

## Responses to Teacher Town Hall meetings: May 2012

# Teachers want to know what Gov. Jindal's education reforms will mean in their lives and in their classrooms.

## *Did Superintendent of Education John White satisfy their concerns?*

In 2010, the Louisiana Legislature adopted Act 54 to dramatically change the way teachers are evaluated. Those changes begin going into effect in the fall. This year, lawmakers adopted Act 1, which requires virtually all personnel decisions to be based on the evaluation system created in Act 54.

Teachers are concerned about the new laws, and want to understand the impact they will have on public education.

As soon as Gov. Jindal signed this year's new education laws, Superintendent of Education John White announced a series of Teacher Town Halls at which he would ask "educators to work with him on the formulation of a comprehensive plan to make certain these reforms are implemented to achieve one central objective: ensuring all students, at every grade level, are on track to attain a college degree or succeed in a professional career."

Immediately following those meetings, which included in-person visits to teachers at 11 sites and four virtual, online meetings, LFT asked teachers who attended to give us their impressions of the meetings.

What follows is not, in the strictest sense, a scientific survey. It reflects the opinions of 211 teachers who volunteered to discuss their reactions to Superintendent White's meetings.

Included in the survey are responses from some teachers who did not participate in either the Teacher Townhall or virtual online meetings. Their responses are important because of the reasons given for not attending.

The most significant finding is that of the teachers who responded, 65% said they remain "very confused" about the governor's agenda.

### **Important numbers:**

211: The number of responses to the survey

97: The number who attended one of the meetings in schools around the state.

42: The number who took part in one of the superintendent's virtual online conferences.

24: Teachers who did not attend because there was not an event in their area.

42: The number of respondents who were not aware that the meetings were scheduled.

57: Teachers who volunteered whether or not a single answer from Supt. White affected their opinion of the education reform laws.

88: Teachers who shared their insights about the superintendent's presentation.

# By the numbers:

## Responses to short-answer questions on the survey

# 1.

How informed do you feel about the changes coming as a result of Governor Jindal's "bold education reforms" enacted during this legislative session?

|     |     |                               |
|-----|-----|-------------------------------|
| 6   | 3%  | Very well informed            |
| 65  | 32% | Informed but I have questions |
| 131 | 65% | Very confused                 |

# 2.

Did you attend one of Superintendent White's 12 town hall conferences held in schools around Louisiana?

|     |     |     |
|-----|-----|-----|
| 97  | 46% | Yes |
| 114 | 54% | No  |

# 3.

Which best describes your impression of the town hall conference?

|    |     |  |
|----|-----|--|
| 6  | 4%  | Very informative addressing most or all of my concerns and questions |
| 44 | 30% | Informative but inadequate to the task                               |
| 65 | 66% | Unsatisfactory and disappointing                                     |

# 4.

Did you attend one of Superintendent White's virtual online conferences?

|     |     |     |
|-----|-----|-----|
| 42  | 21% | Yes |
| 160 | 79% | No  |

# 5.

If you answered yes, did you find the online conference

|    |     |  |
|----|-----|--|
| 1  | 2%  | Very informative addressing most or all of my concerns and questions |
| 15 | 33% | Informative but inadequate to the task                               |
| 29 | 65% | Unsatisfactory and disappointing                                     |

# 6.

If you did not attend any of the town hall conferences or virtual meetings, why not?

|    |     |   |
|----|-----|---|
| 24 | 31% | There was not one in my area.             |
| 3  | 4%  | I know all I need to know about the laws. |
| 8  | 10% | I was not interested.                     |
| 42 | 55% | I was not aware of the event.             |

Two questions in our survey called for longer answers One of those was:

**Did any single question that was answered by the superintendent affect your opinion of the education reform laws enacted this session? If so, what was it and how were you affected?**

Fifty-seven responders answered the question. Some simply said “no.”

