A young girl with dark, curly hair, wearing a pink sleeveless polo shirt, is sitting at a desk in a classroom. She is smiling and has her right hand raised high in the air. In front of her is an open book and a white pencil. In the background, other students are visible at their desks, and a green chalkboard is behind them.

The State of Public Education in New Orleans

2008 REPORT

A report prepared by:

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

In partnership with:

The Greater New Orleans Education Foundation
The New Orleans City Council Education Committee

The 2008 State of Public Education in New Orleans report was prepared by:

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

The Scott S. Cowen Institute for Public Education Initiatives at Tulane University, founded in March 2007, operates as an action-oriented think-tank that actively addresses the issues impeding student achievement by designing and advancing innovative, high-impact policies and programs. 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.

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH:

The Greater New Orleans Education Foundation

The Greater New Orleans Education Foundation (GNOEF), a nonprofit organization of business, education, civic, and political leaders, was formed in March 1998 in response to the city's need to reform its failing public schools. The purpose of GNOEF is to ensure a high-quality education for every child in the five-parish region of New Orleans with a primary focus on Orleans Parish.

The New Orleans City Council Education Committee

The New Orleans City Council Education Committee seeks to offer assistance and input to local agencies and school districts to maximize the quality of public education throughout Orleans Parish.

April 2008

In the more than two and a half years since Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans, a fundamentally different public education system has emerged. This new system of schools, while still showing signs of distress, offers our city the opportunity to transform education and improve achievement for every student in every public school.

Never before has so much national and local attention and support been focused on public schools in New Orleans. To take full advantage of this unique opportunity for radical change, we must come together as a city and support actions, initiatives, policies, and plans that will significantly improve the educational opportunities for every public school student regardless of their race, socioeconomic background, or neighborhood.

The 2008 *State of Public Education in New Orleans* report provides information about how well the current system of schools is progressing, based on available quantitative data as well as public opinion. It also offers a set of successes that schools have achieved over the past year and the key challenges that still face public education in New Orleans. Finally, the report outlines the progress that schools have made on a series of recommendations that were set out in last year's report. We hope this year's report will continue to serve as a definitive source of information about public education in New Orleans for policy makers, educators, parents, nonprofits, the media, and the community at large.

We have heard from many community members that the silver lining of Hurricane Katrina is the opportunity to rethink, rebuild, and reinvent our public schools so that all students are provided with a high-quality academic and developmental experience. The future of New Orleans rests in its children—therefore, it is our moral, civic, and economic responsibility to improve public schools for the next generation. This goal will not be achieved overnight, but with patience and perseverance it is possible.

Thank you for letting us be a part of this ongoing transformation effort, and thanks to all of you who have dedicated yourselves to supporting and improving public education in New Orleans.

Sincerely,



Scott S. Cowen
President
Tulane University



Robert "Bob" Reily
Chair
Greater New Orleans
Education Foundation



Cynthia Hedge-Morrell
Chair, Education Committee
New Orleans City Council

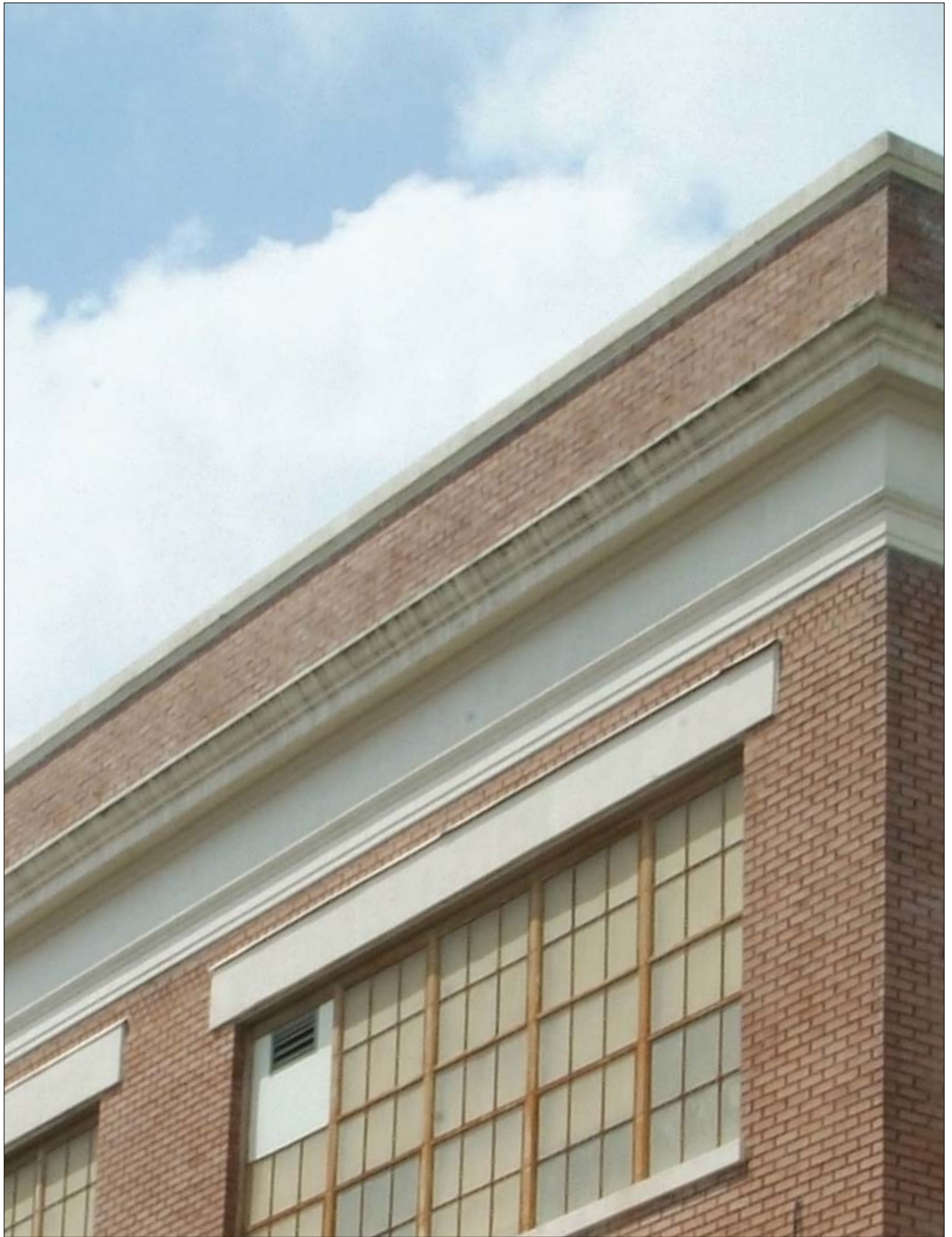


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The State of Public Education in New Orleans 2008 REPORT

Executive Summary



Hurricane Katrina's landfall on August 29, 2005, and the subsequent flooding of New Orleans, presented the New Orleans public school system with both tragedy and opportunity.

While no one would have desired such damage and disruption to the lives of students, parents, teachers, and staff, the storm offered the people of New Orleans a rare opportunity to remake one of the nation's lowest-performing public school systems. Prior to Katrina, the community's investment in its public schools was low. Parental and community involvement was minimal, test scores were among the nation's worst, and facilities had long been neglected.

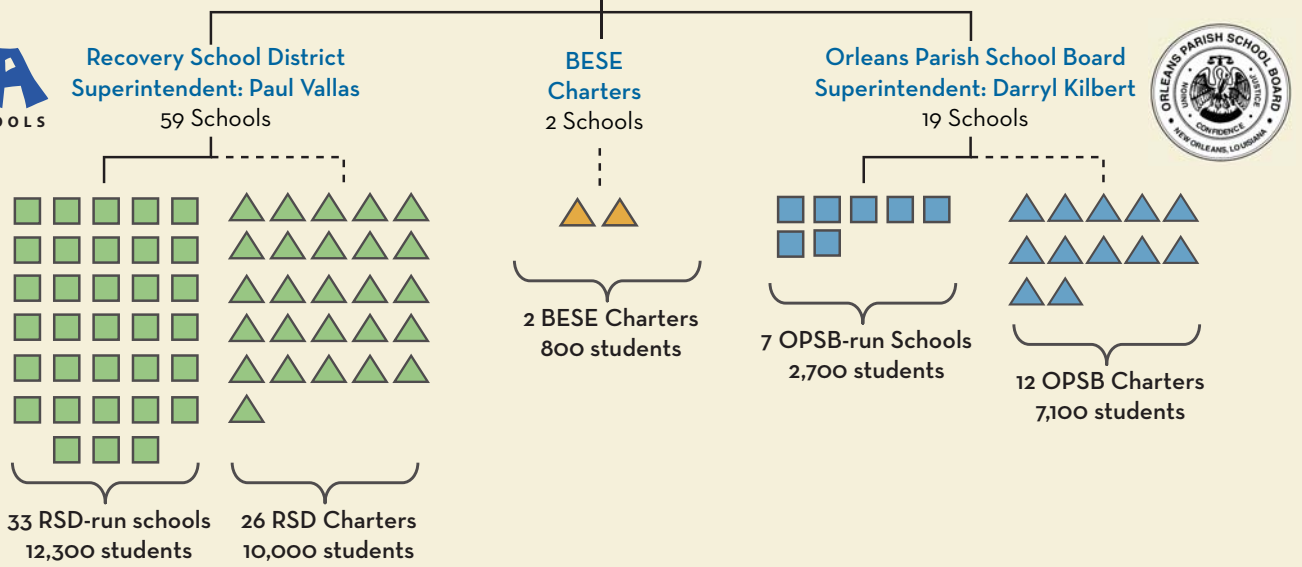
Before Hurricane Katrina, the Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB) operated 127 schools that enrolled over 65,000 students. A vastly different system has emerged since the storm:

- In November 2005, the legislature expanded the state's Recovery School District (RSD) to take control of over 100 OPSB schools performing below the state average.
- The RSD reopened schools initially only as charters, schools run by nonprofits that receive public money and provide free education.
- Also in November 2005, the first OPSB-run school reopened. A number of OPSB charter schools opened soon after.
- In the spring of 2006, the RSD opened its first district-run schools.
- In all cases, opening schools in the 2005-06 school year after Katrina was a difficult and chaotic ordeal.

As a result, the public education landscape in New Orleans has several new and, in some cases, unique features:

- Eighty public schools in New Orleans are run by 29 different operators, including the OPSB, the RSD, and 27 charter school operators.
- Fifty-seven percent of public school students now attend charter schools, more than any other urban school district in the country.
- In most cases, parents now have the choice to send their children to any public school in New Orleans where they can gain admission, regardless of where they live.

Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) & Louisiana Department of Education
 State Superintendent: Paul Pastorek
80 Schools - 32,900 Students



Data from February 2008

Though the system of schools has experienced radical change, the context in which it operates remains similar to before Katrina, and new challenges have emerged:

- Public school students in New Orleans are overwhelmingly poor. Eighty-three percent of students are eligible to receive free or reduced lunches compared to 63 percent statewide.
- New Orleans' overall population is approximately 63 percent minority, while public school students are nearly 95 percent minority—primarily African-American.
- Across the systems, but especially in the RSD-run and RSD charter schools, the majority of students are well below grade level.
- Public schools have a high percentage of special education students, many of whom have not been evaluated.
- Many students have unaddressed mental health needs due to their experiences during and after Hurricane Katrina.

During the previous school year, public schools faced a number of challenges as they tried to reopen and serve their students:

- School buildings, severely damaged by Katrina and years of neglect, were in disrepair and had few functioning bathrooms or kitchens.
- Most schools did not have adequate supplies of books, classroom equipment, and technology.
- A persistent teacher shortage, particularly in RSD-run schools, led to large classes and instability for students.
- RSD-run schools had significant problems with basic security and school discipline.
- Differences in school quality that existed before the storm were further highlighted after Katrina by the state's decision to create separate districts for high- and low-performing schools.

Successes:

The 2007-08 school year began more smoothly than the previous year. We have identified the following as successes achieved since the end of last school year:

- 1) Strong new leadership has emerged at the state and local levels.** Noted school reformer Paul Vallas was recruited by the new state Superintendent of Education, Paul Pastorek, to lead the RSD. The experienced teams they have put in place have improved RSD operations and financial controls and created a sense of momentum and urgency. In addition, more charter schools now have strong leaders and effective board members. Finally, under Superintendent Darryl Kilbert, the OPSB received its first clean audit in four years.
- 2) School buildings have been brought up to basic standards and have significantly more supplies.** In the RSD, whose schools had the most storm-damaged buildings, most bathrooms and kitchens were repaired over the summer. In addition, a number of modular classrooms were built to ensure sufficient capacity. Though challenges remain, students and teachers across the systems note improved facilities and better access to supplies and technology.
- 3) A sufficient number of teachers were hired for the 2007-08 school year.** The RSD and many charter schools worked with several nonprofits to recruit and hire a record number of teachers over the summer. This effort, combined with lower-than-expected student enrollment, allowed schools to keep their class sizes close to 20 students during the current school year.
- 4) The community is much more involved in schools than before Katrina.** Teachers and school leaders from across operators routinely note that community involvement in schools is at an all-time high. Charter schools especially are benefiting from diverse groups of New Orleans residents that have become charter board members.
- 5) Overall, there is a sense among students, teachers, school leaders, and community members that there have been significant improvements in most schools since last school year.** Though still a problem, discipline in RSD-run schools has improved. Students across school operators note that teachers care more, there is more of everything from art supplies to extracurricular activities, and they feel safer at school. Though these improvements are relative to the low baseline of last year, they are nonetheless noticeable and significant.

Challenges:

Though there have been many successes this school year, challenges remain. We have identified the following as the most pressing challenges facing public schools:

- 1) Many teachers do not have the skills or support they need to teach a diverse student population with very high needs.** In RSD-run schools, 60 percent of teachers have less than two years of teaching experience. In the same schools, 85 percent of students are two or more years below grade level. With many inexperienced teachers and students with significant academic challenges, more support is needed to ensure that school staff can meet the needs of students. Though less extreme, these problems extend to other school operators as well.
- 2) Current levels of school spending cannot be sustained. Both the RSD and the OPSB are spending more per student than they will be able to receive from regular per-pupil funding in the coming years.** In the OPSB, some of this extra money is funding one-time recovery costs. In the RSD, operating funds are being spent on one-time capital costs while the district waits for federal reimbursements. The RSD acknowledges, however, that it cannot maintain certain initiatives that are paid for with one-time revenues, including: low student-teacher ratios, new technology, and extended day and summer school programs.
- 3) Special education and mental health services are severely lacking.** Teachers and principals routinely note that they do not have adequate funds or expertise to serve special education students. In addition, most teachers and principals also say that mental health services for students are inadequate, especially given the stress caused by Hurricane Katrina.
- 4) There is poor cooperation among schools and districts.** Significant tension exists between charter schools and their districts, between charter and traditional schools, and directly between the two districts. Tensions commonly arise over access to resources, student recruitment, buildings, and service provision. This situation prevents opportunities for cooperation where shared services could solve common problems.
- 5) There is a lack of timely and accessible school information for parents, students, and the public.** Parents rank information about school options very low in this year's survey. In addition, without the ability to track students across the city's system of schools, it is impossible to know how parents and students are using school choice.

Conclusion:

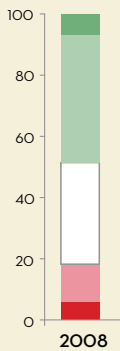
While many challenges remain, promising results can be seen.

Other troubled school districts across the country have been able to address significant shortcomings in their public schools. These efforts required dedication, strong leadership, and sustained funding. Several of these systems saw strong results in student performance only after many years. However, early indicators of success should be observed. These include parent and teacher perceptions of improvement, increased student engagement and attendance, and some incremental improvements in test scores. So far we are able to observe that teachers, parents, and students feel that the public schools in New Orleans are improving.

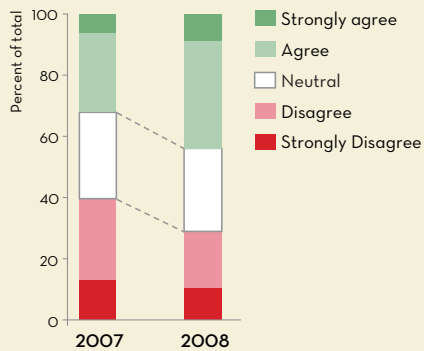
That is a definite step in the right direction.

More people agree that public schools are better compared to last year and to before Katrina

I think public schools are better this year vs. last year



I think public schools are better now than they were before Katrina



Note: For comparison purposes, student responses were removed



Overview of Methodology



Through this report, the Cowen Institute for Public Education Initiatives, the Greater New Orleans Education Foundation, and the New Orleans City Council Education Committee hope to initiate a call to action on behalf of public education to political leaders, parents, educators, and the community by:

- Providing a thorough and accurate description of the public education landscape in New Orleans and how it works;
- Identifying key school system successes and challenges;
- Ensuring that the voices of teachers, parents, students, and administrators are heard; and
- Chronicling how public education has changed over time in New Orleans.

This report does not provide recommendations but instead identifies the progress that has been made during the current school year and highlights ongoing challenges and problems. It serves as an open and anonymous forum for everyone who interacts with public schools in New Orleans. In order to conduct the research for this report, Cowen Institute researchers, with support from the Boston Consulting Group, used the following methods:

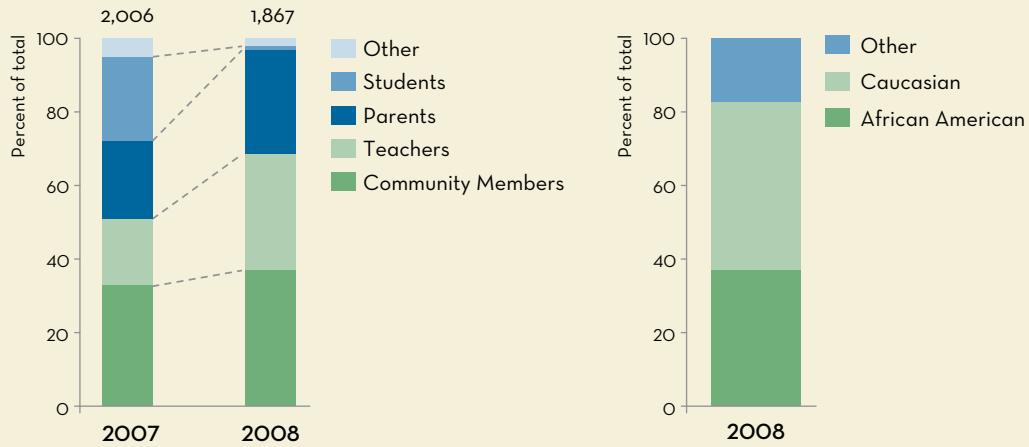
One-on-one interviews:

- Thirty out of 80 public school principals were interviewed with help from students at the Harvard Business School.
- More than 20 additional interviews were conducted with elected officials, school district leaders, leaders of education nonprofits, charter board members, and other community leaders involved with public education.
- The interviews were based on a standardized set of open-ended questions that left substantial opportunity for further discussion of ideas and thoughts.

Focus groups:

- Eleven focus groups were conducted with teachers from a wide variety of school operators. The only type of school not represented in the teacher focus groups was Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) charters.
- Thirteen focus groups were conducted with public school students from a variety of operators. The only type of school not represented in the student focus groups was BESE charters.
- Two focus groups were conducted with school principals and assistant principals.
- One focus group was conducted with neighborhood association leaders involved in public education.
- Focus groups generally included six to 12 individuals with a moderator and a note-taker. For improved standardization, only four moderators were used across all focus groups.

The 2008 survey has more responses from teachers and parents and fewer responses from students than the 2007 survey



Survey:

- A survey was distributed in online and paper formats between January and March 2008. The online version was sent out to school principals, education policymakers, community leaders and neighborhood associations to distribute. The paper version was distributed at nearly every public school in New Orleans via drop-boxes. Cowen Institute researchers also conducted intercept surveys of public school parents outside of five geographically diverse supermarkets in New Orleans over the course of two weekends. Due to erratic responses received from students during last year’s survey, students were not actively targeted with the survey and instead were engaged through focus groups.
- The survey received 1,867 responses.
- Teachers: 585 teachers responded, 51 percent of whom were African-American. There were sufficiently large samples from teachers for Recovery School District (RSD)-run schools, Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB)-run schools, RSD charters, and OPSB charters.
- Parents: 529 parents responded, 54 percent of whom were African-American. There were sufficiently large samples from parents for RSD-run schools, RSD charters, and OPSB charters.

Requests for school data were made to the following organizations:

- Louisiana Department of Education;
- Recovery School District;
- Orleans Parish School Board;
- Algiers Charter School Association; and
- A number of nonprofit school support organizations working in New Orleans.

In the fall, an addendum to this report will be released analyzing 2008 LEAP test scores to understand what progress has been made this year in terms of student achievement.

History and Background



1840-62: The Early Years

The first New Orleans public school opened in January 1842 on Julia Street between Magazine and Tchoupitoulas. Early New Orleans advocates for free public schools were influenced by Horace Mann, the first Massachusetts secretary of education and a pioneer of American public education. John Angier Shaw, a Boston native and Horace Mann's friend, was the first school superintendent in the city's second municipality, an area encompassing the American sector upriver from the French Quarter.¹ Prior to the Civil War, a number of divisions within the population led to political conflicts over public education. French Creoles wanted to maintain a separate system of French language schools. Newer Catholic and Jewish immigrants, who arrived in large numbers in the 1840s and 1850s, objected to the use of Protestant prayers in the American sector's public schools. New Orleans' free African-Americans, who numbered 11,000 in 1860, were denied access to public education along with the city's 14,000 slaves.²

1862-77: War, Opportunity, and Resistance

When New Orleans surrendered to Union troops in 1862, Union troops encouraged the public schools to reopen but also created a school system for freed slaves. In 1868, a new state constitutional convention dominated by newly enfranchised African-Americans and white Republicans adopted a constitution that required schools to be established on a common basis without segregation based on race. This led to a number of schools in New Orleans operating as integrated institutions in the years 1871-74. New private schools, however, were also established during this period to take in white students whose parents would not send their children to integrated schools.

