

2010 Mayoral Election

## Defining the Role of City Hall in K-12 Public Education in New Orleans

With a mayoral election on the horizon, New Orleans is looking ahead to its next political chapter and a new stage in its recovery and development. Public education remains a critical element of our progress, yet the system is still deeply in flux and in need of sustainable, transformative leadership. The system of public schools operates independently of the mayor's office; instead it is collectively run by the Orleans Parish School Board, the Recovery School District, individual charter boards, and the Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education.

The Scott S. Cowen Institute for Public Education Initiatives at Tulane University ("Cowen Institute") is often asked what role and authority the Mayor of New Orleans actually wields in our city's public education landscape. Through the mayor's various official powers as well as his/her political influence, he or she can actually do quite a lot to impact education and foster positive development for our city's children, families, and communities. The mayor has authority in several areas that directly affect our children, including crime prevention, social services, playgrounds, and economic development. The mayor can also use his/her political capital to serve as a champion for our youth and advocate for their best interests while being impartial among the various school governing bodies.

Specifically, the Mayor of New Orleans can do the following:

- Coordinate the New Orleans Master Plan with the School Facilities Master Plan
- Enforce truancy laws to get school-aged children off the streets and back into schools
- Support the recommendations made by the Afterschool Partnership to support youth

Additional information on each recommendation can be found on the following pages.

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### **Scott S. Cowen Institute for Public Education Initiatives at Tulane University**

The Cowen Institute is an action-oriented think tank that informs and advances solutions – through policies, programs, and partnerships – to eliminate the challenges impeding the success of K-12 education in New Orleans and beyond. It also serves as a clearinghouse for charter and traditional public schools in Orleans Parish to directly access the myriad of experts and resources available at Tulane. Our work is focused in four key areas: Applied Research, Public Policy, University-Based Initiatives, and College Readiness Programs. If you are interested in learning more about the Cowen Institute, please visit <http://education.tulane.edu>, call 504-274-3690, or stop by 200 Broadway Street, Suite 108, New Orleans, Louisiana 70118.

## Defining the Role of City Hall in K-12 Education:

### #1: Coordination of the New Orleans Master Plan with the School Facilities Master Plan

Two major planning efforts are being currently finalized or implemented in New Orleans: the *New Orleans Master Plan and Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance* and the *School Facilities Master Plan for Orleans Parish*. Information on each follows:

#### New Orleans Master Plan and Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance

- Has not been presented to the New Orleans City Council for consideration as of January 2010
- If adopted, will guide the future physical development of the city
- Seeks to improve “livability” for all neighborhoods in New Orleans

#### School Facilities Master Plan for Orleans Parish

- Adopted by the Orleans Parish School Board and the Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education in November 2008
- Will guide construction and renovation of all public school buildings in New Orleans for the next decade
- Identifies location for approximately 85 schools, some in new locations
- Will cost \$1.65 billion to fully implement (\$700 million has been secured)

Because of the important role that schools can play in the vitality of a community, the activities governed by one plan will impact the other. However, no formal effort has been made to coordinate these plans. The next mayor should look for ways to integrate these two plans for the following reasons:

- **Coordination can maximize city and educational resources.** The physical and social capital that go into building excellent schools can be leveraged to help revitalize neighborhoods. This is particularly true in neighborhoods that are still rebuilding and recovering from Hurricane Katrina.
- **Making schools the centers of communities can help decrease transportation time and costs for families and schools.** Right now, public schools in New Orleans pay two to three times the state average for transportation. Synchronizing neighborhood development under the city’s master plan with the school facilities master plan has the potential to save money (which could in turn be used for educational purposes) by reducing the number of miles that students travel to get to school.
- **Improvements made to the area around schools can benefit more than just students.** Programs such as the federal Safe Routes to School program provide funding to improve walking and biking infrastructure near schools. Such enhancements can benefit not only students going to and from school but also members of the community.

## Defining the Role of City Hall in K-12 Education:

### #2: Enforcement of truancy laws to get school-aged children off the streets and back in schools

Truancy is a widespread problem in the City of New Orleans. About 20% of high school students in the Recovery School District (RSD) miss high school on an average day. That's nearly 800 teenagers. Youths who are truant are at greater risk for dropping out of school and not graduating from high school. There is a direct link between student achievement and regular school attendance; those school districts with the highest truancy rates have the lowest achievement rates.

#### Louisiana Truancy Laws

According to state law, juveniles seven and not older than seventeen must be enrolled in school (public or private). Juveniles who are not in school during the hours of 9:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m., are in violation of the City Truancy Ordinance and will be picked-up by New Orleans Police Department and transported to the truancy center. Seventeen year olds will be issued a summons and returned to the school in which they are enrolled. If a juvenile is picked-up for truancy three times within a calendar year, the parent will receive a summons to municipal court, and fined a fee of \$500 and 20 hours of community service. For more information, visit <http://www.cityofno.com/portal.aspx?portal=50&tabid=54>

#### Who enforces Truancy Laws?

The first body responsible for enforcing truancy laws is the school district, which works in conjunction with the City of New Orleans. School officials - such as school truancy officers, teachers, and school principals-refer cases to Juvenile Court. The list of procedures can be found online at <http://www.rsdl.net/StudentsAndFamilies/TruancyPrevention.aspx>.

The Truancy Center is located at 639 Rendon Street. The Center works in collaboration with the RSD, the City of New Orleans Municipal Court, and a number of nonprofit organizations. Its main mission is to enforce truancy laws, support parents by encouraging student attendance, and ensuring the proper procedures are followed when a truant arrives at the Center.

#### What can the Mayor do to help solve the truancy problem in New Orleans?

- Work with the RSD to provide more police support to truancy officers. Currently, the RSD only has between two and four officers to enforce truancy laws. Additional manpower is needed.
- Engage New Orleans citizens to become a part of community policing to help keep young people in school. Set up a hotline that is highly publicized that allows citizens who see a young person whom they believe is skipping school to call and report it. Have a truant officer dispatched to that location to interview the child and take action accordingly.

## Defining the Role of City Hall in K-12 Education:

**#3:** Support the principles in the “10 for 2010” campaign for youth that is led by the Afterschool Partnership

The City of New Orleans and our schools and school districts must work together to provide holistic support to our city’s young people. In the past few years, we have begun to reform our educational system and our students have made great progress in academic achievement. However, the children of our city have many social, recreational, and health needs that are unmet. Furthermore, research has shown that after-school programs have a positive impact on academic achievement. While the mayor has no direct authority over the schools, he or she can have a significant impact on what our children are able to achieve in school – by making sure that the City’s resources are maximized to meet the social, recreational, and health needs of our children.

The Afterschool Partnership, a coalition of most of the afterschool organizations in the city, has created a list of ten recommendations that urge candidates to prioritize youth during the 2010 mayoral campaign. By implementing these recommendations, the next Mayor of New Orleans can have a significant impact on the lives of our city’s youth.

The Afterschool Partnership’s 10 for 2010 Campaign Platform can be found online at <http://gnoafterschool.org/what-we-do/policy/10-for-2010>.