

## New Orleans Public School Governance

*A Primer on New Orleans' Unique School Governance Structure*

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By Patrick Sims

### Foreword

The structure of school governance in New Orleans is more complex than in a traditional school district and regularly evolves. Each year, the Cowen Institute produces a set of governance charts that illustrate this unique system of governing schools. This brief provides an overview of how schools in the city are governed, who authorizes schools, and what changes occurred between the 2014-15 and 2015-16 school years.

## How are schools in New Orleans governed?

The governance structure of New Orleans' public schools is unique. Unlike a traditional school district, **New Orleans' schools are nearly all charter (93 percent) and are overseen by three main governing bodies: the Recovery School District (RSD), the Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB), and the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE).**

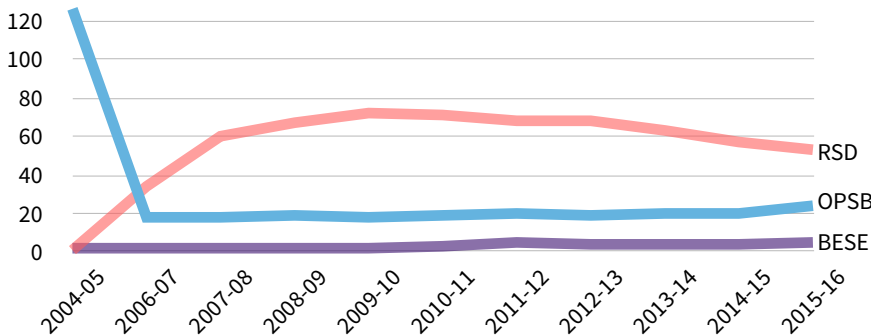
**While the OPSB oversaw nearly all of the city's schools before Hurricane Katrina, the RSD, which is a unit of the Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE) that was created before Katrina to turnaround failing schools, took over the majority of the schools in the wake of the storm. Since 2011, the number of schools in the RSD's portfolio has steadily declined as persistently under-performing schools were closed.** The RSD now oversees 52 charter schools in New Orleans and the OPSB oversees 18 charter schools, as well as the six remaining direct-run schools. BESE has also directly authorized five charter schools that currently operate in New Orleans.

32 Public Schools 6 OPSB Direct-Runs 18 OPSB Charters  
 52 RSD Charters 5 BESE Charters 1 Independent School  
 44 Governing Bodies 12 Charter Management Organizations

The New Orleans Center for Creative Arts is uniquely authorized by the Louisiana Legislature and stands independently from the other schools in the city.

Each charter school or Charter Management Organization (CMO) is overseen by its own nonprofit school board.<sup>a</sup> Including charter boards, BESE, the RSD, and the OPSB, there are now a total of 44 governing bodies in the city, which is significantly higher than in a traditional school district. Only 24 of the city's schools are overseen by a locally-elected board.

### Number of Schools by Authorizer, 2006-07 to 2015-16



<sup>a</sup>A Charter Management Organization (CMO) is an organization that oversees multiple charter schools.

### Key Changes

**Two new charter schools opened under the OPSB.**

Cypress Academy • Foundation Preparatory

**One school moved from the RSD to the OPSB.**

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Charter School for Science & Technology

**Two schools closed and did not reopen.**

Lagniappe Academies • Miller McCoy Academy

**Two schools changed operators.**

McDonogh City Park was taken over by ReNEW • Andrew H. Wilson became a part of InspireNOLA

**One school moved its facility into New Orleans.**

Milestone Academy's campus returned to the city from Jefferson Parish.

**One school that was planned to open did not.**

TMCF decided not to open after operational issues.

See page 3 for more details.

## Who can authorize charter schools in New Orleans?



































Charter schools in Louisiana can be authorized by three types of bodies: the state board of education (BESE), local school boards (OPSB in New Orleans), or local charter authorizers. BESE is the authorizing body for any RSD (Type 5) schools, which the RSD is responsible for overseeing. A local charter authorizer could be a state agency, a Louisiana public postsecondary education institution, or a nonprofit corporation established by the governing authority of a parish or municipality that has been granted the authority to authorize charter schools by BESE. There are currently no local charter authorizers approved by BESE in the state.

## What types of charter schools are there in Louisiana?

There are seven types of charter schools that could be authorized in New Orleans and Louisiana:

- › **Type 1:** New schools authorized by the local school board (OPSB).
- › **Type 1B:** Either new or conversion schools authorized by a local charter authorizer.
- › **Type 2:** Either new or conversion schools authorized by BESE.
- › **Type 3:** Conversion schools authorized by the local school board (OPSB).
- › **Type 3B:** Former Type 5 charter school that has transferred from the RSD to the local school board (OPSB).
- › **Type 4:** Either new or conversion schools authorized by BESE and operated by the OPSB.
- › **Type 5:** Schools overseen by the RSD and authorized by BESE.