Continued resistance to integration, combined with political resistance to Republican rule, led to the formation of white supremacist organizations opposed to school integration. An attempt to further integrate schools in 1874 led to white mob violence, which in turn led to a decline in the number

of African-American children attending integrated schools. When Union troops were pulled out of Louisiana in 1877, schools were again segregated along racial lines.³

1877-1950: Separate but Unequal

Following Reconstruction, school enrollment for white students continued to grow and nearly doubled between 1878 and 1910. In the same period African-American enrollment remained flat; African-American students were routinely restricted to the lower grades and had no access to high school.⁴

A spurt of school building occurred between 1910 and 1940, and African-American enrollment began increasing dramatically. McDonogh #35, the first African-American high school in New Orleans, opened in 1917 after African-American citizens' groups put significant pressure on the school board. From 1910 to 1940, African-American enrollment more than quadrupled while white enrollment increased by 50 percent. McDonogh #35, however, would remain the city's only African-American high school until Booker T. Washington opened in 1942.⁵

Over the course of the post-Reconstruction decades, a dual system of schools emerged. White schools were more numerous, better financed and kept in better condition. African-American schools languished, with fewer resources and overcrowded classrooms.⁶

1954-70: Social Upheaval, Halting Change

After the Supreme Court's 1954 *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision removed legal protections for school segregation, the Louisiana legislature passed several bills to keep public schools segregated. A.P. Tureaud, a civil rights lawyer, filed a suit against the Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB) to desegregate the city's schools based on the *Brown* decision. In 1956, federal judges ruled the state legislature's segregation bills unconstitutional and overturned the school board's segregation policy.⁷

Once its appeals were exhausted, the Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB) decided to accept applications from African-American students for individual school transfers to white schools, finally winnowing 137 applications down to four. On November 14, 1960, four African-American girls protected by police and federal marshals walked past shouting mobs and integrated the first white schools since Reconstruction.⁸

Angered by the slow pace of desegregation, the NAACP went back to the courts to challenge the school board's desegregation process. A federal judge ordered a speeded-up process that officially desegregated schools through the 12th grade by the 1969-70 school year.⁹

1970-2005: The School System of Last Resort

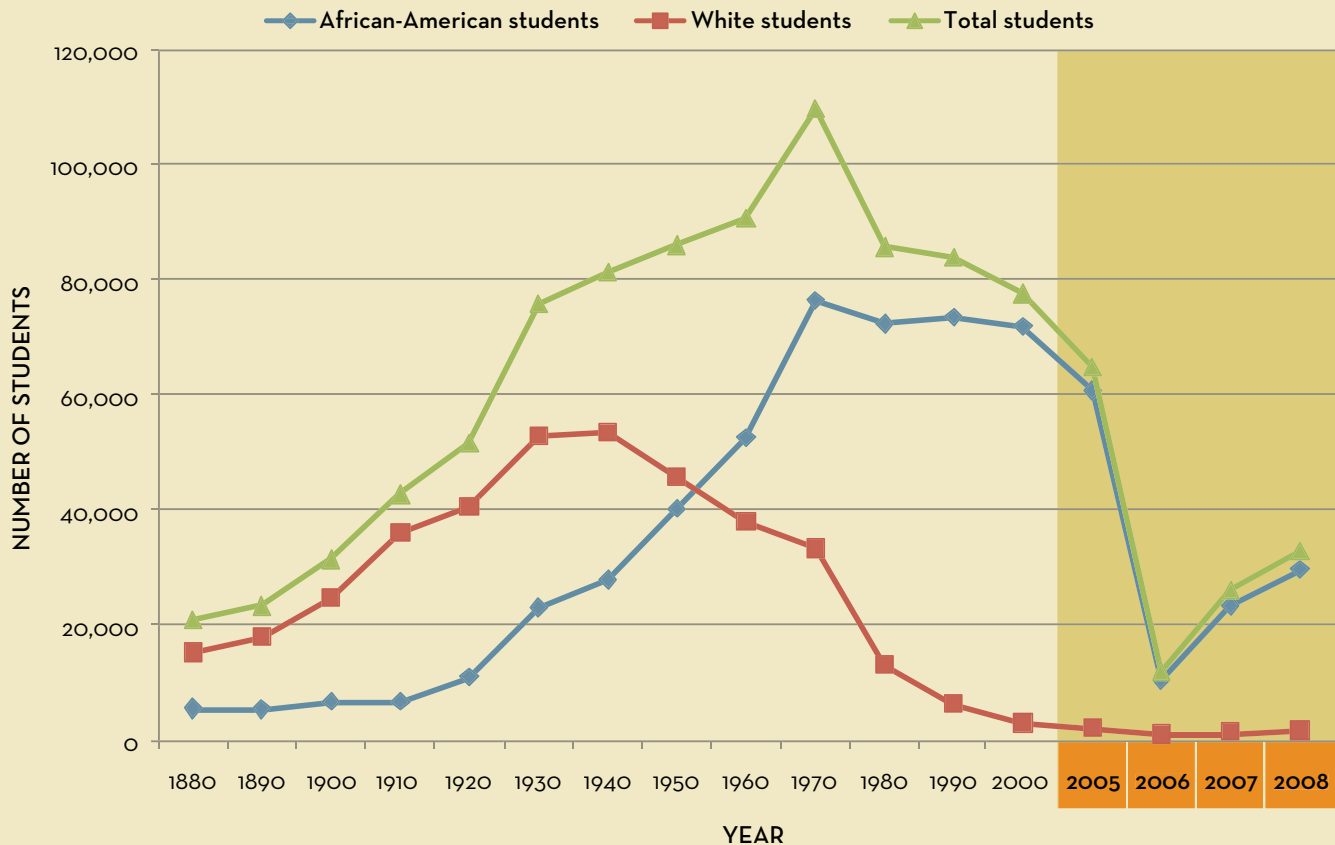
While desegregation is often associated with white flight to private schools or suburban districts, white public school enrollment dipped only slightly during the period from 1960-69. White enrollment fell by half, however, in the decade from 1970-79.¹⁰

As a result of whites and middle-class African-Americans leaving the New Orleans public school system for private and suburban schools, the city's public schools did not reflect the overall demographic makeup of the community. By 2005, New Orleans was 65 percent African-American, yet the public school population was 94 percent African-American. Citywide, 40 percent of children lived below the poverty line, yet 73 percent of New Orleans public school students qualified for free lunch.¹¹ To many in the community, New Orleans public schools (NOPS) had become a school system of last resort.

With the exception of a few high-performing, selective-admissions schools, most public schools in the decade before Katrina were low-performing and composed almost entirely of African-American and low income students.¹² This created a significant socio-economic achievement gap within the public school system.

Some of this poor performance can be attributed to a lack of stable and effective leadership at the district level; the public schools had an astonishingly high rate of turnover. Eight superintendents served between 1998 and 2005, with an

History of New Orleans public school enrollment



Source: DeVore & Logsdon, *Crescent City Schools*; LDE student enrollment data

average tenure of only 11 months—a turnover rate triple that of the national average for urban school superintendents.¹³ New Orleans public schools also struggled with a legacy of financial mismanagement. In 2004, the Federal Bureau of Investigation indicted 11 employees for criminal financial offenses against the OPSB.¹⁴ By 2005, the district faced the threat of bankruptcy, with \$265 million of debt and annual operating costs that exceeded revenues.¹⁵

The decaying state of public school buildings compounded the district's growing challenges. With more school facilities built before 1950 than after, simply maintaining buildings presented a challenge, particularly in light of the district's financial problems.¹⁶

2005-06: Devastation and Transformation

As a result of Hurricane Katrina, all 65,000 New Orleans public school students had to leave the city. Public school leadership and teaching staff were also displaced. In the end, the OPSB laid off more than 7,500 public school employees — nearly all of its workers — including more than 4,000 teachers. This action effectively ended the district's collective bargaining agreement with the teachers' union. The storm also took an enormous physical toll on the public schools' long-neglected facilities. Thirty-five percent of the public school buildings suffered significant damage, with many rendered unusable.¹⁷

Hurricane Katrina also served as a catalyst for change. In November 2005, a special session of the Louisiana legislature passed Act No. 35, which expanded the power of the state to intervene in failing school districts. With its new authority, the state transferred over 100 low-performing OPSB schools to the state-run Recovery School District (RSD), charging the new district with opening and operating the schools under its control for an initial period of five years.¹⁸ The RSD's entry into New Orleans changed the public school system overnight from a centralized, single-district model of education to a two-district model in which both the OPSB and RSD operate and oversee local schools.

Both districts also oversee charter schools, schools run by nonprofits that receive public money and have increased autonomy to control budgeting, staffing, and curriculum. Many of the first RSD charters were opened as part of the Algiers Charter Schools Association (ACSA) on the city's less-flooded West Bank. A number of OPSB charter schools, whose charters were approved in the weeks and months following Katrina, opened in early 2006. The growth of charter schools, driven in part by the need to reopen schools quickly with limited support from the district office, has led to further decentralization. In addition, the charter schools

were able to access a \$20.9 million federal grant earmarked specifically for charters.¹⁹

Originally, the RSD envisioned a district composed primarily of charter schools with a lean central administrative staff. By early 2006, however, it had become apparent that there were not enough high-quality charter operators for the number of schools that needed to open, and the RSD was forced to transform itself into a district able to operate schools. With little time and a lack of experienced leaders, the RSD had to rely heavily on outside contractors and staff from the Louisiana Department of Education to bridge its staffing gap in order to open schools quickly. Thus, the RSD began the 2006–07 school year at a severe disadvantage and continued to struggle throughout the year.

2006-07: A Tall Order

Lacking experienced leadership and a fully staffed central office, the RSD found it challenging to meet its mandate of operating public schools to serve some of the most academically and developmentally needy students in the city. During 2006-07, there was more than 100 percent turnover in the top personnel at the RSD central office.²⁰ Additionally, many RSD schools did not have strong school-level leadership before Hurricane Katrina, which made recruiting high-quality principals and teachers to support their transformation much more difficult.

The RSD also had to open schools in buildings with the most severe storm damage and the greatest amount of pre-storm deferred maintenance. During the 2006-07 school year, the RSD was incapable of providing regular and timely operational support to the schools it operated. Though operations at most schools improved over the course of the 2006-07 school year, by year's end many RSD schools still lacked such basic amenities as working kitchens; functioning bathrooms; and school supplies, like textbooks.

Another salient issue for the RSD was student safety and security. According to the Juvenile Justice Program of New Orleans, the RSD had one security guard for every 37 students—a rate nine times higher than pre-Katrina. Yet incidents of student violence continued to plague RSD-run schools, forcing the district to hire additional guards, limit access to school buildings, and require both high school and even some elementary students to pass through metal detectors. These security efforts boosted the district's spending on security to \$465 per student—a rate 10 times higher than what New Orleans public schools paid before Hurricane Katrina.²¹ Complaints of young, inexperienced and hostile security guards acting inappropriately were made frequently by parents and students.²²

One of the RSD's most enduring problems from 2006-2007 was a persistent teacher shortage. Because the majority of RSD-run schools opened after the OPSB-run and charter schools, there was a limited pool of teachers, administrators, and staff from which to draw. The teacher gap in RSD-run schools contributed to increased class size—some with more than 30 students—as well as reduced student supervision, and increased discipline problems.

The teacher and support-staff shortage contributed to a widespread community consensus, supported by anecdotal evidence, that students did not receive the support services they needed at RSD-run schools—especially counseling. Special-needs students, in particular, suffered because the schools lacked the trained staff needed to support the RSD's policy of integrating special-needs students into traditional classrooms.

In addition to the RSD-run schools' troubles, RSD charters and OPSB-run and charter schools also struggled to open schools, fix buildings in disrepair, and provide basic supplies and services in their schools. Charter schools in both systems faced large operational challenges as they tried to run autonomous schools with limited help from their districts.

Even so, the OPSB-run and OPSB charter schools enjoyed initial success post-Katrina. With the formation of the RSD, the OPSB was left to run or oversee only those schools that had traditionally been the board's highest-performing public schools, many of which have some form of selective admissions criteria. Many of these schools already had strong leaders, experienced staff, and community relationships that supported their reopening. From their existing position of strength, the OPSB-run and OPSB charter schools also had less trouble recruiting and retaining experienced teachers, sparing them from some of the problems of overcrowding and teacher shortages that plagued the RSD.²³

RSD charter schools, which are required to have open enrollment, did well in some of the same areas as the OPSB schools, in part due to their leaders' ability and resolve to focus exclusively on the performance of a single school or small set of schools. RSD charters had fewer procurement barriers and fewer problems in hiring staff and maintaining small classes compared with RSD-run schools. Charter schools also had the advantage of being able to cap their enrollments while the RSD-run schools were mandated to enroll students throughout the year. All charters also had access to federal funds earmarked for charter education, and many sought donations from private philanthropic organizations and individuals.



2007-Present: Planning—and Hope

Late in the 2006-07 school year, new leaders began taking steps to stabilize and improve the RSD. In April 2007, newly appointed State Superintendent Paul Pastorek made the timely reopening of schools in fall 2007 a top priority. A new RSD superintendent, Paul Vallas, brought significant experience with troubled urban school systems to New Orleans. Having led school districts in Chicago and Philadelphia, Vallas said that New Orleans, with its smaller size, abundance of universities and active community presence, was poised for success.²⁴ He planned to bring much-needed support staff to the RSD from his previous jobs and to actively engage local educators to assist as well.²⁵ With new leadership in place, the school year ended with some hope for the future of the RSD.

During the 2006-07 school year, under the new leadership of Darryl Kilbert, the OPSB achieved better control of its finances — a problem that plagued the board before Hurricane Katrina. Cash flow improved substantially due to the state's decision to temporarily assist the district by lending it funds to service its debt. In addition, in May 2007, the OPSB received the first “clean” audit of its financial records in four years.²⁶ While these accomplishments are certainly positive, they must be understood in the context of a radically smaller OPSB running just five traditional schools (and two smaller specialized schools) and overseeing 12 charter schools.

All public schools in New Orleans continue to struggle in difficult circumstances. In the following chapters, this report will try to provide sufficient context to understand the different experiences public schools in New Orleans have had and the likely effect these differences will have on school performance in the future.

Governance



In most urban districts, public schools are controlled by an elected school board that appoints a superintendent to run schools on a day-to-day basis. However, in recent years, many urban school districts have begun to experiment with alternative ways of governing their schools in an effort to turn around low-performing systems.

In Chicago and New York, politically strong mayors have taken control of the schools and appointed their own superintendents.²⁷ In Oakland and Philadelphia, the state government interceded and took over failing school districts from their school boards, installing state-appointed district superintendents.²⁸ In many other struggling districts, similar efforts have been tried or are being considered.

New Orleans public school governance is divided along several different lines of authority. Due to the state's takeover of low-performing schools, the Louisiana Department of Education (LDE) now directly operates or oversees the vast majority of schools through the state-run Recovery School District (RSD). The RSD operates 33 schools and oversees 26 charter schools. The Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB), which before Katrina ran 127 schools, now runs seven schools and oversees 12 charters made up of the highest-performing schools from the old district. (Among the seven OPSB-run schools are two small juvenile detention schools.) In addition, two public charter schools that existed before the storm are directly accountable to the state Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE).

What makes New Orleans unique is the high percentage of students in charter schools.

Charters have increased autonomy to control budgeting, staffing, and curriculum. Even so, the state and local districts play an oversight role by ensuring that charters' curricula meet basic standards, that they responsibly manage public funds, and that they show improvement in student test scores.

In Louisiana, school charters can only be held by nonprofit organizations, which in turn are governed by a board that hires the school leader, sets school policies, and provides general oversight. Chartering nonprofits are allowed to contract with for-profit education management companies

(e.g., Edison Schools, Leona Group, Mosaica Education) for school management services. In addition to federal funds, charter schools receive the same amount of state and local per-pupil funding as their governing district. Unlike in most states, Louisiana charter schools are provided with a building by their district. Otherwise, they must make their own arrangements for services like sanitation, food provision, transportation, and building maintenance. In some cases, one nonprofit board oversees multiple charter schools, like the Algiers Charter School Association (ACSA, nine schools) or the New Orleans branch of the national Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP, three schools). In other cases, individual charter organizations form alliances to provide shared services. In March 2008, nine OPSB and BESE charter schools formed the Louisiana Charter School Alliance (LCSA) in order to share services and cut operational costs.²⁹

In interviews, charter board members describe their roles as providing oversight to school leaders, ensuring that plans are in place to raise student achievement, and reviewing school finances. Board members also raise funds for their school and provide specialized services based on their skills—legal or financial advice, for example. Some board members express that there is a tension that they still need to work out between their roles of governing a private organization and stewarding public funds. However, many also noted with pleasure that a diverse group of talented citizens are now serving on charter boards, seeking resources for schools, and getting involved in public education advocacy for the first time.

National studies of charter school effectiveness have yielded mixed results. On the positive side, a recent analysis of charter school studies showed that 29 of 33 longitudinal studies found charters performing as well as or better than traditional public schools.³⁰ On the other hand, a large national study conducted by the U.S. Department of

Education found charter schools no more effective, and sometimes less effective, than traditional public schools at improving student achievement.³¹ In one of the most rigorous charter school studies to date, researchers found that students enrolled in charter schools through a random lottery had slightly larger improvements in math and reading than students with similar backgrounds who were not chosen in the lottery.³² Due to these conflicting results, there is still no academic consensus on whether charter schools provide a better model of school governance than traditional schools. Whatever their effect, the proliferation of charter schools creates a challenge in finding an oversight model that takes advantage of centralized services while also maintaining the autonomy needed to make them successful.

Governance looks very different for district-run schools and charter schools.

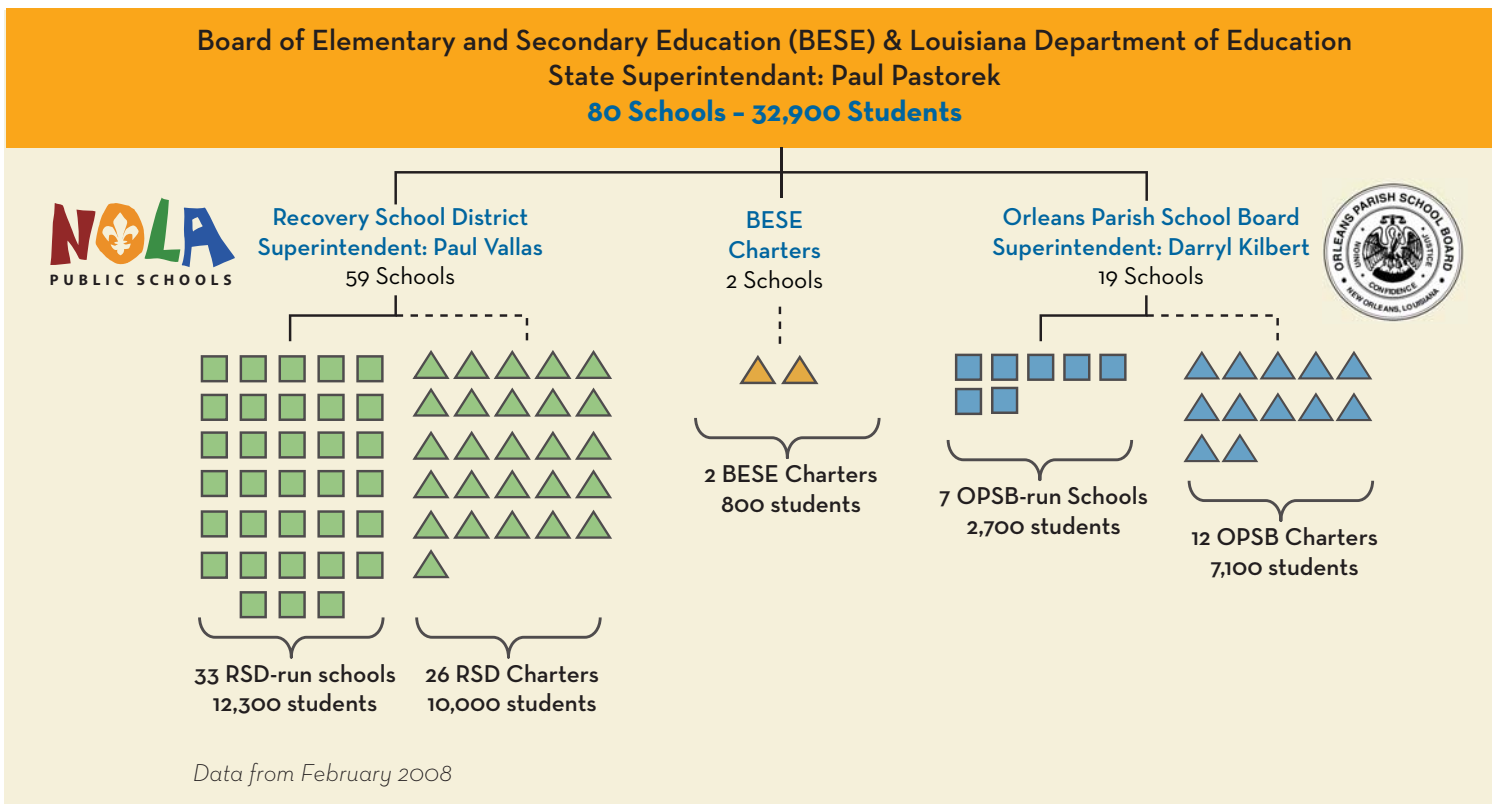
The RSD is part of the state government, and therefore is under the authority of the State Superintendent of Education, Paul Pastorek, and the Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE). BESE is composed of elected and appointed members from across Louisiana. The OPSB is made up of representatives elected by voters in Orleans Parish who in turn hire a superintendent and set policies for their schools. Both RSD and OPSB district-run schools have principals chosen by the district office and operate according to district policies and budgeting rules. The district has the power to assign

teachers to a particular school, though this often happens with some principal input. The district also has the power to select curriculum and professional development. Districts handle most school operations as well, including school maintenance, security, food service, cleaning, technology, and procurement.

