroom at the same time and they got into arguments and one of them pushed the other. Since they were about using the bathroom, the incident was misleading and it was dealt with the appropriate members of our school and it was not of sexual nature. The teacher involved was informed to revisit her classroom rules/procedures and to notify the parents.

Second Incident: This incident occurred in a storage closet of Ms. Redd's classroom. A 5-year old male kindergarten student had inappropriate contact with another male classmate. After hearing what happened, we contacted New Orleans 7th District Police Department and they dispatched two officers to our school; one female and one male. Both students' parents were also contacted. The police officers talked to us and took statements. One of the parents arrived and began questioning her son with the police officer listening in. Upon hearing what he had to say, the police contacted another department and it was decided that children involved were too young for any police action, but that protective services should be contacted. Protective services were then contacted and both parents met with them. The next day, a representative from Child Protection came to Abramson to meet with the parents involved. The representative met with the student that was in attendance and Ms. Redd.

So, all procedures were followed and monitored by our staff. Since both incidents occurred during Ms. Redd class and the poor classroom management caused especially the second incident, ultimately she was let go. Again, when these incidents occurred, the school administration followed appropriate reporting procedures with the police and the families of the children. Written documents prove that these matters were handled by the rules and regulations.

Abramson advertises a special focus on science and technology, but state officials found lab materials "still boxed, packed and sealed" after two years sitting at the school.

The unopened boxes located in rear corner of the room contain spare microscopes. Additionally we had FOSS kits that were in boxes because they are meant to be stored in respective, subject specific boxes. You may refer to <http://www.fossweb.com/> for details. Also, the lab equipments is used by science teachers for regular Science classes and cleaned every time after use.

A group of ninth-graders said they had straight A's or B's, and said they felt the state's standardized exams were "easy". They described practice on items that were very close to the items on the test."

We strive to provide best possible environment for our student to succeed in their lives including state tests. We believe our dedicated teachers should be commended for that rather than being put under suspicion by hidden implications. Our school uses state released resources for test prep such as Eagle, Louisiana PASS, released test items, LEAP Tutoring lessons, and practice tests. In addition to state resources, teachers are provided with Louisiana content aligned Coach and Buckle Down publications for test prep.

In order to monitor student progress, we administer 4 full-length practice tests published by Coach and Buckle Down testing companies. Students are placed into pull out groups based on their respective areas of weakness. School is offering free Saturday school, along with free transportation and lunch.

They also reported a "general feeling of fear" among the school's staff because of what appeared to be retaliation against teachers, parents and students who had spoken up about the school's practices.

There has been no sign or record of withholding or threatening to withhold a favorable action that could discourage an employee, student or a parent from speaking up, out of more than 100 employees, hundreds of students and parents. It is obvious that the claim of "general feeling of fear" was limited to three former teachers who were let go because of poor performance or other legitimate reasons.

Another group of students was "very vocal about their outrage over the firing of the 'best' teacher"

As explained above she was let go based on serious problems. That group of students might be set to talk in favor of her shows that she continued to be in contact with them. Besides, some parents were complaining about her raising her voice to students too much and several observations of her being unnecessarily and excessively rude to students. So, she clearly wasn't the "best" teacher in the eyes of everybody.

When his team made its initial unplanned visit to the school, they were told the high school students would be leaving for a field trip. But students "indicated that they did not know about the trip," Dunbar wrote, and "a few teachers said it was put together at the last minute. Team members suspect that it was done because of the review."

This trip was already scheduled a week in advance and 10th & 11th graders knew about it, but 9th graders were told a day before, so some of them might not have heard it on time. More importantly, the report itself indicates that the visit was unplanned and there is no possibility that school could know it

beforehand to schedule a last minute field trip to hide high school students as if there could be a benefit for doing that!

In an email dated Feb. 2, 2010, and signed by DeCoursey, Baker and two others, they wrote to Kenneth Campell, then head of the state's charter office: "Though we are fully aware of the significant amount of autonomy given to charter schools, we are now concerned that this autonomy is being abused to the point that students are being forced to engage in unethical acts."

With regards to "unethical acts" claim, it was addressed in corrective action plan and school came up with possible resolutions along with the deadlines for each issue. School successfully implemented the corrective action plan according Mr. Dunbar's official audit in Spring 2011.

We also would like to mention a comment we have been hearing from our parents and many supporters: "Several nearby schools have crime, drugs, teen pregnancy etc. problems but none of those schools are being suspended for those serious problems let alone "unethical acts". Besides, if there was a suspicion of unethical acts it would be investigated and if wrongdoing were to be found, a proper punishment would be given but speculating that put a school operation under suspension is too extreme.

Finally we would like to share an incident: During Congressman Bill Cassidy's visit to one of Pelican schools, one student came before him in tears and made a statement that she couldn't make it to where she was then if this school hadn't been opened and she might already been a teen-mother if it was not for this school.



Congressman Cassidy listens to a student about her experience with the School.