### Types of Charter Schools in Louisiana, 2015-16

	Type 1	Type 1B	Type 2	Type 3	Type 3B	Type 4	Type 5
<b>Who authorizes the charter school in New Orleans?</b>	 OPSB	Local Charter Authorizer	 BESE	 OPSB	 OPSB	 BESE <sup>†</sup>	 BESE <sup>‡</sup>
<b>Is the school a start-up or a conversion?</b>	 Start-up	 Either	 Either	 Conversion	 Conversion	 Either	 Either
<b>Where can the students come from?</b>	 NOLA	 State	 State	 NOLA	 NOLA	 NOLA	 NOLA
<b>Can the school have admission requirements?</b>	 Yes	 Yes	 Yes	 Yes	 No	 Yes	 No
<b>Does the school act as its own Local Education Agency?*</b>	 No	 Yes	 Yes	 No	 Either	 No	 Yes
<b>How many of this type of charter school are in NOLA?</b>	7	0	5	10	1	0	52

<sup>†</sup>Authorized by BESE, but overseen by the OPSB.

<sup>‡</sup>Authorized by BESE, but overseen by the RSD.

\*Some charter schools act as their own Local Education Agency (LEA), which is an agency that is recognized as a legal entity for administrative control of public schools. In Louisiana, Federal and State funds flow directly from the LDOE to LEAs.

## What changed this school year?

Each year, the K-12 educational landscape in New Orleans changes in a number of ways as schools open, close, and transfer authorizers. The following is a summary of the changes that occurred between the 2014-15 and 2015-16 school years.

### Two new charter schools opened under the OPSB.

#### **Cypress Academy and Foundation Preparatory opened their doors at the beginning of the 2015-16 school year.**

Both schools had planned to open with Kindergartens only, but decided to add first grade after struggling to enroll enough students.<sup>1</sup> Foundation Preparatory is located in eastern New Orleans and plans to focus on reading and language skills, including instruction in Spanish and Vietnamese. Cypress Academy is located in Uptown New Orleans and has placed a strong emphasis on reading skills. The school has a speech pathologist on staff and has reserved 20 percent of its seats for students at risk of a reading disability.<sup>2</sup>

### One school moved from the RSD to the OPSB.

#### **Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Charter School for Science & Technology (MLK) transferred its charter from the RSD to the OPSB.**

RSD takeover schools that have been with the RSD for five years and have met certain performance standards can opt to return to the OPSB. To date, over 30 schools have been eligible, but only MLK has chosen to return, becoming the first Type 3B charter school in the state.<sup>3</sup>

### Two charter schools closed and did not reopen.

#### **Two RSD-authorized charter schools, Lagniappe Academies and Miller McCoy Academy, did not reopen in the 2015-16 school year.**

BESE chose to not renew Lagniappe Academies charter after the LDOE found evidence that the school failed to appropriately educate its students with special needs and intentionally covered it up.<sup>4</sup> The decision came in the spring of 2015, which made it difficult for many parents to plan for their students' upcoming school year, though they were given priority when applying with *OneApp*.<sup>5</sup> Miller McCoy, an all-boys school serving grades 5-12, was closed after the charter board chose to surrender its charter to BESE due to persistently failing to improve academic performance and accusations of security failings.<sup>6</sup>

### Two schools changed operators.

#### **Andrew H. Wilson's students and facility were absorbed by InspireNOLA, a charter management organization (CMO) that operates two other schools in the city, after persistently low academic outcomes.**

In early 2015, BESE chose to not renew Wilson's charter for the 2015-16 school year and advised that the RSD select a new charter operator for the school.<sup>7</sup> Through a public Request for Applications process that included Wilson parent representatives, InspireNOLA was selected to take over the school. In 2012, the Louisiana Legislature passed Act 2, which, among other things, allows successful charter schools to operate up to two additional schools that serve the same grade levels in the same geographic zone without having to repeat the entire first-time applicant process.<sup>8</sup> InspireNOLA used this authority to reopen Wilson Charter school as an OPSB-authorized charter school. This is the first time that this authority has been exercised in Louisiana.

#### **McDonogh City Park Academy, voluntarily opted to join ReNEW, a CMO that operates five other schools in the city.**

Though the school received a D letter grade in 2014, the school was not in danger of being shut down, according to the president of the school's board. Instead, the board saw advantages in the economies of scale that CMOs can realize.<sup>9</sup> The school's principal has retired, which also prompted the switch, and ReNEW has brought in some of its own leadership and plans to add more arts-related activities.