New leadership at the RSD has created significant momentum for its schools. Under the new leadership of Paul Vallas, and with support from State Superintendent Paul Pastorek, RSD schools have shown significant improvements this school year, albeit from a very low baseline. Though problems certainly persist (and these will be enumerated in later chapters), overall students and teachers in RSD-run schools cite much better conditions since last school year in part due to a strong effort to repair RSD facilities and provide them with technology and supplies. According to one principal at an RSD-run school: “Our district and state superintendent have taken care of things when we take it to them. They solve it on the spot. That open line of communication is great.”

“He [Vallas] brought respect, which lifts us to another level; it means a lot to have someone who is respected, especially outside of our own community; a leader with respect automatically enables him to be more effective.”

– NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION LEADER



Roles and responsibilities of charter schools and districts are often unclear.

Both OPSB and RSD charter principals and some charter teachers express frustration with their district offices, citing poor services and a lack of clarity about the district’s responsibilities versus their own in terms of facilities repair, technology, and procurement. “Anything we depend on them [RSD] for generally has not been great,” said an RSD charter principal. According to an OPSB charter teacher: “It is very hard to identify who is responsible for what at the [OPSB] central office.” OPSB charter principals also felt they were not properly consulted in the creation of the evaluation framework for their schools.

District leaders likewise express frustration with charter principals and board members, arguing that charters should use their autonomy to address their own problems instead of relying on the district. District staff members at the RSD also insist that charters often do not appreciate how much of their time and resources are spent on charter buildings. The school districts feel that charter schools can solve their own procurement problems with the public funds that they are given. In the area of oversight, OPSB district leaders said they want to engage charters in the evaluation process but feel the school board must be able to identify its own standards against which all district schools will be judged.

All of these concerns highlight the lack of communication between charter schools and their districts. Within the RSD, some charter principals and district leaders agree

“There are options and choices. Where else can you get such a vast amount of variety in education? I can choose if I want to take a specific path through schools that is more akin to who I am naturally and academically.”

– CHARTER SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

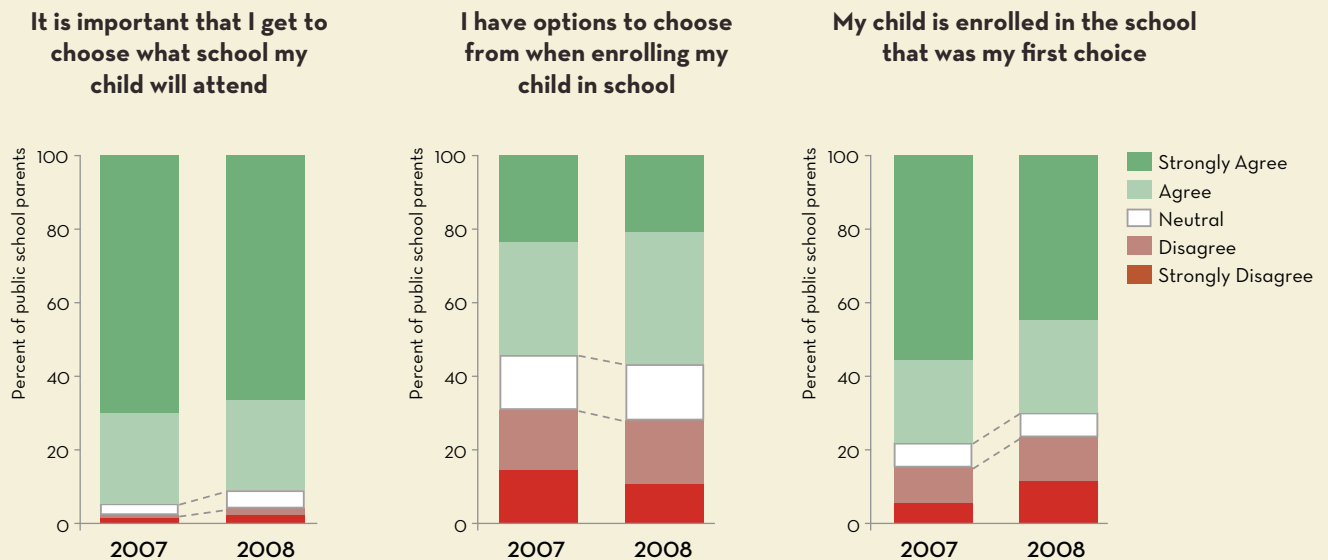
that communication has improved slightly this year. Across operators, however, district and charter school leaders agree that there needs to be more clarity about the roles and responsibilities of school districts and charter schools. A written definition of RSD and charter responsibilities from BESE is currently being created, but this process has been delayed since January 2007.³³ This is a clear area for improvement in school governance.

School choice is an important aspect of post-Katrina public education in New Orleans.

Since Katrina, students are no longer required to go to schools that fall within geographically based “attendance zones.” Instead, students can go to any school in the city as long as they meet attendance criteria (in the case of selective-admissions schools) and schools have not reached their enrollment caps. The chapter entitled “A System of Schools” looks in more depth at different types of schools, while in this section we address issues related specifically to school choice.

New Orleans public school parents consider school choice critical, but a significant number are not satisfied with the

Parents overwhelmingly want school choice, but some do not feel they have choice



“If you provide choices, but nobody knows there’s choices, is it really a choice? Freedom is information.”

– RSD SUPERINTENDENT PAUL VALLAS³⁵

choices available to them. Ninety-one percent of public school parents agreed that it is important for them to choose their children’s schools, including 66 percent who strongly agreed. However, only 57 percent of parents agreed that they have options to choose from when enrolling their children in school. Interestingly, more parents (70 percent) agreed that their children are attending their first-choice school than agreed that they have options from which to choose.

Parents with children in RSD-run schools are less likely than RSD charter and OPSB charter school parents to agree that their child is enrolled in their first-choice school (37 percent vs. 73 and 84 percent). In addition, African-American parents are less likely than white parents to agree that their child is enrolled in their first-choice school (63 percent vs. 76 percent). Only 59 percent of public school parents were able to enroll their child in a school in “their neighborhood.” The result is a high percentage of students traveling to school by bus. Eighty-two percent of students in RSD-run schools and 79 percent of students in OPSB-run schools live more than a mile from their school and as a result are eligible to take the bus or receive bus tokens. In addition, 42 percent of students in RSD-run schools travel three or more miles to school.³⁴

Obstacles to choice include a lack of good information about school options and the difficulty of registration.

Just half (50 percent) of public school parents surveyed agreed that information on different school options is readily available. According to one state education official: “We need to do a better job communicating with the public, so we can make sure that they are clear about their options. We have to re-sell public education to people coming back into New Orleans.” Several nonprofits have tried to address this problem by creating the *New Orleans Parents’ Guide to Public Schools*, a comprehensive booklet and website about available public schools.

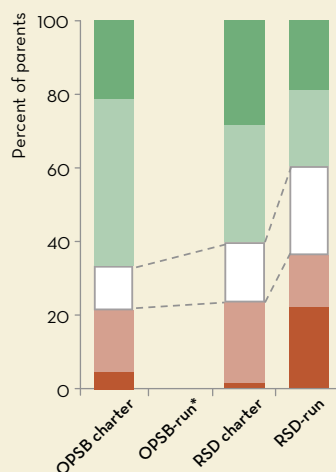
During the 2006-07 school year, student registration was not coordinated across schools. Indeed, many schools had different registration deadlines for students. As a result, some parents enrolled their children in multiple schools due to confusion and uncertainty about the registration process. In this year’s survey, only 55 percent of public school parents agreed that it was easy to register their child for school. A potential solution to this problem is the common application, which standardizes the application process for 70 public schools in New Orleans. However, due to poor initial publicity and low participation rates from parents, the deadline for the application has had to be extended.³⁶

“OPSB and charter schools pick the cream of the crop.”

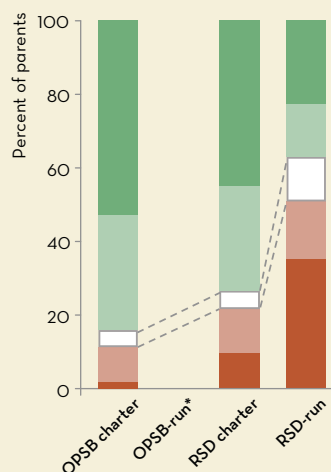
– RSD-RUN SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

School type and ethnicity play a role in parent perceptions of having school choice

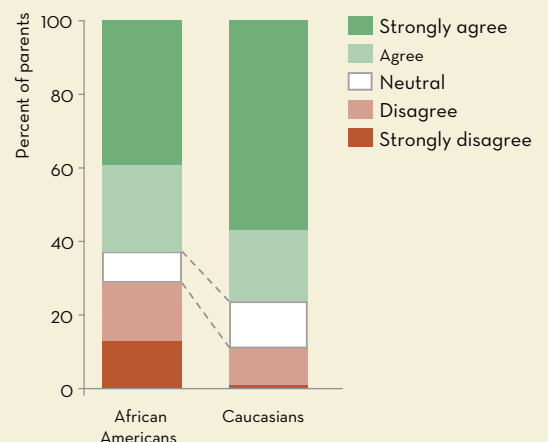
I have options to choose from when enrolling my child in school



My child is enrolled in the school that was my first choice



My child is enrolled in the school that was my first choice



*The sample of OPSB-operated school parents was too small to use

District

Many principals and teachers working in RSD-run schools perceive their schools to be a “dumping ground” for students who are not wanted in the OPSB-run, OPSB charter, or RSD charter schools.

This claim requires better student tracking data to prove or disprove. However, it may be a reflection of the way in which each district was created. Because RSD schools were chosen due to their low performance, the district started with more challenged schools and lower-performing students. For instance, 22 percent of students in OPSB charter schools and 11 percent of students at OPSB-run schools are identified as “talented and gifted” versus just 1 percent in RSD-run and RSD charter schools.³⁷ These differences are reinforced by the selective admissions criteria used by many OPSB-run and OPSB charter schools—criteria that the majority of RSD students cannot meet.

Because the RSD-run system allows mid-year enrollment, unlike most school operators, their student population also includes the majority of students that enter public schools after the initial registration period. While some individual RSD-run schools cap their enrollment to maintain desirable student-teacher ratios, the RSD as a whole is required to take all who come—from the new student who moves to the city mid-year to the student expelled from another public school operator. In the three months from November 2007 to January 2008, the RSD-run schools took in a total of 988 students (approximately 9 percent of the initial RSD student population), mostly from outside of Orleans Parish.³⁸ Students arriving mid-year can be more disruptive because

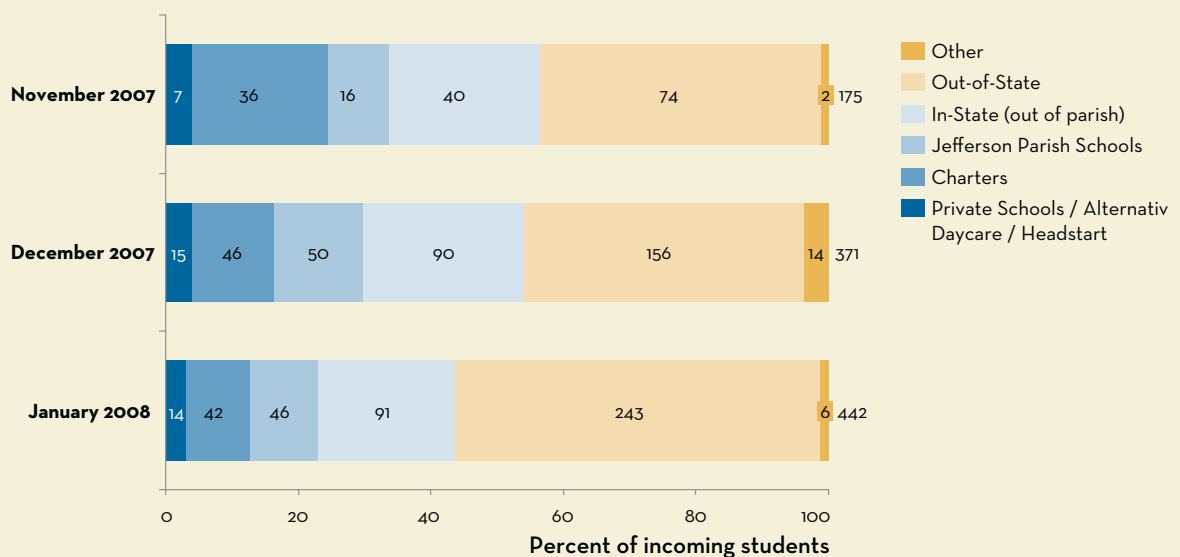
they have less time to acculturate to their new school. This can lower their own academic performance and the performance of their classmates on standardized tests.

Overall changes in student numbers are also indicative. Between October 2007 and February 2008, RSD-run schools increased their overall numbers by over 650 students. This means that while nearly 1,000 students entered the RSD-run schools, approximately 350 left. This kind of student turnover obviously makes acculturation difficult. Though it is impossible to know full student turnover without better student tracking data, in the same period RSD charter and OPSB charter school enrollment remained flat.³⁹

There is an obvious disincentive for schools to keep low-performing students or students with behavioral problems—they lower test scores and disrupt the classroom. An equally strong disincentive exists for schools to serve special-needs students. First, because LEAP test scores are not adjusted to reflect special-needs students, the students’ presence leads to lower test performance for the school. Second, charter schools receive an averaged amount of money per pupil that does not reflect the level of student need at each school. This translates into less support for charter schools that serve an above-average number of students with special needs. Finally, students with severe disabilities like autism require specialized instruction—a very expensive proposition, particularly for a school with only one or two students who have the disability. If there are numerous students with autism across a school system or network, schools can share special education teachers and lower per-student costs; if an independent

The majority of incoming mid-year students to RSD-run schools come from outside of Orleans Parish

Origin of students enrolling mid-year in RSD-run schools, Nov 2007-Jan 2008



Source: RSD enrollment data, Nov 2007-Jan 2008

charter school has only one autistic student, however, that requires one full-time salary to be devoted to one student

Weak governance and a lack of coordination between school operators leads to a lack of transparency and poor information about schools.

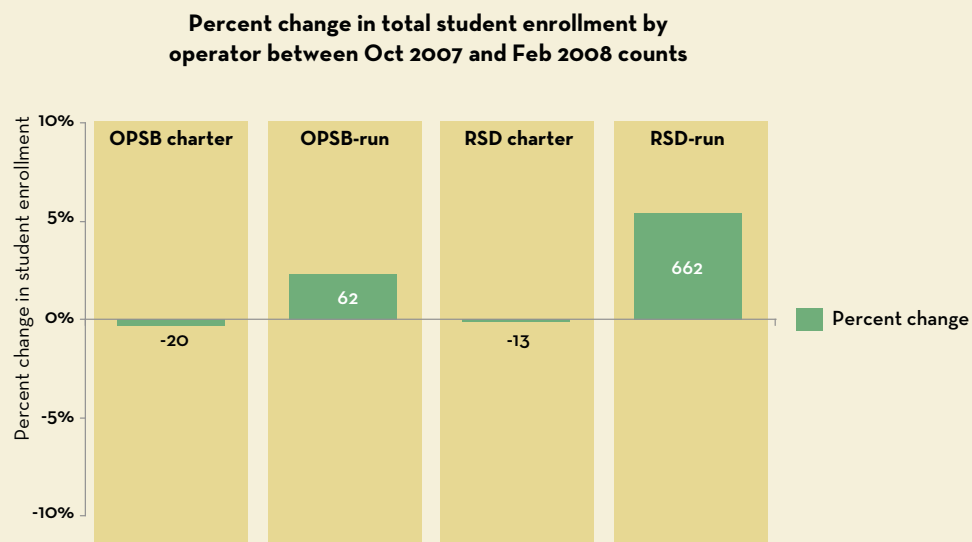
Without more unified governance or increased coordination between schools in New Orleans, it is very difficult to collect, analyze, and distribute critical information about schools. Without better information, parents will not be able to choose the best school for their children. Without a way to track students across different operators, there will be no way of knowing if schools are getting rid of low-performers and students with special needs. Likewise, without a better student information system linked to test scores, it will be difficult to know which schools are best at helping students learn regardless of their background (this will be explained in more detail in the chapter on Student Achievement). Essentially, without better information, it is hard to make schools accessible and to hold schools accountable.

It is unclear how public schools will address the issue of coordination and long-term governance. Act 35 gave the RSD an initial period of five years to run low-performing schools in New Orleans. After that period, the legislature will be able to extend the period or return schools to some form of local control. Though many suggestions have been made, no process has yet been put in place to decide how schools will ultimately be governed. Interviews conducted for this

report revealed that there is little consensus among education advocates on the question of governance. Some education advocates favor more extreme forms of decentralization, while others want a return to a locally-controlled centralized model. In contrast, most principals and teachers from across different operators favor a solution somewhere in the middle that increases coordination and cooperation while allowing schools to have significant autonomy. In a recent effort to increase coordination, State Superintendent Pastorek appointed a commission of distinguished citizens in March 2008 to make recommendations on improving operational efficiencies and eliminating the duplication of services between the OPSB, the RSD, and charter schools.⁴⁰ It remains to be seen what impact the committee will have.

In the subsequent chapters, it will be critical to keep in mind how a school's governing structure (RSD-run, RSD charter, OPSB-run, OPSB charter, or BESE charter) sets the context in which it should be evaluated. It is not very useful to compare selective-admission schools with schools that take all comers. Likewise, it may not be useful to compare open-access charters, which have relatively stable populations throughout the year, to RSD-run schools, which have a changing population that makes student acculturation and teaching much more difficult. This is not to critique any particular type of school (traditional or charter, RSD or OPSB, selective or open admissions), but rather to clarify that comparisons of student achievement across different school types are difficult to make.

RSD-run schools gained the most students by far between October 2007 and February 2008



Source: LDE student enrollment data, Oct 2007 and Feb 2008

A System of Schools



New Orleans has 80 public schools that are currently open, of which half are charter schools.⁴¹ In all, 57 percent of public school students in New Orleans attend a charter school, the highest proportion of any large school district in the United States.⁴² Because schools no longer function as a single school system, it is now more accurate to refer to public schools in New Orleans as a “system of schools.” This chapter will explain the characteristics of different school types and describe some of the organizations that have emerged to support education reform and transformation.

Public schools in New Orleans enroll a higher percentage of minority students than both the city’s overall population and Louisiana’s public school student body.

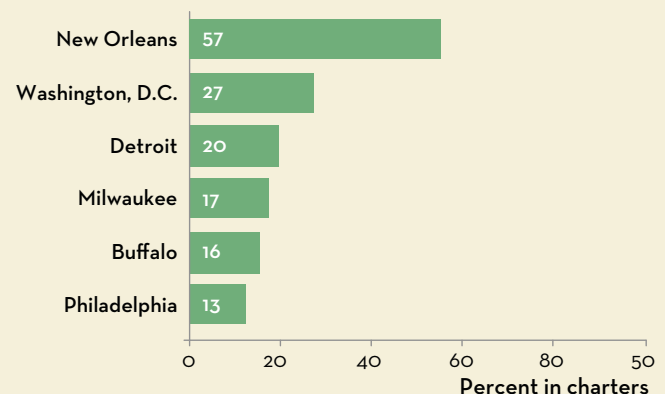
According to the 2006 U.S. Census, New Orleans’ overall population is approximately 63 percent minority, while public schools are nearly 95 percent minority, composed primarily of African-American students. Louisiana public schools, on the other hand, have just over a 50 percent minority population. Recovery School District (RSD)-run schools and RSD charters are almost entirely attended by minority students, while only Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB) charters have a racial distribution approximating the racial breakdown of New Orleans.⁴³ In contrast, non-public schools in New Orleans were 48 percent minority during the 2005-06 school year, the most recent year for which data is available.⁴⁴

Public school students in New Orleans are overwhelmingly poor, with 83 percent of students defined as “at-risk.”

A student is considered at-risk if he or she qualifies for free or reduced lunch. To qualify for free lunch, a student’s family income must be below 130 percent of the federal poverty line; to qualify for reduced lunch, family income must be between 130 and 185 percent of the poverty line.⁴⁵ Among the operator types, RSD charters have the most at-risk students (89 percent) while the two Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) charters have the fewest (57 percent). Because of significant student data problems, it is likely that RSD-run schools have a higher percentage of students than reported by the state (77 percent).⁴⁶ However, until the RSD strengthens its data systems, there will be no way to know for sure.

