



LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Ms. Lily Eskelsen García
President
National Education Association
1201 16th St., NW
Washington, DC 20036-2930

November 21, 2016

Dear Ms. Eskelen García,

I write in reference to comments attributed to you in an interview published by the Pacific Northwest *Inlander* Friday, November 18.

Specifically, I am calling on you to retract comments you made regarding the rebuilding of school facilities in New Orleans in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. Your comments are not only inaccurate but also insensitive to the city's arduous recovery from a horrific tragedy.

In the interview, you state the following: "When Katrina hit, it hit everybody's schools ... They rebuilt and modernized all the white suburb public schools. They ended up better than before and they bulldozed the public schools in the black neighborhoods."

Ms. Eskelsen García, while we may disagree on some matters of policy, we can agree that leaders in our field are responsible for adhering to facts. Here are the facts:

- Public school enrollment in the city of New Orleans is 83 percent African-American and 8 percent white.
- In the time since Hurricane Katrina, the state and federal governments have invested \$1.2 billion in public school reconstruction in the city of New Orleans, with ongoing investment continuing.
- This has resulted in 26 brand new public school buildings and 31 renovated public school buildings, with 23 additional projects to be completed soon.
- By 2019, every single public school student in New Orleans, no matter race nor family income, will attend a new or renovated facility.

Your statements in the *Inlander* contain other inaccuracies. You state that there are no public schools in New Orleans, while Louisiana law specifically identifies that charter schools are public schools. You also diminish the academic progress made by New Orleans schools, validated by a

recent peer-reviewed study in which researchers state that they “are not aware of any other districts that have made such large improvements in such a short time.”

While your misunderstandings on these issues could be chalked up to perspective or semantics, however, there is no missing the flagrant inaccuracy in your assessment of which school buildings were rebuilt, and for which students, after Hurricane Katrina.

So as to clear the record, I call on you to retract these damaging comments immediately. I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John White", written in a cursive style.

John White

State Superintendent of Education

Louisiana Believes