Of the others, however, most were negative in their response. Here are some examples:

- No. I kept hearing, "We don't have it all worked out yet. We are listening to you for your input and advice." The bottom line is this: They don't have a clue other than they want to change so they can say they changed something. It seems it is all for political posturing.
- The answers were very vague with a lot of unknowns! There are a lot of things that need to be worked out!
- My school board member asked him to describe his vision for education in the next 20 years. Supt. White couldn't answer and dodged the question. How can I support anyone who has no idea where they are driving the bus?
- The statistics that were used to support the fact that education in Louisiana is better now than in the late 90s disturbed me... It is all a game to make things look good on paper. Scholarly articles written by people outside of this state claim that this is one of the fallacies behind the reported success of the RSD in New Orleans. I am fearful that once again with this new plan, the numbers will be manipulated to prove the desired results.
- He never mentioned how he will deal with the discipline problems that we are facing.
- I was left with even more questions than when I arrived...He seems more like a P.R. guy rather than an education activist.
- Yes, many of his answers seemed to tell me we are changing, but not sure of the details. These changes should not be implemented until we know what the changes will be.
- He talked for 5 minutes, but never answered my question. I left confused and frustrated, but he did stress that there would be workshops for me when I was deemed ineffective.
- I was convinced that the Common Core standards can be a positive framework for planning instruction in Louisiana.
- No answer to how regulations will stop athletic and other recruiting by private/catholic schools.
- Even though Mr. White promised he would answer all questions, the superintendent did not answer most questions. He tended to "skirt" around the more controversial questions.
- He continued to try to assure teachers that the goal was not to fire teachers, but could never give a sat-

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isfactory answer of why their evaluator would always be objective

- I was left with even more questions than when I arrived. Superintendent White wasted an incredible amount of time providing answers to questions which felt more like he was trying to sell me a product that I had no desire to buy. He seems more like a P.R. guy rather than an education activist.
- It confirmed my belief that this reform was done too quickly, not planned adequately with little feedback from teachers
- No, in fact, he only answered part of my question I submitted via email.
- Yes, many of his answers seemed to tell me we are changing, but not sure of the details. These changes should not be implemented until we know what the changes will be.
- Supt. White told a school board member that all students--- whose parents received a state tax deduction---would take the LEAP test!!! He doesn't understand the state tax system!!!!

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- I asked him why were the students and parents not held accountable for the I-LEAP scores like I was as a 5th grade teacher. He talked for 5 minutes, but never answered my question.
- When someone told him that she had been to some D schools and that the teachers there are doing all the things he had listed in his slideshow as characteristics of " good teachers," he said, "No, only the teachers at good schools do those things." I was shocked and angry. He has a very low opinion of teachers who teach at the schools where they are needed the most. Shame on him.
- He had a set agenda. Only answered questions that he wanted to. He had pat answers and ignored other questions.
- I thought he was evasive about how the law would affect teachers who teach non-traditional students or in an alternative school.
- I asked about the Comprehensive Common Core Curriculum if and when will it be ready? He did not answer my question directly. If he was asked a question "off the script", it seemed he was unsure of the answer or made it up on the spot.
- He could not deny that any child who refused to take the test would result in a teacher getting a rating of ineffective for themselves. Nor could he explain any way around this type of issue that some teachers may face.

**My school board member asked him to describe his vision for education in the next 20 years. Supt. White couldn't answer and dodged the question. How can I support anyone who has no idea where they are driving the bus?**