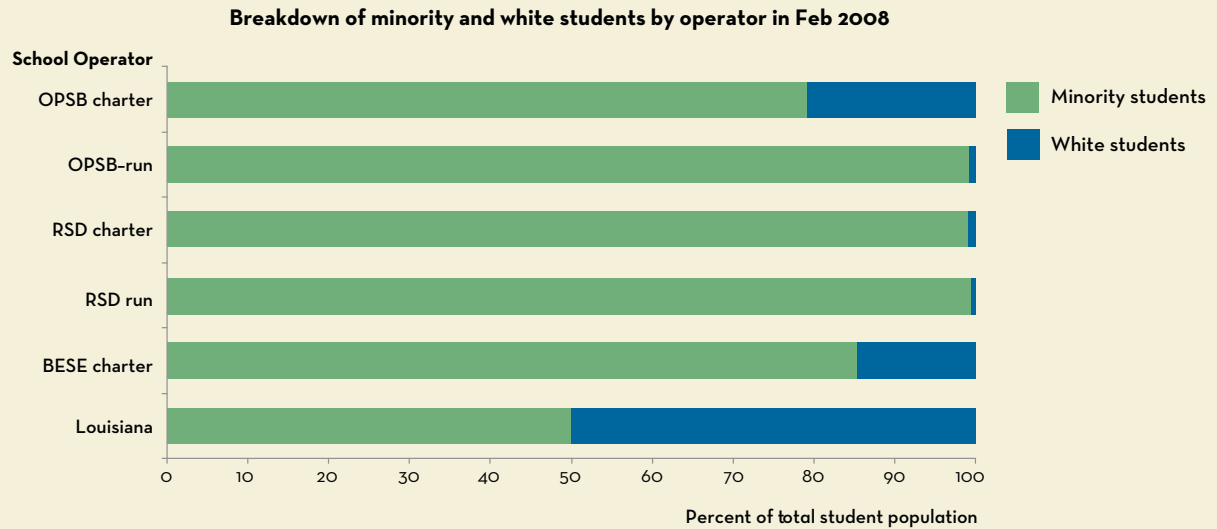
New Orleans has the highest percentage of public school students in charters

Percent of public school students in charters, 2007



Source: National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2007

All New Orleans school operators have a higher percentage of minority students than the state average

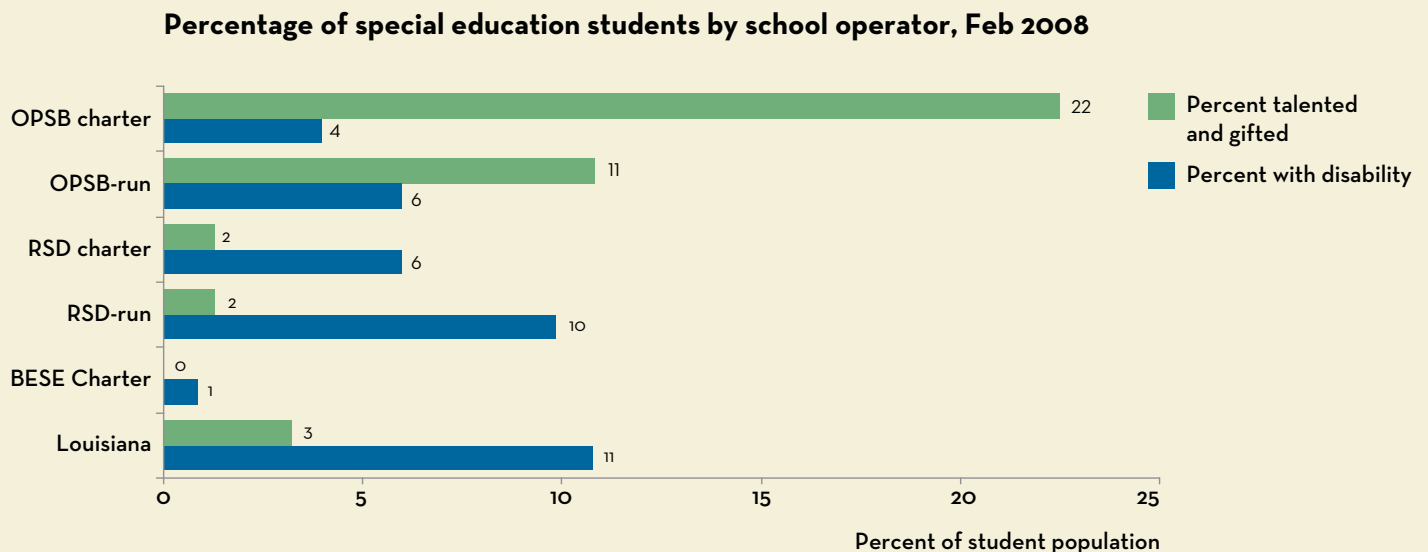


New Orleans has a high level of special education students with disabilities, and there is likely under-reporting of disability rates.

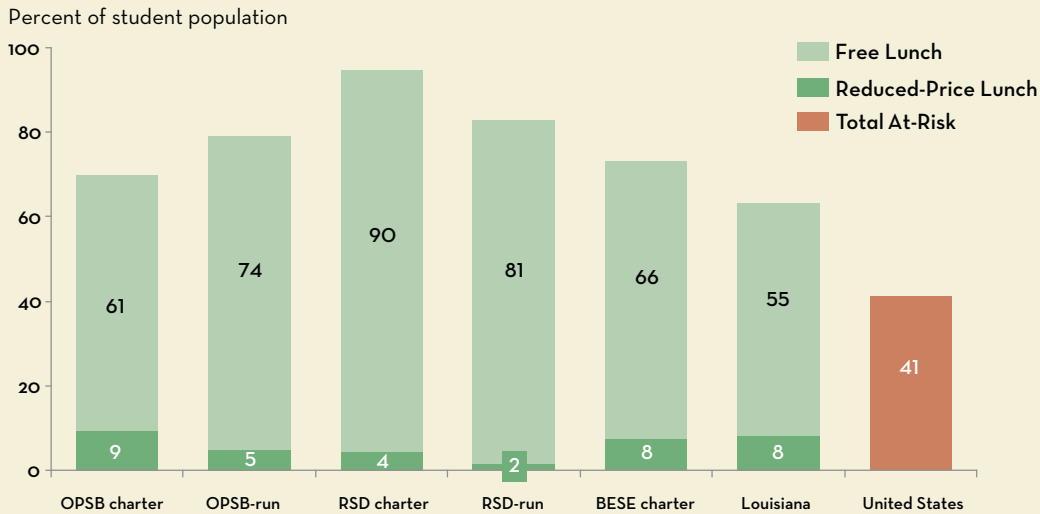
While the graph showing percentages of special education students represents official data, many teachers and principals agree that the numbers are inaccurate.⁴⁷ This makes sense given that, as a state, 11 percent of Louisiana students are identified as special education students with a disability, while in the high-needs, RSD-run schools, only 8 percent of students are identified as having a disability. As a result, all numbers associated with student disabilities should be taken with caution due to the issues of data integrity problems.

Differences in the proportions of students identified as talented and gifted (TAG) are clearer. OPSB charter and OPSB-run schools have much higher proportions of TAG students than RSD charter and RSD-run schools. This is due in part to the selective admissions criteria that many OPSB charters and OPSB-run schools use to enroll students.

OPSB schools have significantly more talented and gifted students than RSD schools and fewer students with disabilities



Percentage of 2008 student population that qualified for free lunch and reduced lunch



Source: LDE student enrollment data, Feb 2008; U.S. Department of Education, 2004

Along with the emergence of a system of schools, a parallel system of nonprofit school-support organizations has emerged to facilitate the process of educational innovation and improvement in New Orleans.

These organizations are working to develop new models of education, help new schools get off the ground, recruit and train teachers and principals, and provide other support to schools in a newly decentralized system.

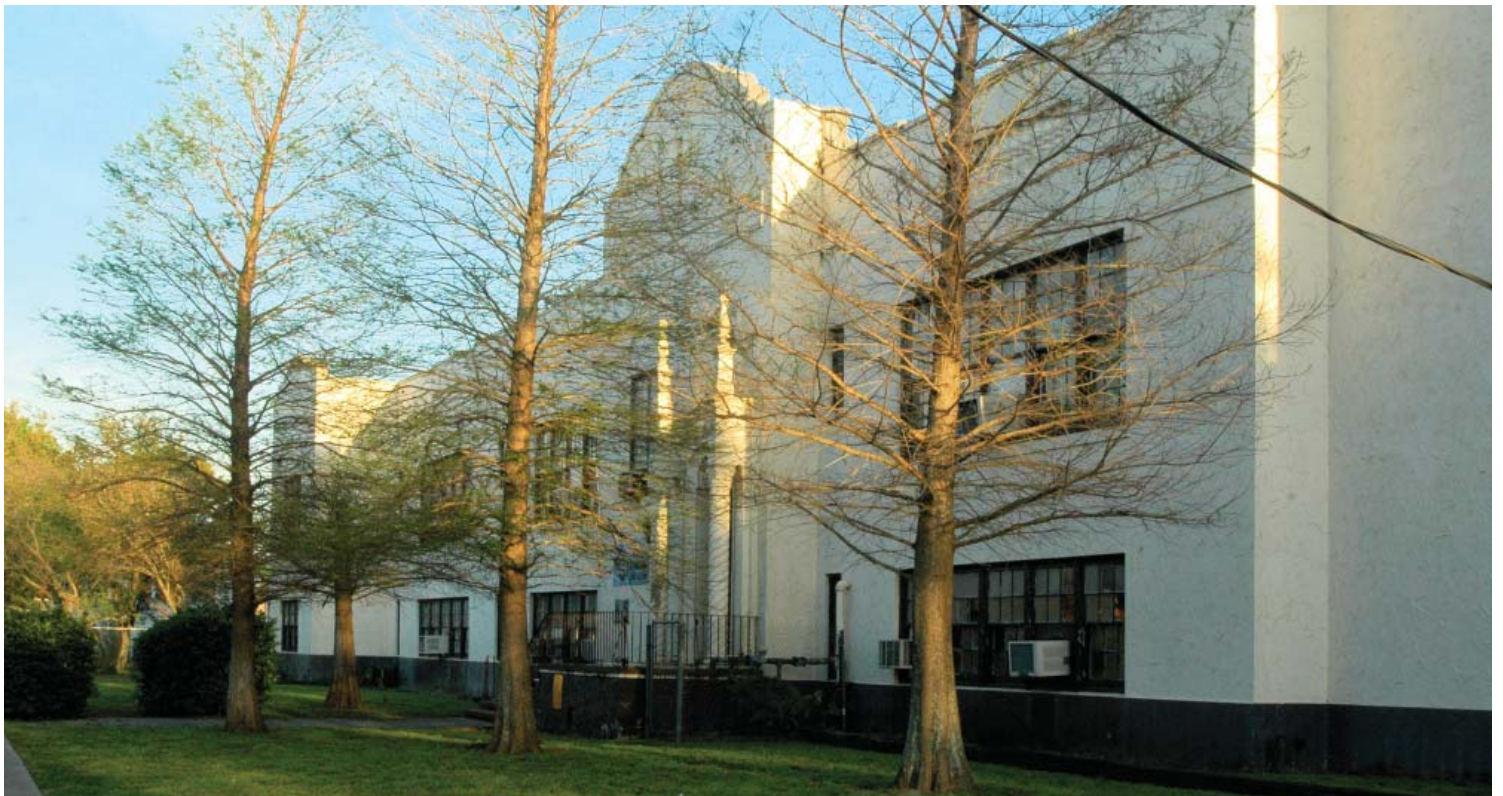
They also represent a model of engagement that combines local and national expertise. New Orleans has become a city of interest for education advocates and innovators from across the country, and national organizations and funders have supported the city’s educational transformation.

Some school-support organizations existed before the storm while others were formed in the period following Katrina. Some have a national presence while others operate only in the New Orleans area. There is no exhaustive list of school-support organizations working in New Orleans because there are so many, and new organizations continue to form. Below, some of the organizations working on educational innovation and support are described in brief.

A number of organizations are working to create and support charter schools.

New Schools for New Orleans (NSNO) formed soon after the storm to attract new educational talent, create and support public charter schools, and advocate on behalf of high-quality schools. NSNO has worked with New Leaders for New Schools (NLNS), Teach for America (TFA), and TeachNOLA (a local branch of The New Teacher Project, a national organization) to recruit and train new principals and teachers for New Orleans charter and traditional schools. In one of the largest donations made to public education in New Orleans, three national education foundations, the Gates Foundation, Broad Foundation, and the Fisher Fund, collaborated to give \$17.5 million to NSNO, NLNS, and TFA.⁴⁸

The Algiers Charter School Association (ACSA) formed after the storm to reopen schools on the city’s West Bank as quickly as possible. ACSA operates nine charter schools under one board, making it the largest charter operator in Louisiana. Several other organizations operate multiple charter schools, including the Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP), the Capital One-University of New Orleans Charter School Center, Middle School Advocates, and the New Orleans Charter Foundation. On the East Bank, the Louisiana Charter School Alliance (LCSA) brings together nine independent charter schools in order to share operational costs and collaborate on other initiatives. ACSA and LCSA are both funded in part by Baptist Community Ministries, a local foundation that has made



a \$4 million commitment to support New Orleans charter schools.⁴⁹ Many other local foundations and donors have made significant contributions to charter schools and other educational projects.

In addition to the recruitment and training efforts of NLNS, TFA, and TeachNOLA, a number of organizations are focused on providing professional development services to schools.

The School Leadership Center (SLC), which is affiliated with ACSA and LCSA, provides leadership training to school principals. The Center for Development and Learning (CDL) and SEDL (formerly the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory) are providing professional development support to teachers across the city. In addition, the SUNS Center (Serving the Unique Needs of Students) provides professional services to help schools serve students with special needs. Many other organizations are also helping to train educators in New Orleans.

Additional organizations have emerged to provide information about schools to the public and to be advocates for New Orleans schools in the public sphere.

The Urban League of Greater New Orleans has sponsored school fairs and has worked with the New Orleans Parent Organizing Network and other groups to produce the *New Orleans Parents' Guide to Public Schools*. Likewise, Save our Schools NOLA has worked to make information about schools and school performance available in an

easy-to-use, online format. Meanwhile the Greater New Orleans Education Foundation, Tulane University's Cowen Institute, NSNO, and many other groups are working to assess problems in the city's public schools and advocate for solutions to local, state, and federal policymakers. The Cowen Institute has also donated space to and is co-located with NSNO, NLNS, and TeachNOLA in order to facilitate nonprofit cooperation in education.

The organizations mentioned above are only some of the many groups that have contributed to educational transformation in New Orleans since Hurricane Katrina. These organizations represent a movement to fundamentally change the way that public education is delivered in the city in the wake of a radical change in school governance and operations. Though promising in their number, vitality, and scope, it remains to be seen if these and other groups can significantly improve the quality of education in the city's public schools.

Student Issues and Concerns



Discipline and safety are crucial to learning. Without enforcing order and discipline in the hallways and in the classroom, effective learning is nearly impossible. Students and teachers agree that discipline and safety were areas of concern during the 2006-07 school year, especially in Recovery School District (RSD)-run schools. Fights were frequent, truancy was high, and numerous security guards were hired with limited effect. However, the tide seems to be turning this year.

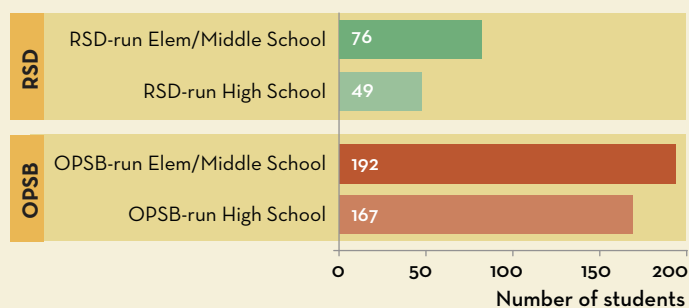
During the 2007-08 school year, students in all but two of the student focus groups said their schools are safer overall, with fewer fights and better discipline in the classroom. The RSD has also reported a 15 percent decrease in truancy since the beginning of the year.⁵⁰ Fewer security guards are employed this year, which most students find to be a positive change. One student said, “My teachers have more experience dealing with the problem students this year so they are better at keeping control. I like that there aren’t as many security guards this year because it feels more like a school and less like a prison.”

While students in RSD-run schools say they want some security guards in the schools to handle outside intruders or aggressive students, many students also reported that some guards do not actively work while on duty. One student said, “The guards just sit in their chairs and play with their phones. They don’t walk the hallways or get up from their post unless the principal walks by.”

Students in three focus groups also reported that security guards have acted inappropriately and violently with students in isolated instances. Students at three different schools said they witnessed guards physically push students without provocation, and students in two other focus groups noted that the younger security guards flirt with the female students or sexually harass them. Security guards in RSD-run schools are only required to be 18 years old; students in focus groups agreed that the young guards were ineffective because they were too close in age to the students. “They [security guards] are young, they are just like students...,” said an RSD-run high school student. Many believed the minimum age requirement for guards should be at least 25. Security guards were a bigger issue in RSD-run schools, where more guards are employed and discipline remained a problem. While there is one security guard for every 49 students in RSD-run high schools, there is only one security guard for every 167 students in OPSB-run high schools.⁵¹

RSD-run schools have a higher level of security presence than OPSB-run schools

Number of students per security guard by district, 2008



Source: RSD and OPSB security data, 2008

“People have seen what is possible in education and their expectations for education in New Orleans have gone up. They have seen that quality education isn’t just something that’s possible for middle-class kids; every child can have it.”

– RSD CHARTER PRINCIPAL

Despite substantial improvements in discipline, much remains to be done. In surveys, half (52 percent) of public school teachers agree with the statement that “discipline problems in my school significantly interfere with learning,” while just a third (34 percent) disagree. Teacher perceptions of discipline problems vary widely by school operator. Seventy-three percent of teachers in RSD-run schools agree that discipline problems interfere with student learning, while just 21 percent of OPSB charter school teachers agree with the same statement.

Another frequently cited area of concern and frustration is the pace of teaching in New Orleans public schools.

Nearly 100 percent of students in focus groups who attended public schools in other states when they relocated after Katrina noted that the schools outside of Louisiana were more rigorous. “I learned more in class, I had more homework and everyone tried harder and moved along faster,” one student said. Another admitted, “I’m naturally lazy, so when I’m never pushed here I don’t learn anything. When I was forced to learn more in Texas, I rose to that level and I did.” One of the key issues concerning pace in New Orleans schools is the need to slow down the class for slower-learning students. This raises questions about how well including special education students in regular classrooms (known as “inclusion”) is working. Though required by law, many teachers expressed that inclusion is good in theory but difficult to manage in practice without additional support and training.

Comprehensive and coordinated special education remains a major problem across public schools in New Orleans.

Many special education records were lost during Katrina, and students who were in special education before the storm often do not have their old evaluations. While many more students were evaluated during the 2007-08 school year, teachers find there are still students who need to be in special education but are not, either because they have not been evaluated or their parents do not want them to suffer the stigma of being labeled a special-needs student. “The number of students identified is getting better, but about 20 percent



“If they don’t understand the stuff then they blame the teacher. I am required to teach them this stuff. I am going to do what I have to do. [But] you can’t hold me accountable as an eleventh- and twelfth-grade teacher for kids who don’t know how to read.”

– ORLEANS PARISH SCHOOL BOARD (OPSB) CHARTER HIGH SCHOOL TEACHER

of our school should probably be in special education that isn’t right now,” one teacher said.

Some teachers in focus groups said they believed some students were identified as needing special education when, in reality, they are simply several years behind grade level. One teacher said, “Some kids didn’t go to school for a year or two after Katrina, and they had already fallen behind because their old schools were bad. They don’t have a learning disability; they just haven’t received their education.” While the state provides additional funding for students with disabilities, most teachers agree that it is not enough. For instance, only 32 percent of public school teachers surveyed agreed or strongly agreed that their schools had adequate resources to serve special education students. As a result, students with the most acute disabilities may be juggled from one school to another due to a school’s inability to serve them.

“Special education needs to have more attention. We are commanded to do it but with no extra funds.”

– OPSB CHARTER PRINCIPAL

One parent of an autistic child noted in a focus group, “When I evacuated, I just walked down the road and signed my child up at the nearest school (in California). Here, I feel like I’m gently nudged away from a school and they tell me it isn’t the best fit.” Since money is allotted to special education students at the district level instead of following students to the schools they attend, there is inconsistent support for schools serving students with multiple types of disabilities. Likewise, students with disabilities bring down overall school test scores (the majority of students with disabilities take the regular LEAP test; only a handful take a separate test). Without an accountability system that takes disability into account, schools will continue to have a disincentive to enroll students with disabilities.

Students identified as gifted and talented also fall under the special education programs in public schools, and can receive specialized classroom instruction within traditional public

schools and charters. Teachers in focus groups agreed that gifted students had been evaluated and identified within their schools at a better rate than students with disabilities. Some gifted students, however, met the requirements to gain entrance to selective-admissions public schools but were denied because the schools were at capacity. As a result, some gifted students are performing below their potential due to a lack of intellectual challenge. “I know I am going to pass the (GEE) test, so my grades slip because the work is boring and I just won’t do the GEE work because I am not being challenged,” said one gifted high school student in a focus group. These students can receive gifted coursework at other schools, but the programs are not all as rigorous or extensive as the selective-admissions school offerings.

Mental health issues have worsened in the wake of Katrina.

According to a government survey conducted by the Harvard Medical School, the number of Katrina survivors suffering from symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder has actually increased since the storm, from 16 percent in 2006 to 21 percent in 2007. Additionally, thoughts of suicide increased among individuals surveyed in the New Orleans area from 3 percent to 8 percent. Compounding the mental health crisis in the city is the shortage of mental health professionals, since a large number did not return after the storm.⁵² Because of insufficient funding and an inability to find qualified staff, many schools struggle to meet the needs of students who require special assistance. “All types of students are experiencing post-traumatic stress, but it’s the worst among students who had to be forcibly evacuated,” one counselor said. “Only students who pose a threat to themselves or others can get evaluated for treatment.” The storm’s impact on the stability of households in New Orleans also has intensified mental health issues among students. A great number of families remain scattered around New Orleans and in other states, leaving some high school students living alone.⁵³ In certain instances, the students have chosen to return to New Orleans because of the unkind treatment they received as Katrina evacuees, which was another difficult experience. Some parents are dealing with post-traumatic stress themselves, which affects their children. “Daily life for the parents is so difficult now that only high-order needs are being met for the kids, like food and shelter,” said the counselor. “Their parents aren’t there for them emotionally.” All of these factors impact the schools. The need for evaluations has increased while the number of certified mental health professionals in schools has decreased, leaving many students untreated.

Though significant problems persist, overall students see real improvements over last year.

Discipline is better, and students agree that teachers care more about their jobs this year. School supplies and technology are more abundant than last year. Students also express more satisfaction with guidance counselors this year. In 2006-07, school counselors were often missing or unorganized—several students noted that copies of transcripts were never delivered for seniors applying for college programs. This year, students said, not only are there enough counselors but they are more helpful, especially regarding school choice. Interestingly, students said their counselors sometimes encouraged them to enroll in other schools with more rigorous coursework or that were a better fit for them.

As the overall school experience improves for students, more students feel connected to their school and exhibit increased pride. “I want to get a class ring and a jacket and let everyone know where I go to school,” one senior said. Increased school pride is one factor leading to better student behavior and problem-free classroom lessons. After-school activities that were not available during the 2006-07 school year have

been added at a number of schools. One student said, “They added a football team and a band class this year. We’re getting basketball courts soon, too, so I’m excited.” In RSD-run schools, however, the level of school pride has changed the least. Many RSD-run students in focus groups noted that they did not want to attend their school but were required to when they could not enroll in their first-choice school.

Students face a variety of obstacles in the public schools, from a lack of mental health and special education services, to concerns about their safety. However, in all of the school districts, there has been improvement over the previous school year. While this bodes well for student learning, it is clear that the experience of public school students is still well below the standard for students in neighboring states and the expectations of New Orleans families.



Human Capital



An enormous challenge facing the Recovery School District (RSD) as it prepared for the 2007-08 school year was whether enough teachers could be recruited into the system. The problem was addressed through effective recruitment combined with a lower-than-expected student population. While there has been much discussion about the new teachers, most focus groups and interviews reflected the feeling that new teachers are a welcome addition. Combined with veteran teachers, new teachers provide a diversity of experiences and teaching styles that many students found engaging.

At every level of seniority, teachers in 2007 have higher levels of educational attainment than teachers in 2004 just before Hurricane Katrina.⁵⁴ While this alone does not lead to better teacher quality, it is certainly a step in the right direction. Parents also express a high level of satisfaction with teachers: 75 percent of surveyed public school parents agreed that “My child’s teachers do a good job at meeting his or her needs.” More importantly, students have noticed the difference. Student focus groups consistently reiterated that teacher quality had improved over the last year, though students also mentioned that there is still a minority of teachers going to class each day “simply to collect a check.”

Many teachers said RSD-run schools are seen as a “proving ground” for new teachers where they sink or swim before moving on to other schools or leaving the profession.

RSD-run schools have the highest percentage of teachers that are new to the profession; 60 percent of teachers in RSD-run schools have less than two years of experience. By contrast, 48 percent of teachers in OPSB-run schools and 20 percent of teachers in OPSB charters have 25 or more years of teaching experience.⁵⁵ Though teacher experience, like teacher education, does not necessarily lead to higher teacher quality, there is some evidence that teachers in their first few years of teaching do not improve student performance as much as teachers with 3-5 years of experience or more.⁵⁶ This means that a district which has to rely to a large extent on teachers with less than two years of experience may have lower student performance gains than a district with more experienced teachers.

Overall, a small majority of teachers (53 percent) agree that teaching conditions are better this year versus last year, while only 14 percent disagree.

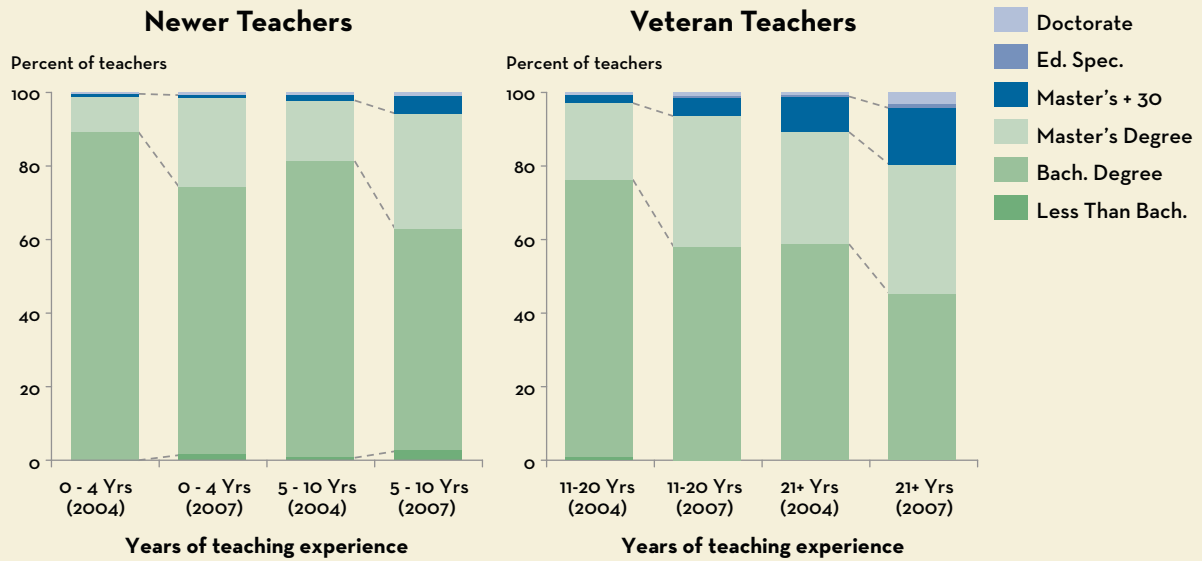
In addition, 60 percent of teachers report that they are satisfied with their current position. Nevertheless, the number of teachers that have seriously considered leaving their current school is relatively high, with 39 percent agreeing or strongly agreeing with that statement. While teachers agree that teacher recruitment is a problem, they view teacher retention as an even larger problem.

“I love my teachers. The newer teachers have an energy that you cannot find that often.”

– RSD-RUN SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

A higher percentage of teachers in RSD-run schools agreed with the statement that they had “seriously considered leaving their current school.” Nationally, 50 percent of teachers quit in the first five years of teaching.⁵⁷ Principals readily acknowledge that one of their main challenges is supporting new teachers and they are worried about the challenges of managing the large influx of new teachers. Fifty-five percent of RSD-run school principals that were interviewed cited the need for increased professional development and mentorship programs for new teachers. Teachers and principals agreed that many new teachers had difficulty teaching to the multiple student skill levels, some of them very low, which exist in public schools. Teachers often felt unsupported in this area, especially teaching special education students included in a regular classroom.

Both new and veteran teachers have higher levels of education today than pre-Katrina



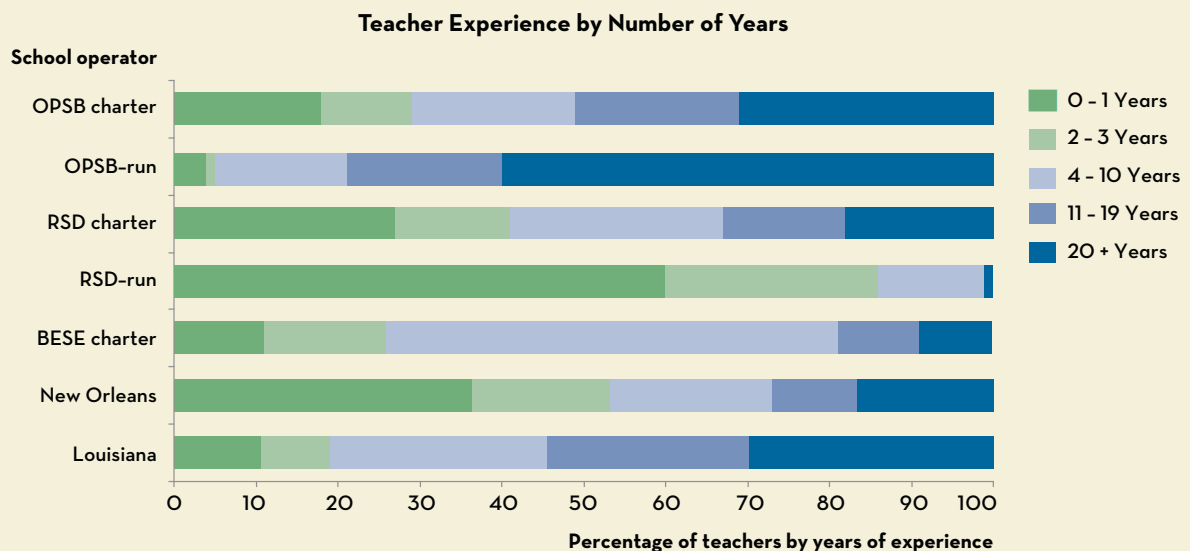
Source: LDE personnel data, 2004 and 2007

Nonprofits are vital to recruiting new teachers, especially from less common sources.

For instance, Teach For America (TFA) recruits a national corps of recent college graduates who commit two years to teach in urban and rural public schools. In 2007-08, TFA has over 80 corps members teaching in public schools in New Orleans. For next school year, the program plans to place 190 new teachers in the city's schools. By 2010, TFA projects that approximately 1 in 3 greater New Orleans public school students will be taught by a Teach For America corps member or alum.⁵⁸ In addition, TeachNOLA recruits

professionals working in non-teaching careers and certified teachers to teach in the city's traditional and charter schools. The organization placed 176 teachers out of nearly 2,300 applicants during the 2007-08 school year. TeachNOLA plans to place an additional 100 teachers next school year.⁵⁹ Finally, teaching is now the third highest-ranking profession for recent graduates of Tulane University.⁶⁰

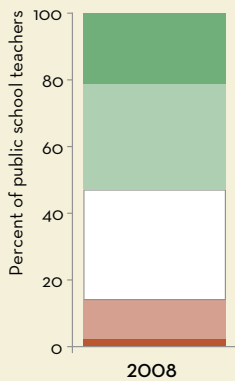
OPSB-run school teachers have the most years of experience while RSD-run school teachers have the least



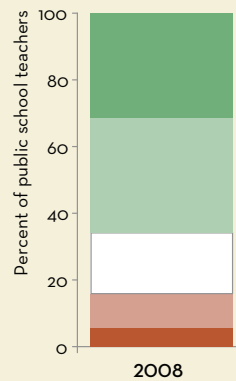
Source: LDE personnel data, 2007

Teachers generally report better conditions but one third of teachers have seriously considered leaving their school

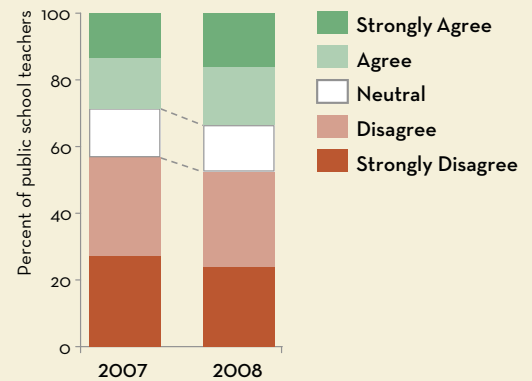
Teaching conditions are better since last year



I am satisfied in my current position

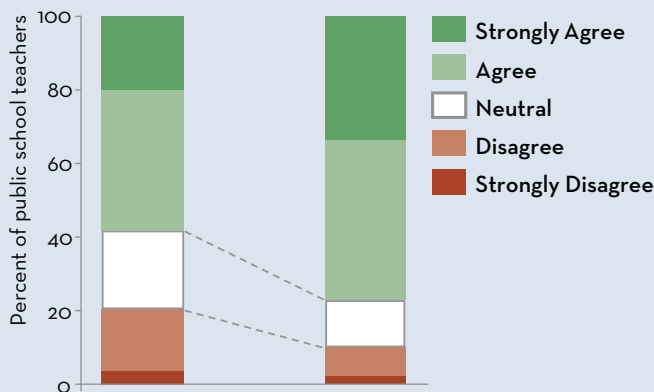


I have seriously considered leaving my current school

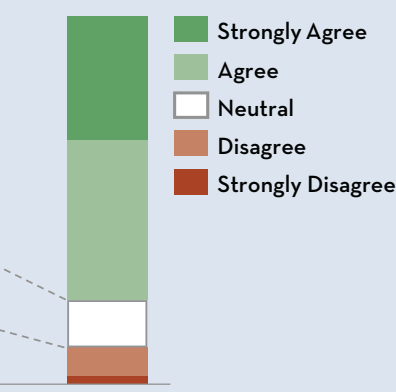


Teachers see recruiting as a problem, and retention as an even larger problem

Recruiting good teachers is a problem in New Orleans



Retaining good teachers is a problem in New Orleans

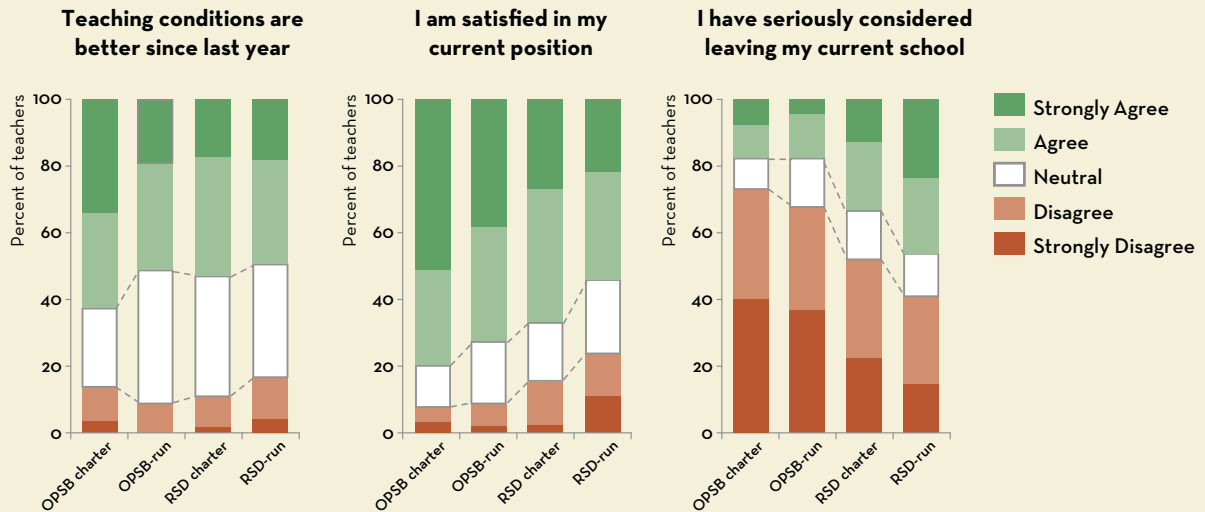


Principals are crucial to a school's success or failure.

In most focus groups, teachers and students noted that that principal performance had improved since last year. The most important activities brought up in focus groups were “walking the halls,” enforcing discipline, and establishing cohesiveness among students and faculty. In those schools where focus groups reported declining school quality, nearly all participants mentioned the role of the principal as contributing to or even prompting this decline. Contrary to the comments mentioned in the “successful school” focus groups, principals mentioned in “declining school” focus groups were seen as largely absent, poor communicators, and contributing to a lack of school cohesiveness. In one high school, there were extensive comments regarding a new principal and the lack of community that resulted. One student said, “The school tells us that we are going to prepare for college but they treat us like we are kids. I don’t even know [principal’s name] as a principal, I just know that [he/she] is the principal.”

Several interviewees mentioned the complexities of the principal’s job under the current choice system. Due to the emergence of charter schools and increasing school autonomy, some suggested that increased “MBA-like” training is needed to handle issues like student recruitment, public relations, fundraising, strategic planning, and school operations. Proper resources and training for principals is necessary to build on current success. Seventy-two percent of public school teachers agree that their school has strong management and leadership, though this approval rating is lower in RSD-run schools. Moreover, as is true with teachers, RSD-run school principals have much less experience compared to other school operators, especially charter schools.⁶¹ As mentioned previously, the national nonprofit New Leaders for New

OPSB charter and OPSB-run school teachers are more satisfied and less likely to consider leaving their school



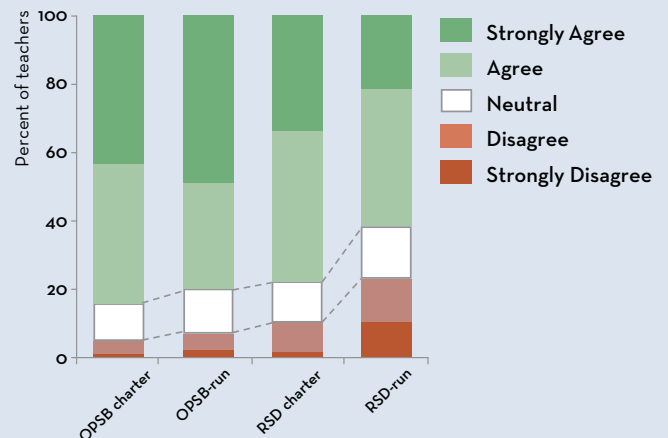
Schools (NLNS) has begun training a cohort of educators with leadership potential to become school principals. NLNS plans to train 40 new school principals over the next three years.

Overall, 2007-08 was a year of progress in terms of human capital.

Parents rank teacher performance highly, and most teachers believe that there is strong leadership at their schools. Importantly, students recognize and appreciate that better principals and teachers are leading to improvements at the school level and, subsequently, in their academic performance. Principals are seen as having a large impact on their schools' direction and performance. Several schools previously described as "out of control" by students were turned around within one year largely due to new leaders establishing clear rules and expectations. By contrast, negative comments regarding principals were made in schools seen as declining by students and teachers. While order and discipline alone do not lead to increased student achievement, they are necessary to create an effective learning environment. Though many opportunities for improvement remain, there have been strong and beneficial changes in school leadership and teaching staff this year that should lead to positive results in the future.

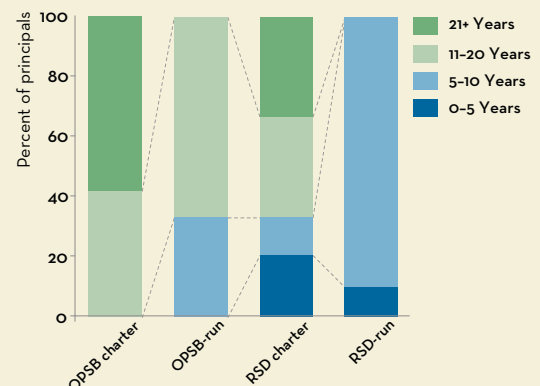
RSD-run school teachers are the least satisfied with school leadership

My school has strong management and leadership



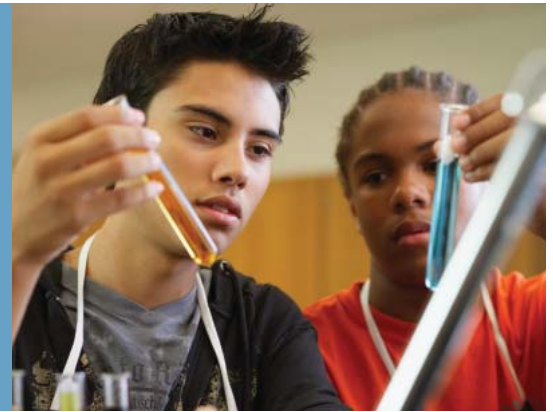
OPSB charter school principals have the most experience while RSD-run school principals have the least

Principals by years of experience



Source: LDE personnel data, 2007

Student Achievement



New Orleans remains one of the lowest-performing parishes in Louisiana in terms of student achievement on standardized tests. As mentioned previously, all public school operators in New Orleans have a high number of at-risk students, based on their eligibility for free and reduced lunch. The challenges of educating at-risk students were demonstrated by the Recovery School District's (RSD) analysis of its fall 2007 incoming class, which showed that 85 percent of students are two or more years below grade level.⁶² The relative baseline and context of each district—as well as each school—needs to be considered when making comparisons based on student achievement.

Certain facts are clear: There have been enormous changes as a result of Katrina.

Many former schools did not reopen, while new schools have appeared. Almost all New Orleans public school teachers were fired; some have been rehired, and many new teachers have been hired. Some students studied out of state during the post-storm period, while others stayed in Louisiana or did not attend school at all. When students returned, many did not return to their pre-Katrina school.⁶³ When students did return to the same school, the leadership, staff, and mix of students were often very different than before the storm. For these reasons, few definitive conclusions can be drawn from comparing pre- and post-Katrina test scores for individual schools or groups of schools. They are not comparable due to the enormous changes within schools and across the school population; they are measuring different things.

When looking at district-level test scores before and after Katrina, the most notable aspect of both 2004 and 2007 scores is that New Orleans students performed well below state averages. Therefore, the post-Katrina period continues with massive challenges and an opportunity for significant improvement. In both the fourth and eighth grades, scores in English and math are relatively low. Fourth graders have greater challenges in math than in English, but both remain far below state averages. In the eighth grade, the challenges are similarly large for both math and English.

Comparing the 2007 baseline scores of different districts, Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB) schools started with higher test scores than RSD schools.

Given the reasons for each district's formation, this should be expected. In fourth-grade exams, OPSB-run schools scored at the same level or higher than OPSB charters, though the opposite is true for eighth-grade scores. For RSD schools, the charters consistently score higher than RSD-run schools. Interestingly, the baseline for RSD charters and OPSB-run schools is very similar for eighth-grade math.