The second question which called for longer answers was

## **“Are there any insights you would like to share about Superintendent White’s presentation?”**

**Eighty-eight respondents provided us with an answer. Here are some of them:**

- Everyone is confused. He was very vague in his explanation. I emailed several questions to the online meetings and none of them were answered.
- Mr. White carefully chose which questions to answer. His presentation covered a lot of material in a short time. He did field lots of questions, but he chose which ones to answer.
- It was such a contradiction of what has been said in the newspapers and media. He's either lying to us, or lying to them. Even better is how he praises us for our strides and accomplishments (which he even admitted to) by taking away our rights and our funding.
- He is a politician not an educator. His opinions are biased and have a hidden agenda.
- I left the meeting, confused, and very unsure of where we are headed. Some of my colleagues asked questions at the meeting, but didn't understand the vague answers... We are left to flounder, hoping that the STATE will be ready this summer to help us prepare, but we know that we would do a much better job this upcoming school year if we could have been trained BEFORE we step into the classroom in August.
- He shared what he wanted us to hear, but there were still major issues not addressed to anyone's satisfaction. I am not against change. I just think that much of this has not been thought out fully and that we are trying to implement too much too quickly. Teachers will basically do whatever you ask of them as long as they know the expectations, and right now there are still too many unknowns
- No matter what teachers say or do this untried, untested, looks good on paper plan is going to be put into place. A whole generation of students will be lost before they realize their mistake and try something else. Why aren't they listening to teachers?
- Anytime a tough question was asked of Mr. White, he would take the microphone away from the participant. He was very vague.
- I was glad to see Superintendent White in person. I thought he was professional and reasonable in his approach to providing us information and the facts, not slanted through teacher "hearsay" and politicians. He was willing to answer all questions and understood some had a different philosophy. It was clear he was committed to his/the legislature's philosophy.

**If he was really interested in the input of teachers around the state he would have had these meetings before the Legislative session began, not after the bills had already passed. I fully believe that these meetings were window dressing - to make it look like he and the governor cared what we thought.**

**He's cute :)**

- He speaks a good game, but there were no answers...He skirted around, sounding intelligent, but no absolute answers were given.
- I wish he would listen more and not just carry out his agenda
- Expert in articulate vaguery.
- It has not been thoroughly thought through. He is clueless to realities of the real classroom situations.
- I think it is unthinkable for the governor to place someone in charge who exhibits so little understanding of our needs and challenges.
- He seemed like a used car sales man manipulating numbers to tell the story he wanted us to believe in.
- He should stop changing his story. He should stick to one version of the truth! He said the new laws empower teachers and local school boards.
- It seemed like he answered only the questions he wanted to answer. He left off a key part of one of the questions I sent in via email.
- Will he, and other appointed/elected officials be held to the same standards as us? When will money be put into the state budget for teachers who meet "merit pay" standards to get raises?
- Very confusing, talked in circles, did not thoroughly answer questions and kept referring to his email address
- Superintendent White seemed to think he had all the answers to everything, but never answered the

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tough questions. He talked around the answers. The other question I never got a turn to ask was if the student in the charter school is required to take the LEAP, how do we know that the charter school gave him what he needed to pass the LEAP? If there is no accountability for the charter school, where is the state's accountability to that student who was placed there?

- He is an excellent talker and knows how to persuade and coax you to believe the new laws are adequate to change education.
- What a mess. I hope public education survives.
- Several people asked valid, well-stated questions that weren't truly answered. I felt as though he quickly brushed

over the difficult issues and just repeated much of the same jargon that we've been hearing for months.

- He's very sharp, but dodged at few questions by our teachers and some principals. Typical, sticking to the script.

- I felt that he was evasive in answering questions . He skirted issues when the questions were difficult and pointed ones. He gave opinions and denied facts. Everyone left feeling unsatisfied.
- Why were there no meetings in Baton Rouge?
- I felt that questions were not answered directly, I left feeling that it was all more politics and not about our children.
- It seemed to me that it was just a PR stunt.
- Most of what he says is either distorting of the facts or outright lies. Unfortunately, people who know the truth are afraid to speak up because of the vindictive nature of the Jindal administration. I would be afraid to sign my name to this.
- His answers were polite yet nebulous. Of course the rhetoric centered on what will be "best for the children" the assumption being that bureaucrats can define "best" better than classroom teachers can.
- If he was really interested in the input of teachers around the state he would have had these meetings before the Legislative session began, not after the bills had already passed. I fully believe that these meetings were window dressing - to make it look like he and the governor cared what we thought.
- He is a gentle and persuasive speaker, yet I don't trust him.
- He's cute :)
- Please have REAL dialogue, not something you manufactured. Listen to our concerns.
- He is a political bureaucrat trying to talk as smoothly as possible.
- There were not any insights from the presentation, but after extensive research, it is obvious that the Superintendent has a track record for pushing through this program, making changes that jeopardize teachers and public schools and then moving on 2 or 3 years later.

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- Yes, the teachers need to be left alone to teach....stop trying to break the union!!
- It was clearly a public relations push rather than an honest exchange of information and questioning.
- It was well scripted!