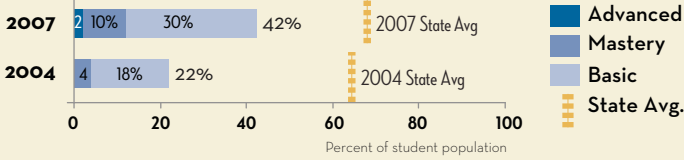
In Fall 2008, the Cowen Institute will release an addendum to this report to make the first post-Katrina comparisons of year-over-year LEAP test scores. This publication will provide some context for the relative starting points not only of each school, but also of each district.

Overall, year-to-year comparisons are important and necessary, but there are certain caveats to be made because of the issue of student recruitment. Schools are expected to increase LEAP scores as the main measure of their performance, and this method is valid as long as the student population remains similar year after year. The choices inherent in the post-Katrina education system, however, encourage student mobility, and lead to the possibility that school scores could go up and down based mostly on what types of students are choosing the school. As a result, schools that are effective at taking low performers and substantially raising their scores would fare worse under the current system than a school that simply concentrates on recruiting higher-performing students.

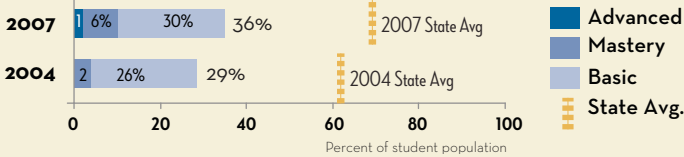
Fourth grade LEAP scores have increased on average since Katrina

Percentage of New Orleans 4th grade students scoring "Basic" or above on the LEAP test

ENGLISH



MATH

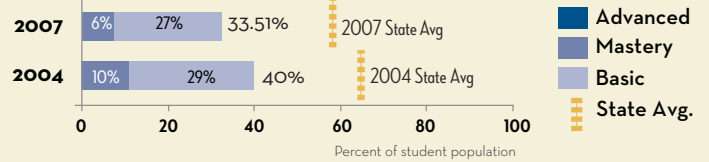


Source: LDE achievement data, 2004 and 2007

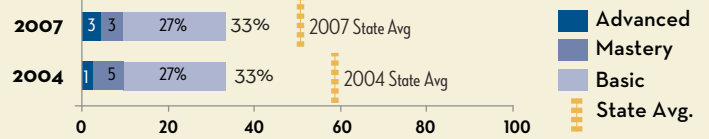
Eighth grade LEAP scores have decreased or remained the same on average since Katrina

Percentage of New Orleans 8th grade students scoring "Basic" or above on the LEAP test

ENGLISH



MATH

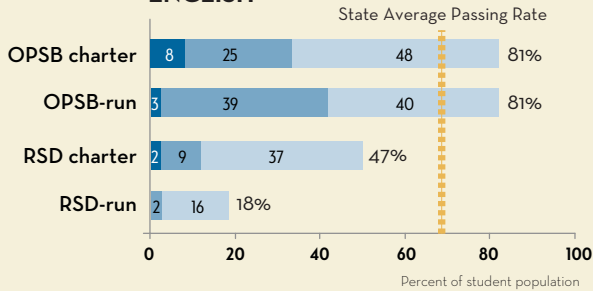


Source: LDE achievement data, 2004 and 2007

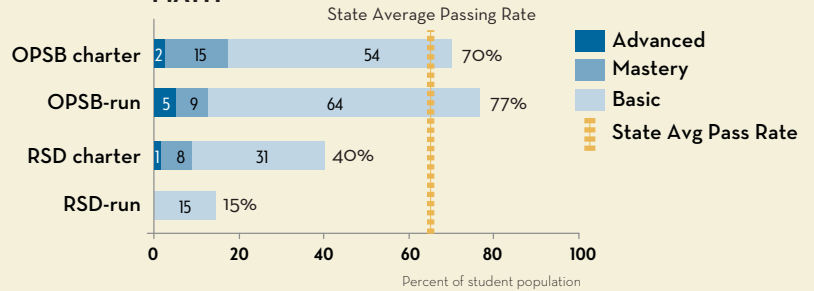
OPSB schools passed the 4th grade LEAP test at a higher rate than RSD schools – Just 15 percent of RSD-run school students passed the Math section of the LEAP –

Percentage of 4th grade students scoring "Basic" or above on 2007 LEAP test

ENGLISH



MATH

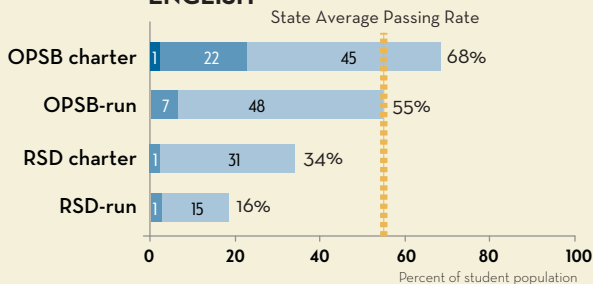


Source: LDE achievement data, 2007

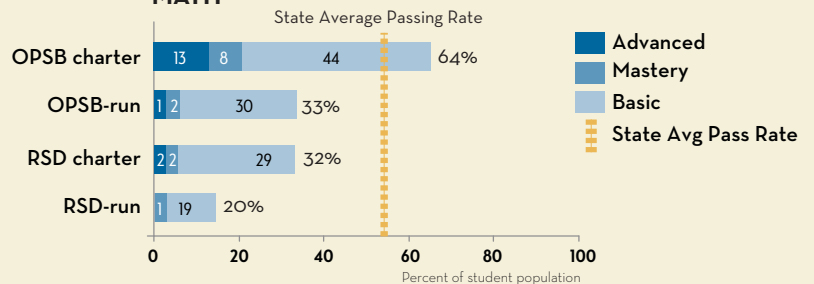
OPSB schools surpassed RSD 8th grade LEAP scores too – All passing rates declined from the 4th grade to the 8th grade except for RSD-run schools –

Percentage of 8th grade students scoring "Basic" or above on 2007 LEAP test

ENGLISH



MATH



Source: LDE achievement data, 2007



There are several signals that the school system is on the verge of making inroads in terms of student achievement.

As mentioned in several other chapters, there are many factors that point to the likelihood that student achievement will increase over last year:

- 1) There was a relatively smooth school opening in 2007-08 with improved facilities and an adequate number of teachers.
- 2) Principal quality is regarded as improved at most schools.
- 3) Teacher education levels and perceived quality have improved since last year.
- 4) Schools feel more welcoming, leading to improved student engagement.
- 5) There is better school and classroom discipline.

Tempering this optimism are the following problems:

- 1) A very high percentage of students are at-risk and below grade level, especially in RSD-run and RSD charter schools.
- 2) Multiple student skill levels are present in many classrooms, creating unique challenges for an inexperienced cohort of teachers.
- 3) There is still a lack of high quality schooling options for every student.

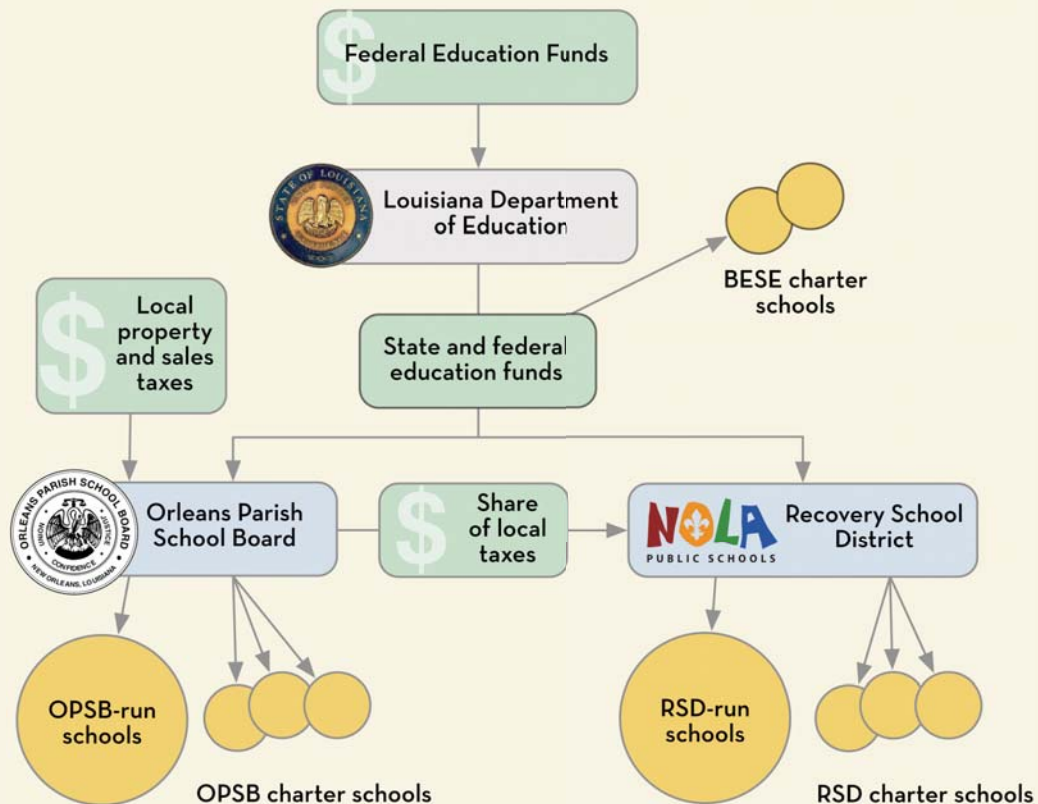
Overall, schools feel a cautious optimism. Twenty-three out of 25 focus groups expressed that school conditions had improved at least somewhat in the last year. Survey results also point to a year of progress. Finally, 71 percent of survey respondents affiliated with public schools agreed with the statement that public schools will be better in the future.

Funding



While public schools in New Orleans receive funds from a variety of sources, the majority of funds come from local and state taxes. In Louisiana, local school districts levy property and sales taxes. The revenue from these taxes is combined with additional funding from the state to provide revenue to the schools in each district. In New Orleans, the Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB) levies taxes on behalf of all public schools in the parish: OPSB-run schools, OPSB charter schools, Recovery School District (RSD)-run schools, and RSD charter schools. The two Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) charters that operate in New Orleans receive funding directly from the state; they do not receive any local tax revenue. In 2008, the OPSB estimates that it will collect \$88 million in property taxes and \$90 million in sales taxes.

How public education in New Orleans is funded





In Louisiana, combined local and state funds for schools are distributed under the Minimum Foundation Program (MFP).

The MFP is designed to determine the cost of a minimum foundation of education for every student in Louisiana and to distribute state funds equitably to local school systems. Using a formula that takes into account local tax revenues, the Louisiana Department of Education calculates a per-pupil amount of funding for every parish in the state. Certain categories of students receive additional weighting in the formula. At-risk students (i.e., students who are eligible for free or reduced lunch or students with limited English proficiency) are weighted by 121 percent; vocational education students are weighted by 105 percent; special education students with disabilities are weighted by 250 percent; and special education students who are talented and gifted are weighted by 160 percent.

Many schools in New Orleans also receive federal funds. Although there are numerous sources of federal funds for schools, the majority of federal funds going to New Orleans public schools come from two programs: Title I formula grants and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Part B. Title I provides financial assistance to schools with high numbers or high percentages of poor children to ensure that all children can meet challenging state academic standards. IDEA Part B provides funds to supplement or increase the level of special education services for students with disabilities. These funds can be used for a wide variety of purposes. Because Title I and IDEA Part B are targeted to specific populations, the amount of funding varies by schools.

For many reasons, it is difficult to assess the financial health of public schools in New Orleans at the present time.

First, there is no single financial picture for public education in New Orleans. The OPSB and the RSD have different financial situations as does each individual charter school or charter organization. While one district or school may be financially healthy, another might not be. Second, there is substantial non-recurring revenue related to hurricane recovery flowing through the districts. It is difficult to know in detail what the financial situation of the districts will be once this revenue has been expended. Nevertheless, it is possible to draw some general conclusions about the financial picture of the two districts and their charter schools.

For the 2007-08 school year, the OPSB has a total budget of \$270 million; however, this figure overstates the cost of operating OPSB schools.

One-third of the OPSB's expenses are payments to the RSD. Because the OPSB is the local taxing body, it collects tax revenues that must be passed through to the other schools in the parish. Another 26 percent of the OPSB's expenses are payments on its debt. The OPSB retains all of the debt from before Hurricane Katrina, including bond debt from when the public schools served approximately twice as many students. OPSB also passes through MFP funding for the charters that it oversees. Of the OPSB's total budget, 18 percent is transferred to charter schools.

There are two areas of concern in the OPSB's finances. First, the current level of expenditure at OPSB-run schools is not sustainable. For the five regular district-run schools (two are juvenile detention schools), the OPSB is spending more than \$20,000 per student in total operating expenditures, or more than double what the school system spent per pupil before Katrina.⁶⁴ Some of the additional expenditures are one-time costs related to hurricane recovery. Other extra expenditures are related to the school board's responsibility for managing the legacy debt from before Katrina. However, such an expenditure level raises questions about whether recurring expenses are currently being paid for with non-recurring funds. If so, these schools will face significant budget cuts and, as a result, programmatic cuts in the near future. The second source of concern is the method used by the OPSB to allocate funding to district-run schools. Funds are allocated to schools based on personnel budgets created based on student-to-teacher ratios and mandated positions. Because teachers receive different salaries based on experience, it is not clear that this allocation method results in a fairly distributed amount of funding based on student need across OPSB-run schools.

The Recovery School District has a budget of \$262 million for the 2007-08 school year.

The expenditures in this budget are almost entirely for district-run schools; a little over one percent of the total budget is for operating expenses related to services provided to charter schools. Unlike the OPSB, the RSD allocates funding to its district-run schools on a per-pupil basis, with higher weightings for special education students. There are four different per-pupil allocation amounts: one for regular education students and three for special education students. Special education students with more profound needs receive a higher allocation than those with less profound needs.

The current RSD administration inherited a system in disarray with significant cash flow problems, a poor

relationship with FEMA, and without a detailed budget. In February 2008, the RSD resolved its immediate cash flow problems by receiving payments from the state into a revolving fund that will be repaid with future FEMA reimbursements.⁶⁵ The RSD has also improved its negotiating relationship with FEMA, and has created a new and simpler model for documenting damages and receiving reimbursements for building contents.⁶⁶ Finally, the RSD has produced its first detailed budget since the storm.⁶⁷

Like the OPSB, the RSD's operating budget reports that the district is spending over \$20,000 per pupil. Though this represents more than twice what was spent pre-storm, RSD staff members explain that many capital expenses are included in their operating budget, making comparisons to pre-storm per-pupil spending invalid. Out of necessity, the district has included one-time disaster recovery expenses and capital expenses in its operating budget until reimbursements can be received. Operating funds were spent on capital costs for RSD-run and RSD charter schools (RSD staff members report that they spent \$60-\$70 million on RSD charter school buildings and contents alone). RSD staff members predict that their spending will decrease substantially, and identify a more stable operating cost of \$12,000-\$13,000 per pupil for the future. The RSD continues to operate in a state of flux; district staff members report that they are constantly amending their budget.⁶⁸

Even so, many of the RSD's most expensive reforms from the current year were paid for using non-recurring, primarily federal, sources of funding. These include low student-teacher ratios, introducing a significant amount of technological resources into the classroom, and offering extended day and summer school programming. The district acknowledges that it will be a challenge to cut back these initiatives in the coming years as one-time sources of revenue disappear.⁶⁹

It should be noted that both districts, and especially the RSD, are working in extreme circumstances where incoming revenue streams and school costs are hard to predict. However, the likelihood of deep cuts in school spending and programs is a challenge that the school systems and the community will need to face.

Because each charter school adopts its own budget, it is difficult to gain a comprehensive understanding of the financial health of charter schools.

Charter schools are public schools and are entitled to a proportional share of MFP funding based on their student count. Charter schools are also eligible to receive funding under programs such as Title I and IDEA Part B, assuming that they meet the programs' requirements. Furthermore, many charter schools receive donations, sometimes

substantial, from private sources. In both systems, charter schools receive a set amount of money per pupil regardless of a student's individual level of need or disability. As a result, charter schools with a greater proportion of special needs students than the average do not receive more funds to serve that higher level of need. This creates a clear disincentive to accept high needs students who are more expensive to serve. On the expenses side, charter schools have considerable autonomy to set their own budgets. Thus, different charter schools may spend their money in very different ways.

While it is difficult to assess the specifics of charter school funding because of its variety, some general patterns can be identified. OPSB charter schools currently receive 100 percent of the per-pupil MFP funding.⁷⁰ This funding arrangement means that charters are not paying their share of certain costs. First, OPSB charters do not pay anything toward existing bond debt. The OPSB levies a millage that is dedicated toward repaying debt on bonds issued to address capital needs at all Orleans Parish school buildings. The millage revenue is included in the MFP calculations, so all schools in Orleans Parish receive a portion of this revenue. OPSB charter schools are able to keep this revenue, and OPSB must pay the costs related to debt service out of its own funding. On the other hand, RSD charters do pay the annual per-pupil share of bond debt. The per-pupil costs of this debt are between \$400 and \$500 annually. Second, as discussed below, OPSB charters do not pay any fees for district overhead. The OPSB spends approximately seven percent of its total budget on costs related to providing services to charter schools and RSD schools. By contrast, RSD charters pay a percentage of their MFP toward overhead. Thus, while their per-pupil expenditures are probably more sustainable than those at district-run schools, OPSB charter schools are not currently being required to cover the full costs of operating their schools. Of all the public schools in Orleans Parish today, RSD charters probably come closest to receiving the amount of funding that schools can expect to receive over the longer term.

The circumstances surrounding school facilities in New Orleans are complicated under the current system.

While the OPSB retains ownership of all public school buildings in Orleans Parish, control of individual buildings generally rests with the school district that oversees the schools. That is, buildings that house RSD schools, including charter schools, are under the control of the RSD. Buildings that house OPSB schools, including charter schools, are under the control of the OPSB. At charter schools, the individual school is responsible for any expenses that are considered maintenance. This split in responsibility leads to confusion

and disputes over who should pay for expenses that are not easily classified as either capital or maintenance. Furthermore, neither the RSD nor the OPSB has adequate resources to address the full capital needs of their buildings. Currently, only Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding related to hurricane recovery are available to address school capital needs. However, there is no source of ongoing revenue dedicated to facilities for either district. Federal funds for hurricane recovery are expected to address only 35 – 40 percent of capital needs across all schools.⁷¹

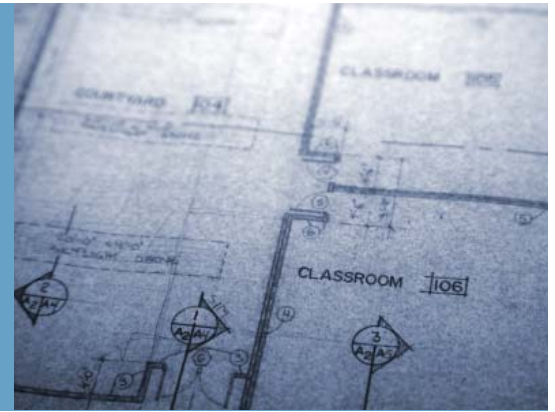
The OPSB has a significant amount of debt: approximately \$500 million in total.

Some of the debt existed before Hurricane Katrina, when the school district had many more students, teachers, and schools. Indeed, the bond debt carried by the OPSB is for bonds that were issued when there were approximately twice as many public school students in over 120 schools. Other debt was incurred as a result of Katrina. For example, the school district received a Community Disaster Loan of nearly \$60 million to help with recovery efforts in the immediate aftermath of the storm. Not including charter school students, the OPSB now has fewer than 3,000 students. It will not be able to retire all of the debt that it carries nor should it be expected to retire debt from a school system 20 times that size. The question of how to split this debt among students in OPSB-run schools, OPSB charter schools, RSD-run schools, and RSD charter schools is a complicated one, and the school districts and charter schools have not yet found a solution.

It is difficult to draw more specific conclusions about the financial situation of schools in New Orleans.

Charter schools, RSD-run schools, and OPSB-run schools all have different operating and regulatory environments; therefore, they face different financial challenges. The OPSB has different authorities and responsibilities under state law than the RSD does. Additionally, the OPSB and RSD budgets are in different formats, and the RSD budget is still in flux. The most important short term issue for public schools in New Orleans is sustainability of revenues and expenditures. In addition, facility repair and debt are two major outstanding financial issues that must be addressed by all public schools in New Orleans working together.

Facilities and Operations



Public schools in New Orleans opened the 2007-08 school year relatively smoothly, with an adequate number of facilities and more than enough teachers. While major issues with school facilities remain, students, teachers, and principals are generally pleased with building improvements to date. During the 2006-07 school year, facilities had problems ranging from dysfunctional and dilapidated kitchens and bathrooms to leaky pipes and ceilings. Schools were in such disrepair that State Superintendent Paul Pastorek made their reconditioning a top priority.

During the summer of 2007, an RSD Kitchens and Restrooms Tiger Team (commissioned by Paul Pastorek and created with the help of the Louisiana National Guard) repaired facilities to ensure they were in basic working order and capable of producing hot meals for every school before classes started.⁷² Student feedback has generally been positive—schools have been able to serve hot meals this year and bathrooms are vastly improved. Walls have been painted and new furniture has arrived. National and local organizations like KaBOOM! and Communities In Schools also supported the effort by providing a range of resources to schools, including books, volunteer labor, playground equipment, and funding. One young student during a focus group commented on the colors of the newly painted walls: “They are welcoming and I love it here.” Another quickly agreed in stronger terms: “I actually feel like a student this year, not like a prisoner.”

Two of the biggest upgrades in public schools during the 2007-08 school year involved technology.

In RSD-run schools, all core-curriculum classrooms between the fourth and 12th grades received interactive electronic whiteboards that allow teachers to display images and videos. A number of charter schools have also bought interactive whiteboards for their schools. Students and teachers in focus groups give the new whiteboards high marks, saying they make lessons more engaging and allow them to supplement the curriculum with digital content. The only difficulty students noted with the boards involves their use; some teachers do not seem to have adequate training to use the technology and struggle with its operation. Teachers in focus groups also admit that their ability to use the new whiteboards varies widely.

The second major technology initiative this year was providing basic laptop computers for all RSD-run high school students to assist them with their coursework through the delivery of certain curriculum materials.⁷³ While a laptop per high school student sounds promising, many teachers reported that the computers malfunction too easily and distract students who have breached the Internet firewall. Students use the laptops to play games and listen to music. One RSD-run school principal pointed out that the computers would be valuable if they complemented lessons, but in some instances they are replacing them: “The computers should be a tool for the curriculum, not THE curriculum.” Students are also generally disappointed by the computers, and, though they like the idea of having a computer, they have not yet found them particularly useful for learning. RSD district leaders said in interviews that they plan to expand the program in the coming year to better align it with the curriculum.

Based on benchmarks created by the RSD, the facilities improvement plan in RSD schools is progressing well.

A regular RSD facilities evaluation based on internal teacher surveys demonstrates progress in the majority of the schools over the past school year. Seventy-three percent of elementary school teachers said they had newly painted classrooms, and 87 percent had properly functioning air conditioning. High school teachers reported similar numbers.⁷⁴ The RSD uses the surveys to follow up with individual schools, and district officials report that nearly all classrooms have been painted since they received teacher responses.

In a more problematic area, only 48 percent of elementary school teachers and 52 percent of high school teachers said they had enough textbooks for all of their students when they were surveyed in fall 2007.⁷⁵ RSD-run school teachers in focus groups also expressed frustration with the delay in getting textbooks at the beginning of the year. According to RSD officials, all teachers now have enough textbooks because the issue was resolved as a follow-up to the surveys. Though worrying that these procurement problems persist, it is worth noting that RSD internal surveys are being conducted and were openly shared. This is a positive indication of the performance management style being used in the RSD.

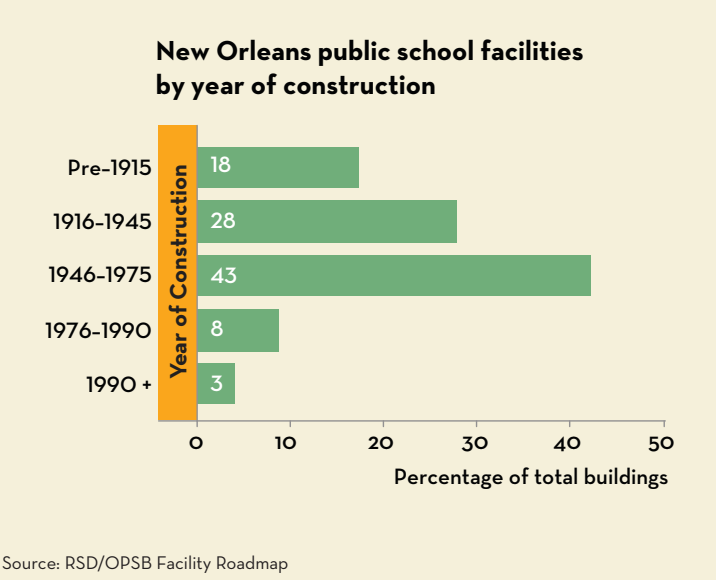
Despite the positive changes, there are many facilities issues that still need to be resolved.

Students from one high school complained about a lengthy electricity outage of several weeks in half of the building, while about half of the students in focus groups commented that bathrooms were still lacking stall doors, hot water, or soap. This was seen as an issue across all operators. Overall, results are mixed. For instance, while 50 percent of teachers surveyed did not agree that the physical condition of their schools interferes with student learning, a third (33 percent) did agree with the statement.⁷⁶ While noting significant improvements since last year, teachers, students, and principals agree that much still remains to be done to bring school facilities up to an acceptable level.

To address continuing facility needs, five schools are slated to receive new or fully renovated facilities for the 2009-10 school year through the RSD's Quick Start program.⁷⁷

In addition to Quick Start, a School Facilities Master Plan undertaken by the state and the Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB) seeks to set out a plan for school repairs, demolitions, and new builds, with the first projects to be completed in 2010. The master plan evaluates the current status of every school facility in New Orleans. Those preparing the master plan have organized community meetings to give New Orleans residents input into the decision-making process. While seen as a good idea, most focus group participants who have attended these meetings found them to be unproductive. One public school employee who attended said, "I felt like [New Orleans Public Schools] wasn't listening and they had the meeting to say they included the public." A presentation of the completed School Facilities Master Plan is expected to be released shortly after this report. In addition, it is unclear where the funds to finance the master plan will come from. As of now, only 35-40 percent of the necessary funds for public school capital needs (estimated at \$1.5 billion) have been identified.⁷⁸

**The vast majority of New Orleans school buildings are more than 30 years old
- Only 3 percent of schools were built in the last 18 years -**



“I’ve had two urinals out of commission for two and a half months. . . . the AC was pumping cold air on the coldest day of the year. It is hard to get RSD to fix these things.”

– RSD CHARTER SCHOOL PRINCIPAL⁷⁹

Disagreements over who will pay for what has a negative impact on the resolution of maintenance issues in charter schools.⁸⁰

The problem is compounded in the RSD because the district not only oversees many more charters but also controls the buildings that sustained the greatest level of damage from Katrina. In both the RSD and the OPSB, charters are housed in facilities controlled by their respective district. As a result, many charters see the district as the responsible party when something goes wrong, while the districts insist that maintenance is the responsibility of the charters. Though there is disagreement over what counts as a capital improvement and what counts as maintenance, charters have also voiced concerns about paying for maintenance because many have had to switch buildings since their establishment. Charters do not want to invest money into a building that they may not use within a year or two. There are also worrying delays in the assignment of facilities for new charters. While new RSD charter schools for the 2008-09 school year were authorized by the Louisiana Board

of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) in early December 2007, schools were recruiting students for three months before they all knew where they would be located.⁸¹ Understandably, it is difficult to recruit students for a school that does not yet have an address.

The OPSB and its charter schools have also disagreed over who should pay for students' transportation.

The OPSB and its charters dispute who is responsible for paying for busing charter school students. As a result, some OPSB charter schools do not offer free transportation to their students. This creates another barrier to full school choice. By contrast, all RSD charter schools are required by their agreements with BESE to provide transportation or bus tokens to their students.⁸² For the schools and districts that pay for busing, the cost has gone up since Katrina. As mentioned previously, 82 percent of students in RSD-run schools and 79 percent of students in OPSB-run schools live more than a mile from their school and as a result are eligible to take the bus or receive bus tokens. In addition, 42 percent of students in RSD-run schools travel three or more miles to school.⁸³ This has led to higher transportation costs than before Katrina, when many more students lived close enough to walk or bike to school.

Though many problems remain for school facilities and operations, overall year-over-year improvements have been substantial.

Working kitchens and bathrooms, upgraded technology, newly painted schools, and improved procurement are all significant advances given the condition of public schools during the 2006-07 school year. Much remains to be done, however, to bring facilities up to acceptable standards. Increased transportation costs and disputes over building maintenance will continue to challenge public schools until districts and charter schools are able to cooperate and adopt common policies. Finally, identifying and securing the funds to bring all school facilities up to a high level of excellence will remain a significant challenge for the public education system in the coming years.



Parent and Community Involvement



Numerous new and existing community organizations stepped forward after Katrina to assist public schools in New Orleans. There are dozens of nonprofit organizations that provide a range of services to schools at little or no cost, including tutoring, counseling, health care, and afterschool care. Numerous studies suggest that carefully crafted and implemented youth programs can improve student academic and behavioral outcomes.⁸⁴

One of the larger programs working in New Orleans is the Afterschool Partnership for Greater New Orleans, which offers afterschool programs with training, evaluation, and other support to increase the quality of out-of-school time opportunities. Another youth enrichment program is Young Aspirations/Young Artists, which gives students the chance to apprentice with professional artists and learn about the business aspect of the arts. The Ashé Cultural Arts Center, an African-American-based neighborhood outreach organization, provides child care that coincides with RSD's vacation schedule to give students a place to spend non-school days. Communities In Schools, a national organization, helps link schools with community organizations to help students stay in school. Organizations like the Fyre Youth Squad and Kids Rethink New Orleans Schools are empowering students to think about and affect school change. All of these organizations, and many others, are connecting with students and schools to supplement the school day with activities that address the multiple needs of children and young adults.

While New Orleans residents agree that community organizations are helping public schools, school administrators are still unsure of their role as a community center for the neighborhood, not just a school for students. Principals and teachers agree that community members can help keep students engaged and learning, which in turn increases the likelihood that they remain in school. School leaders also agree that a school used by the neighborhood—not just the students—would increase community involvement, but they are uncertain of how to lead such an endeavor, nor do they have much time to devote to it. “Our

computer lab is not used in the evening,” one principal said. “I would love to see it used for a GED class to integrate our school within the neighborhood, but I don't know how.”

Community work in local schools can also have an unintended consequences. With an abundance of newly created organizations since Katrina, their well-intended efforts can create a dilemma for school leaders. One principal said, “We are getting loved to death. For every organization that comes in and helps out, I have to turn away one or two. Nonprofits don't ask how they can serve us as a school and fill in the gaps; instead, they simply create their own program.” This problem was echoed by other school leaders, who were quick to express their gratefulness for community groups, but also their desire to have better coordination between school needs and available services. However, overall community organizations are seen by schools as beneficial and an important component for the future success of public education in New Orleans.

“I like that charters have fueled discussion about schooling and quality of education and choice. Charters make people like me get involved in public education and care about its quality. People without a direct connection to public education in New Orleans are now donating their time and money. I'm hoping charters are opening the door for change in the system.”

— RSD CHARTER BOARD MEMBER

One of the most intriguing changes in community involvement has been a direct result of the increase in the number of charter schools.

Involvement in charter boards has engaged many community members in public education and is bringing together a diverse cross section of New Orleans society to advocate for public schools. This is happening within the context of increased support from New Orleans residents who are otherwise unaffiliated with public schools, such as business community members, social club members (like the Rex Organization), and university faculty, staff, and students that are participating in various aspects of urban school renewal. Many interviewees expressed the hope that this diverse involvement in New Orleans public education will help ensure that the latest efforts at school reform will not only be more effective than previous reforms, but also more sustainable.

Community involvement can be important in improving student achievement, but parental involvement is essential.

According to 2002 research by the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, students with involved parents—no matter what their income or background—are more likely to earn higher grades and test scores, attend school regularly, and adapt well to school.⁸⁵ Parental involvement in New Orleans, while low, appears to be improving slowly and varies widely by school. A few teachers identified parents as an integral part of the school community, while most expressed the view that parents rarely connect with the school, especially once children leave the early grades. Veteran teachers noted that report card conferences and meetings have yielded low parental attendance since before Katrina, but that more parents are starting to interact with their children's schools.

In interviews, school leaders stressed the importance of parents to help motivate and engage their children. Parents generally feel that schools are reaching out to them: 82 percent of public school parents surveyed agreed that their child's school encourages parental involvement, including 54 percent who strongly agreed. One parent in a focus group said, "We need parents and organizations to get involved at the schools because teachers just can't work around the clock. Plus, the stronger the community's relationship with the school, the stronger the school will be."

According to one charter school board member, "Parents used to have a 'why bother' attitude about the schools since they were bad. Now that they are improving, parents are encouraged, volunteering more and showing up more." As afterschool activities have increased, parents are attending athletic events, performances, and concerts. Some charter schools even require parental involvement, including in-person

student pickup and appointments with teachers. For instance, the principal and social worker from one charter school met with all parents in their homes before the first day of school to engage them from the start of the 2007-08 school year.⁸⁶

Community involvement has increased in public schools but parental involvement remains low.

The New Orleans community is engaging with public schools through charter school boards, volunteer organizations, philanthropy, and other avenues. Many educators feel that community involvement in public education is at an all-time high. However, parental involvement is only slightly improved since the hurricane. Several teachers and principals felt that many low income parents are reluctant to get involved in schools because they were failed by New Orleans public schools when they were students. Some cite the economic hardship and mental stress that many parents face, and still others blame a generalized apathy. Whatever the causes, until methods are found to increase parental engagement with the city's public schools, it may be difficult to create systemic change in New Orleans public education.

Conclusion



Public schools in New Orleans face massive challenges to becoming a premier system of learning, but they are carving out a pathway toward a brighter future. Reforming the public schools will require dedication and perseverance from principals, teachers, parents, students, nonprofits, universities, businesses, and the entire New Orleans community. Our research, and the work of many others, has identified several areas of particular concern:

Governance:

It will be difficult for schools to plan for the future without additional cooperation between school systems and a process for deciding the future of school governance. Even if the solution arrived at is a highly decentralized system, many interviewees stressed the need for better definition of roles and responsibilities for the many organizations involved in public education. Likewise, the lack of good information about schools means that parents cannot effectively use school choice and the community does not have good insight into school quality.

Principals and teachers:

Principal leadership sets the tone for school communities. A principal who is both skilled at school management and present by “walking the halls” is more likely to create a positive school culture. Classroom teachers appreciate effective management and students are better behaved and more engaged in schools that are properly run both in and outside of the classroom. Likewise, effective and well-supported teachers can make a huge difference in student achievement, regardless of student background.⁸⁷ Interviewees and focus group participants expressed that additional mentoring and training for teachers and principals is critical to building excellent schools. In addition, without good support and opportunities for professional development, it will be difficult for public schools to recruit and retain high-quality teachers.

Resources and support:

The requisites for a quality school system extend beyond its human resources. To be successful, schools must have high-quality facilities, adequate funding, and ample services to keep students healthy, including nourishing meals, health care, and mental health counseling. Access to proper services increases the probability of student retention and subsequently lowers dropout rates.⁸⁸ As this report has shown, though facilities have improved and supplies are more plentiful, much remains to be done. In addition, student services for special education and mental health are severely lacking in most public schools in New Orleans.

Parent and community involvement:

Students’ time outside of school must be well spent in order for them to achieve in the classroom. Parent and community involvement in schools provides mentoring, tutoring, and other support, which not only reinforces teaching but also reduces juvenile crime and violence caused by a lack of adult supervision.⁸⁹ As this report has shown, while community involvement has increased since the storm, parental involvement in public schools is still very low.



While the system of public schools in New Orleans is transforming, it still has a great way to go before all students can go to high-performing, high-quality schools. There is no perfect formula to follow for transforming low-performing urban school systems, but there are districts that have successfully implemented changes. While school environments may feel more positive immediately following new reforms, large measurable results are often not observed for several years. We can see this through past examples in other troubled urban school systems:

Boston:

In 1995, Boston Public Schools launched a pilot school program that opened both charters and new traditional schools and tailored the course offerings for each. Nine years later, the percentage of ninth graders passing the state exam in pilot schools rose from 25 percent to 74 percent. The pilot schools also had better retention and graduation rates, despite having a student population that was representative of the Boston Public Schools as a whole.

Philadelphia:

In 2002, 70 low-performing schools were placed under the operating control of education management organizations and community groups and, like in New Orleans, some were turned into charters. By 2005, the number of schools meeting adequate yearly progress benchmarks had tripled, and test scores had improved substantially.

San Jose:

In 1998, the school board increased graduation requirements, including an additional year of math, science, and foreign language. Seven years later, high school reading and math scores had improved and the number of students meeting college entrance requirements had increased by 25 percent.⁹⁰

Through these successful urban school district reforms, the New Orleans community can find hope that its public schools will advance in the future and acknowledge that true transformation does not happen overnight. However, early indicators should be observed. These include parent and teacher perceptions of improvement, increased student engagement and attendance, and some incremental improvements in test scores. So far we are able to observe that teachers, parents, and students feel that the public schools in New Orleans are improving. **That is a definite step in the right direction.**

Progress Report on 2007 Recommendations

Tulane University's Cowen Institute for Public Education Initiatives, in partnership with the Greater New Orleans Education Foundation and the New Orleans City Council Education Committee, released the initial State of Public Education in New Orleans report in June 2007.

In that report, six recommendations were made to “meet the current and long-term goal of providing an excellent education to all public school students in New Orleans.” Those recommendations (along with their sub-recommendations) are reproduced here with a progress report on how well each has been implemented to date based on our research, plus a rating based on the current state of the public schools compared to last year. These ratings are: “Significant Progress,” “Moderate Progress,” “Limited Progress,” and “No Progress.”

1 Ensure adequate capacity for the 2007-2008 school year.

Because the RSD is responsible for opening and operating the majority of schools, it should take the lead in creating a team and plan to ensure enough schools are ready to open in August 2007. This plan should include an aggressive strategy to recruit and retain teachers and staff, a process to streamline procurement, and an evaluation of innovative ways to ensure there are enough schools for all students.

Recommendations to be implemented before the 2007-08 school year:

- Create a cross-functional team focused on opening schools for the 2007–08 school year. (*Significant Progress*)
- Develop an aggressive and innovative recruiting strategy to attract new principals, teachers, and support staff to all public schools. (*Significant Progress*)
- Develop an aggressive and innovative retention strategy to retain high-quality principals, teachers, and support staff at all public schools. (*Limited Progress*)
- Ensure adequate capacity is available by evaluating innovative options for streamlining the procurement of adequate facilities. (*Moderate Progress*)
- Evaluate innovative alternatives to reduce the number of schools the Recovery School District (RSD) needs to open for the 2007–08 school year. (*Moderate Progress*)

Overall Assessment: Moderate Progress

There were enough facilities for all students enrolled during the 2007-08 school year, and enough instructors and school administrators were recruited to serve them. The RSD was effective at addressing the most basic capacity issues by remodeling bathrooms, rebuilding kitchens, constructing modular buildings, and opening approximately 20 new charter and traditional schools since the previous school year.

Recruitment, especially of teachers, has been effective as a result of innovative strategies that included moving incentives, housing stipends, and signing bonuses, in addition to direct recruiting support from nonprofits including Teach for America, teachNOLA, the Louisiana Charter School Alliance, and others. The recruitment system has yet to be seriously tested with the recruitment of principals. Teacher retention remains a serious problem, especially in RSD-run schools.

The state has been able to reduce the number of schools the RSD needs to open by authorizing more charter schools. The state Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) was effective at soliciting, and subsequently authorizing, a new round of charter schools for the 2007-08 school year with the help of the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA).

2

Equip and empower all families to choose the best public schools for their children from a range of high-quality school options.

To make choices available for all students, families must have easy-to-understand information about public schools and all students must have access to diverse, high-quality options. Enrollment barriers should be limited, and there should be open access schools in every neighborhood. Additionally, resources must be adequately and fairly distributed to all schools.

Recommendations to be implemented before the 2007-08 school year:

- Provide information to families and students about the public schools. *(Limited Progress)*
- Create resource centers for parents. *(Moderate Progress)*

“The system forces a thought process that gives people control, which makes them more interested in the state of their children’s school and their children’s performance.”

— NEW ORLEANS BUSINESS COMMUNITY MEMBER

“We need to do a better job communicating with the public, so we can make sure that they are clear about their options.”

— PUBLIC EDUCATION ADMINISTRATOR

Overall Assessment: Limited Progress

Parents continue to struggle to find accessible and useful school information—only 50 percent of public school parents surveyed agreed that accessible material on school choice is readily available. Additionally, surveyed parents rated the statement, “It is easy to register my child for school,” as the worst of 16 school performance indicators.

One resource filling the void, developed by a coalition of nonprofits, is the New Orleans Parents’ Guide to Public Schools. With information on the different public schools, the guide assisted some parents in the process of selecting and enrolling their children in school. Another improvement that will provide more information to parents is the creation of parent resource centers. Eighteen out of 33 RSD-run schools now have parent resource centers, including Schaumberg, Laurel Elementary, Rabouin, John McDonogh, and Drew Elementary.⁹¹ Though RSD principals welcome their development, they acknowledge that it remains difficult to engage parents and that much more still needs to be done. For the next school year, a common application enrollment process involving 70 schools from a variety of operators is under way. However, due to low participation rates from parents, the deadline for the application has already been extended.⁹²

3 Strengthen the RSD

The RSD must strengthen the capabilities of district leadership, develop a 100-day turnaround plan to improve its operations, and develop and implement plans to improve special education, student discipline, and student mental health services. In addition, it should evaluate ways to engage the community, create school networks, and build the expertise of school administrators and teachers. Last, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, the RSD's governing board, should create a process and timetable for returning public schools in New Orleans to local control.

Recommendations to be implemented before the 2007-2008 school year:

- Build out leadership and operational capacity at the RSD. *(Significant progress)*
- Develop a 100-day turnaround and stabilization plan for the RSD with input from the community and collaboration with other operators. *(Moderate Progress)*
- Evaluate the effectiveness of the special education inclusion model and develop an improvement plan. *(Limited Progress)*
- Evaluate the state of students' mental health, discipline, and safety policies and develop an improvement plan. *(Limited Progress)*

“Our children are badly damaged, psychologically, emotionally, and academically.”

— RSD-RUN HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

“The mental health of our students is perhaps the most pressing problem facing our students in New Orleans”

— RSD-RUN ELEMENTARY PRINCIPAL

Overall Assessment: Moderate Progress

The July 2007 appointment of Paul Vallas as superintendent was a significant step in the right direction for the RSD. Sufficient teachers were hired, class sizes were reduced, and significant facility improvements were made during summer 2007—all of which led to a relatively smooth opening for the 2007-08 school year. The RSD is dynamic and has made progress to overcome a relatively low starting point. While there may have been no formal “100 day plan,” the new administration effectively tackled the most pressing issues and ensured a successful opening for the 2007 school year.

Two particularly challenging areas for any future plan are special education and mental health. Inclusion remains a worthy goal but is encountering problems in the RSD. The district has had difficulty identifying all of its special education students and serving them. In addition, special education teachers are not receiving the support needed to be effective. Though the RSD has put plans in place to address these issues, it acknowledges that much remains to be done. In the area of mental health, teacher focus groups and principal interviews consistently reiterated the shortfalls of the system. “All types of students are experiencing post-traumatic stress,” one counselor said. “Only students who pose a threat to themselves or others can get evaluated for treatment.” The system needs increased capacity to evaluate students' mental health and to provide counseling to them after evaluation.

One area where progress is being made is school discipline. Across operators, but especially in the troubled RSD-run schools, students and teachers have noticed improvements in order and discipline in most schools. In 2008, 30 percent of public school parents (versus 65 percent in 2007) said schools were doing badly or very badly in terms of providing safe and disciplined schools. As a cornerstone for student learning, efforts at improving discipline must be continued.

4 Attract, develop, and retain high-quality teachers

Public schools in New Orleans should work together to create innovative recruitment and retention strategies aimed at high-quality principals, teachers, and school staff. In addition, schools should expand professional development opportunities that support effective classroom instruction.

Recommendations to be implemented before the 2007-2008 school year:

- Develop a pipeline to attract high-quality principals. (*Limited Progress*)
- Develop a pipeline to attract and build the capabilities of high-quality teachers. (*Moderate Progress*)
- Develop a program to retain high-quality teachers. (*No Progress*)
- Develop a pipeline to attract high-quality counselors, nurses, and other support staff. (*Limited Progress*)

“The district has had so many new initiatives that the new teachers are feeling slightly bombarded.”

— RSD-RUN PRINCIPAL

Overall Assessment: Limited Progress

With increased school autonomy, more demands are being placed on principals. Traditional training does not address many of the challenges currently facing principals, which range from public relations and fund raising to the hiring and development of teachers and more. A pipeline for recruiting principals seeks to meet this challenge. Seven principals trained by New Schools for New Leaders are expected to enter New Orleans schools next year, with another 33 arriving in the following 2-3 years. The success of this effort remains to be seen.

Nonprofits also led the way in supporting teacher recruitment. Programs such as Teach for America and teachNOLA have attracted teachers to public schools in New Orleans through highly selective programs. For the 2007-08 school year, approximately 250 teachers were recruited from these programs.

Across the system, challenges in training and retention continue, especially among new teachers. Professional development and teacher training during the 2006-07 school year were criticized by many teachers in focus groups—they found it infrequent, poorly timed, and unproductive (though many said it has improved somewhat in 2008). However, a number of independent nonprofits have come in to fill some of the gaps. Several organizations, including the Center for Development and Learning (CDL), the School Leadership Center (SLC), and SEDL (formerly the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory) are providing professional development support to teachers and principals in schools across the city. This year, 63 percent of public school teachers agree that their school offers strong opportunities for training and development. Seventy-two percent of teachers also agree that school leadership and management in their schools are strong.

As mentioned above, teacher retention remains a problem. Thirty-five percent of teachers agreed that they have seriously considered leaving their jobs; 17 percent of this group strongly agreed with the statement. In RSD-run schools, these percentages were even higher. These figures indicate the likelihood of high teacher turnover.

Public education in New Orleans needs a group or groups focused exclusively on supporting initiatives that benefit all public schools. Responsibilities would include securing and marshaling resources, facilitating collaboration, and building local and national relationships to support school transformation.

Recommendations to be implemented before the 2007-2008 school year:

- Create a group focused exclusively on supporting initiatives that benefit all public schools in New Orleans. *(Limited Progress)*

“Clusters of schools aren’t going to make a big bang and I’m concerned the New Orleans schools aren’t all collaborating. I want to unite our community through our school system because thriving cities are built from the ground up.”

— RSD CHARTER SCHOOL TEACHER⁹³

Overall Assessment: Limited Progress

There is no one group focused on supporting initiatives that benefit all public schools. There continues to be significant tension between the district offices and the charter schools they oversee, and there is also tension between the Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB) and RSD. This continuing tension makes cooperation within the structure of one entity difficult to accomplish. However, nonprofits are filling some of these voids to address system-wide problems. Indeed, many organizations that support schools disagree about how centralized or all-encompassing school support organizations should be.

While community members and nonprofits have taken significant steps to improve individual schools or groups of schools, these efforts remain fragmented. The lack of coordination between groups has led to significant distrust over which systems are receiving more or less resources. Moving forward, even if there is no one group focusing on supporting all schools, there does need to be increased coordination and trust-building between schools, districts, and the communities and groups that support them. In a recent effort to increase coordination, State Superintendent Paul Pastorek appointed a committee to make recommendations on improving operational efficiencies and eliminating the duplication of services between the OPSB, the RSD, and charter schools.⁹⁴ It remains to be seen what impact the committee will have.

6 Create and endorse a short-term action plan and a long-term strategic plan for public education

Education and community leaders should create a short-term action plan to prioritize key system-wide initiatives that require immediate action. In addition, New Orleans should create a long-term plan for public education that includes input from the community and builds on previous planning processes. This plan should be widely endorsed and communicated.

Recommendations to be implemented before the 2007-2008 school year:

- Adopt and communicate a short-term action plan for system transformation. (*Moderate progress*)

Recommendations to be implemented before the 2008-2009 school year:

- Adopt and communicate a unified vision and long-term strategic plan for public education. (*Limited progress*)

“*Competition between educational institutions is healthy when it raises the level of student achievement. We should come together to focus on what’s working well in [OPSB], RSD, and charters so that success can be replicated for all the students in Orleans Parish.*”

— OPSB-RUN SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

“*I would do anything rather than have a centralized system.*”

— NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION LEADER

Overall Assessment: Limited Progress

The RSD proved highly effective in the short term by addressing mission-critical issues to ensure that the doors would successfully open for the 2007-08 year. Based on the state of facilities last school year, these efforts should not be underestimated. However, the RSD, OPSB, charter schools, and the community have not worked together to create a short term action plan for system transformation.

Now the focus needs to shift to longer-term goals. The creation of the Master Facilities Plan shows that the RSD and OPSB are moving toward more collaboration. However, conflicting opinions concerning the long-term vision for the charters and the dual-district system jeopardize the cooperation that will be necessary in order to move forward. Currently, long-range planning is only being carried out in a fragmented way by individual districts and by each charter operator. To date, no process has been established to determine what public education in New Orleans should eventually look like or what entity (or entities) will ultimately govern the schools.

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Public Schools in New Orleans

School Operator	School Name	Grades Served	February 2008 Enrollment	% Free Lunch (Feb 2008)	% Disabled (Feb 2008)	% Gifted (Feb 2008)
OPSB Charter Schools	Audubon Charter School	PK-8	674	45%	3%	30%
	Einstein Charter School	K-8	521	91%	4%	2%
	Warren Easton Senior High School	9-12	825	82%	3%	4%
	Benjamin Franklin High School	9-12	544	41%	1%	76%
	Alice Harte Elementary Charter School	K-8	633	64%	9%	9%
	Edward Hynes Charter School	K-8	404	62%	7%	14%
	Edna Karr Secondary School	9-12	793	60%	3%	12%
	Priestley School of Architecture/Construction	9-11	204	93%	9%	2%
	Lusher Charter School	K-12	1,424	35%	4%	40%
	Robert Russa Moton Charter School	PK-7	272	93%	1%	0%
	Lake Forest Elementary Charter School	K-8	416	70%	3%	15%
	New Orleans Charter Science and Mathematics	9-12	359	69%	4%	1%
	OPSB Charter Schools Enrollment Total			7,069	61%	4%
OPSB-run Schools	Mary Bethune Elementary Literature/Technology	PK-6	274	93%	13%	1%
	McDonogh #35 Senior High School	7-12	958	67%	5%	9%
	Eleanor McMain Secondary School	7-12	722	68%	5%	16%
	Benjamin Franklin Elementary for Math and Science	PK-6	499	80%	8%	15%
	Orleans Parish PM School	7-12	101	63%	6%	1%
	Youth Study Center	5-12	18	100%	0%	6%
	The Alternative Learning Institute	8-12	120	100%	0%	0%
	OPSB-run Schools Enrollment Total			2,692	74%	6%
RSD Charter Schools	P. A. Capdau School	PK-10	538	88%	6%	1%
	Nelson Elementary School	PK-8	340	99%	6%	0%
	New Orleans College Prep Charter School	6-7	99	90%	4%	0%
	Esperanza Charter School	K-8	375	92%	5%	0%
	Langston Hughes Academy Charter School	K-6	106	81%	0%	0%
	Andrew H. Wilson Charter School	K-6	361	84%	6%	0%
	Abramson Science & Technology Charter School	K-10	409	99%	4%	0%
	James M. Singleton Charter School	PK-8	690	92%	4%	0%
	Dr. M.L.K. Charter School for Science & Tech.	PK-8	555	98%	2%	1%
	McDonogh #28 City Park Academy	K-8	394	88%	5%	1%
	New Orleans Free Academy	K-8	194	95%	2%	0%
	Lafayette Academy of New Orleans	PK-7	698	85%	8%	0%
	McDonogh #42 Elementary Charter School	PK-8	472	95%	4%	0%
	Martin Behrman Elementary School	K-8	544	92%	7%	2%
	Dwight D. Eisenhower Elementary School	K-8	527	78%	7%	4%
	William J. Fischer Elementary School	K-8	427	93%	6%	1%
	McDonogh #32 Elementary School	K-8	415	92%	7%	1%
	O.P. Walker Senior High School	9-12	830	89%	8%	1%
Harriet Tubman Elementary School	K-8	475	92%	6%	2%	

School Operator	School Name	Grades Served	February 2008 Enrollment	% Free Lunch (Feb 2008)	% Disabled (Feb 2008)	% Gifted (Feb 2008)
RSD Charter Schools	Algiers Technology Academy	9-12	175	77%	6%	1%
	Sophie B. Wright Institute of Academic Excellence	4-8	327	100%	6%	7%
	KIPP Believe College Prep	5-7	171	80%	6%	1%
	McDonogh #15: A KIPP Transformation School	PK-8	452	88%	10%	4%
	KIPP Central City Academy	5-6	80	93%	10%	0%
	Samuel J. Green Charter School	K-8	325	93%	7%	2%
	New Orleans Charter Middle School	3-6	48	90%	4%	2%
	RSD Charter Schools Enrollment Total			10,027	90%	6%
RSD-run Schools	Joseph A. Craig School	PK-8	449	87%	9%	0%
	Joseph S. Clark Senior High School	9-12	567	66%	13%	2%
	Benjamin Banneker Elementary School	PK-8	375	88%	14%	4%
	Walter L. Cohen High School	9-12	540	79%	11%	2%
	John Dibert Elementary School	PK-8	293	91%	13%	3%
	Booker T. Washington High School	8-12	237	77%	27%	3%
	Fredrick A. Douglass High School	9-12	370	72%	10%	3%
	Dr. Charles Richard Drew Elementary School	PK-8	516	90%	7%	0%
	Paul B. Habans Elementary School	PK-8	349	87%	7%	1%
	Murray Henderson Elementary School	PK-8	292	84%	10%	1%
	John McDonogh Senior High School	9-12	508	75%	14%	3%
	James Weldon Johnson School	PK-8	319	83%	10%	0%
	Laurel Elementary School	PK-8	461	85%	10%	0%
	Live Oak Elementary School	PK-8	293	76%	12%	0%
	Rabouin Career Magnet High School	9-12	636	68%	8%	3%
	Sarah Towles Reed Senior High School	9-12	595	64%	11%	3%
	Sylvanie F. Williams School	PK-5	218	83%	9%	0%
	A.P. Tureaud Elementary School	PK-8	291	90%	4%	0%
	Albert Wicker Elementary School	K-8	414	86%	10%	0%
	Sarah Towles Reed Elementary School	PK-8	381	95%	6%	0%
	Schwarz Alternative School	6-12	192	79%	7%	2%
	Agnes L. Bauduit Elementary School	PK-8	253	85%	8%	1%
	Carver Elementary School	PK-8	347	89%	7%	1%
	G.W. Carver High School	9-12	308	80%	9%	2%
	Fannie C. Williams Elementary School	PK-6	374	92%	6%	1%
	F.W. Gregory Elementary School	PK-8	198	77%	5%	1%
	Harney Elementary School	PK-8	366	83%	12%	1%
	Livingston High School	9-12	407	78%	13%	1%
	Thurgood Marshall School	7-8	104	84%	5%	1%
	H.C. Schaumburg Elementary School	PK-8	567	83%	10%	1%
	Mary D. Coghill Elementary School	PK-8	497	84%	7%	0%
	Gentilly Terrace Elementary School	PK-8	306	82%	6%	1%
	Julian Elementary School	PK-8	247	89%	9%	1%
RSD-run Schools Enrollment Total			12,270	81%	10%	1%
BESE Charter Schools	International School of Louisiana	K-7	446	43%	0%	0%
	Milestone SABIS Academy of New Orleans	K-8	383	92%	2%	0%
	BESE Charter Schools Enrollment Total			829	66%	1%
Total (All Public Schools)			32,887	79%	7%	6%

Public School Operators in New Orleans

Recovery School District (RSD):

A school district operated by the Louisiana Department of Education to run underperforming schools, the RSD was created in 2003 and ran five schools before Hurricane Katrina. After a special session of the Louisiana legislature in the fall of 2005, over 100 low-performing schools in New Orleans were placed in the district. The RSD oversees a number of charter schools but also operates the majority of traditional schools in New Orleans. The RSD has been under the leadership of Superintendent Paul Vallas since summer 2007.

Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB):

The governing board of New Orleans Public Schools, the OPSB ran nearly all of New Orleans' schools prior to Hurricane Katrina but now only directly operates a handful. A number of charter schools are also under its jurisdiction. OPSB schools have been under the leadership of Superintendent Darryl Kilbert since summer 2006.

Advocates for Academic Excellence in Education:

The charter organization that operates Benjamin Franklin High School.

Advocates for Arts-Based Education: A nonprofit organization with a board made up of community members, it operates the Lusher Charter School, a K-12 school that is housed in two facilities.

Advocates for Innovative Schools:

The organization that operates Robert Russa Moton Charter School.

Advocates for Science and Math Education, Inc.:

A governing board of community members that operates New Orleans Science & Mathematics High School. The organization is opening a second high school, New Orleans Science & Mathematics Academy, for the 2008-2009 school year.

Algiers Charter Schools Association (ACSA):

A charter school organization that established charters in the Algiers neighborhood on the West Bank of New Orleans after Katrina. ACSA operates six elementary schools and three high schools and is the largest charter school operator in Louisiana. ACSA schools include: Algiers Technology Academy, Martin Behrman Elementary, Dwight D. Eisenhower Elementary, William J. Fischer Elementary, Alice M. Harte Elementary, Edna Karr Senior High, McDonogh #32 Elementary, Harriet R. Tubman Elementary and O. Perry Walker Senior High.

Broadmoor Charter School Board:

Founded by residents of the Broadmoor neighborhood, the board operates Andrew H. Wilson Charter School, an elementary school that re-opened in 2007.

The Choice Foundation:

The Choice Foundation was started in 2004 to promote school choice in Louisiana. It chartered Lafayette Academy after the storm and began operating the school in 2006.

The Council for Quality Education:

The organization that operates Lake Forest Elementary Charter School.

Dryades YMCA:

A New Orleans YMCA affiliated with a group of local individuals that received a charter to operate James M. Singleton Charter School, an elementary school. The organization was one of the first schools in New Orleans to resume operations after Katrina, in November of 2005.

Einstein Group:

The charter organization that operates Einstein Charter School, which was chartered in 2004 and is located in New Orleans East.

Esperanza Charter School Association:

The United Neighborhood Organization, a Chicago-based, Hispanic-oriented nonprofit established in 1984, received a charter to open the Esperanza Charter School in New Orleans to serve the city's Hispanic population.

French and Montessori Education (FAME):

The organization that operates Audubon Charter School, a Montessori school originally established in 1981. The school has had a French focus since 1986.

Friends of King:

A charter group formed to run the Dr. Martin Luther King Charter School for Science & Technology, an elementary school that reopened in 2006 in the Lower 9th Ward.

Hynes Charter School Corp.:

The charter organization that operates Edward Hynes Elementary School.

Innovators in Milestones:

The organization that operates Milestone SABIS Academy of New Orleans, a BESE charter school.

International School of Louisiana:

The charter organization that has operated the International School of Louisiana, a BESE charter school, since 2000.

Knowledge Is Power Program (KIPP):

KIPP is a national network of free, open-enrollment, college-preparatory public charter schools. KIPP was started in 1994 by two teachers in inner-city Houston, Texas, and has grown to 57 schools in 17 states and the District of Columbia serving more than 14,000 students. Each KIPP school is governed by a local board of directors and led by a school leader recruited and trained by the KIPP Foundation. In New Orleans, there are two KIPP middle schools and two elementary schools: KIPP Believe College Prep, KIPP Central City Academy, KIPP Central City Primary and KIPP McDonogh #15, respectively.

Middle School Advocates:

A charter organization that operated the first charter school in New Orleans. It now runs two elementary schools: Samuel J. Green Charter School and New Orleans Charter Middle School.

New Orleans Charter School Foundation:

A charter school organization that operates two elementary schools: McDonogh #28 City Park Academy and New Orleans Free Academy. The foundation partners with the Leona Group, a privately held for-profit company that operates over 50 charter schools across the country, to operate its schools. Leona Group was formed in Michigan in 1996 with the mission of promoting school choice and competition for all students, including those with special needs, and to help them pursue their individual academic goals.

New Orleans College Preparatory Academies:

In 2006, a group of local residents founded New Orleans College Prep, a junior and senior high school, to provide demanding instruction in a tuition-free, non-selective school. The state Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) approved its charter in February 2007 and its first class of sixth graders started in August of the same year. The school will grow one grade per year until reaching full capacity by serving sixth through 12th grades.

NOLA 180:

The charter organization that operates Langston Hughes Charter School, an elementary school that opened in 2007.

Pelican Education Foundation:

The foundation was developed through a workgroup composed of members from a number of Louisiana public universities. The charter group operates Abramson Science & Technology Charter School, an elementary school that gives students the chance to work with university-level students and researchers. The school opened in 2007.

Priestley Charter School Board:

The charter organization that operates Priestley Charter School, which opened in September 2006 and specializes in an architecture and construction career focus.

SUNO Institute for Academic Excellence:

The Southern University at New Orleans (SUNO) operates the Sophie B. Wright Institute of Academic Excellence, a charter middle school.

Treme Charter Schools Association:

The charter organization that operates McDonogh #42 Elementary Charter School.

UNO New Beginnings School Foundation:

The Capital One-University of New Orleans Charter School Center is a private and public partnership that provides support to develop a pre-K through senior high education and serves as a catalyst for economic development for the Lakeview/Gentilly community. The center operates two elementary schools, Pierre A. Capdau Charter School and Medard H. Nelson Charter School. It also supports one elementary, Edward Hynes Charter School, and one high school, Benjamin Franklin High School, in an advisory capacity.

Warren Easton Senior High School Charter Foundation:

Organized in 2006 to repair, reopen, and operate Warren Easton Senior High School, the foundation consists of alumni and administrators who were afraid that one of the city's oldest high schools would not reopen quickly enough under the school board.

Description of State and National Tests

Louisiana Education Assessment Program test (LEAP):

An annual test administered to all students in fourth and eighth grades since 1999 to measure how well they have mastered state content standards. By law, the test is required to be as rigorous as the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). The test includes sections in English, mathematics, science, and social studies. Scores are measured by five performance levels: *Advanced*, *Mastery*, *Basic*, *Approaching Basic*, and *Unsatisfactory*, with students being required to score *Basic* or above in English or mathematics, and *Approaching Basic* or above on the other, to be eligible for advancement to the fifth and ninth grades. Due to hurricanes Rita and Katrina, the LEAP requirements were suspended in affected schools in the Gulf Coast region during the 2004-05 school year.

Graduation Exit Examination (GEE):

A test administered to all students in the 10th and 11th grades beginning in 2001 to measure how well they have mastered the state content standards. The test includes sections in English, mathematics, science, and social studies. Scores are measured by five performance levels: *Advanced*, *Mastery*, *Basic*, *Approaching Basic*, and *Unsatisfactory*. Students are required to score *Approaching Basic* or above in the English and mathematics test in the 10th grade and the science or social studies test in the 11th grade to be eligible for a standard high school diploma. Students who do not pass are given opportunities to take the test again in the summer and fall.

Integrated Louisiana Education Assessment Program test (iLEAP):

A test administered since 2006 to public school students in the third, fifth, sixth, seventh, and ninth grades to measure content and skills they are expected to know and perform. The test includes sections in English, mathematics, science, and social studies that are developed to align with the Louisiana Grade-Level Expectations (GLEs). Scores represent student performance based on state standards and student performance compared to national norms.

National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP):

A U.S. Department of Education-sponsored program under the National Center for Education Statistics. Often referred to as “the nation’s report card,” it is the only program that measures student achievement at a national level in English, mathematics, science, and social studies, allowing a state-to-state student comparison. NAEP develops national testing norms, the framework and test specifications for state tests, and Louisiana participates in NAEP through the iLEAP test. As each state’s NAEP exam or equivalent need only reach minimum requirements in terms of testing, there can be some variation across states regarding the difficulty of the exams and, as a result, score comparability is difficult across states. Scores are measured in percentile rank from 1 to 99%, as well as five performance levels: *Advanced*, *Mastery*, *Basic*, *Approaching Basic*, and *Unsatisfactory*.

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