### One school moved its school back to New Orleans.

#### **Milestone Academy has relocated to New Orleans from Jefferson Parish for the 2015-16 school year.**

<sup>10</sup> The school, which is a Type 2 charter that can enroll students from across the state, was originally opened in New Orleans in 2003 and the majority of its students already lived in Orleans Parish. The school was operated by SABIS, a for-profit management company, between 2002 and 2014, but is now independently operated.<sup>11</sup>

### TMCF Collegiate Academy was planned to open, but did not.

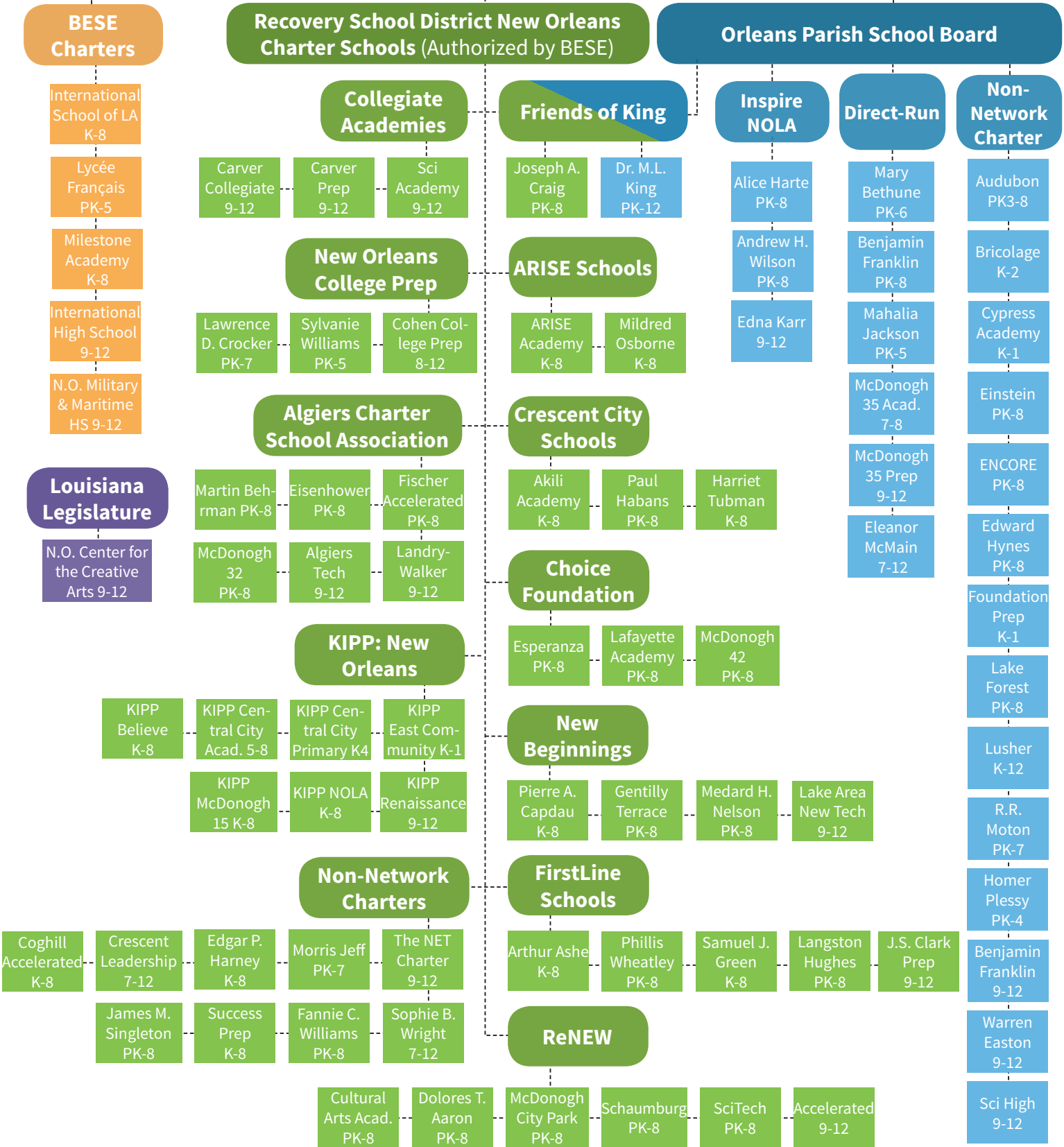
#### **Thurgood Marshall College Fund (TMCF) Collegiate Academy, which received its charter from the OPSB in 2013, surrendered its charter - the first time that an OPSB charter did not result in a school.**

<sup>12</sup> The school planned to use blended learning, a method of instruction where students learn at least in part through digital media and can learn at their own pace, and be closely tied to Southern University of New Orleans' (SUNO) teacher training program. Originally, the school was to be built on SUNO's campus, but environmental concerns interfered. The school board was unable to find a suitable alternative location, which ultimately led to its decision to surrender its charter.<sup>13</sup>

# Public Schools in New Orleans

## 2015-16 School Year

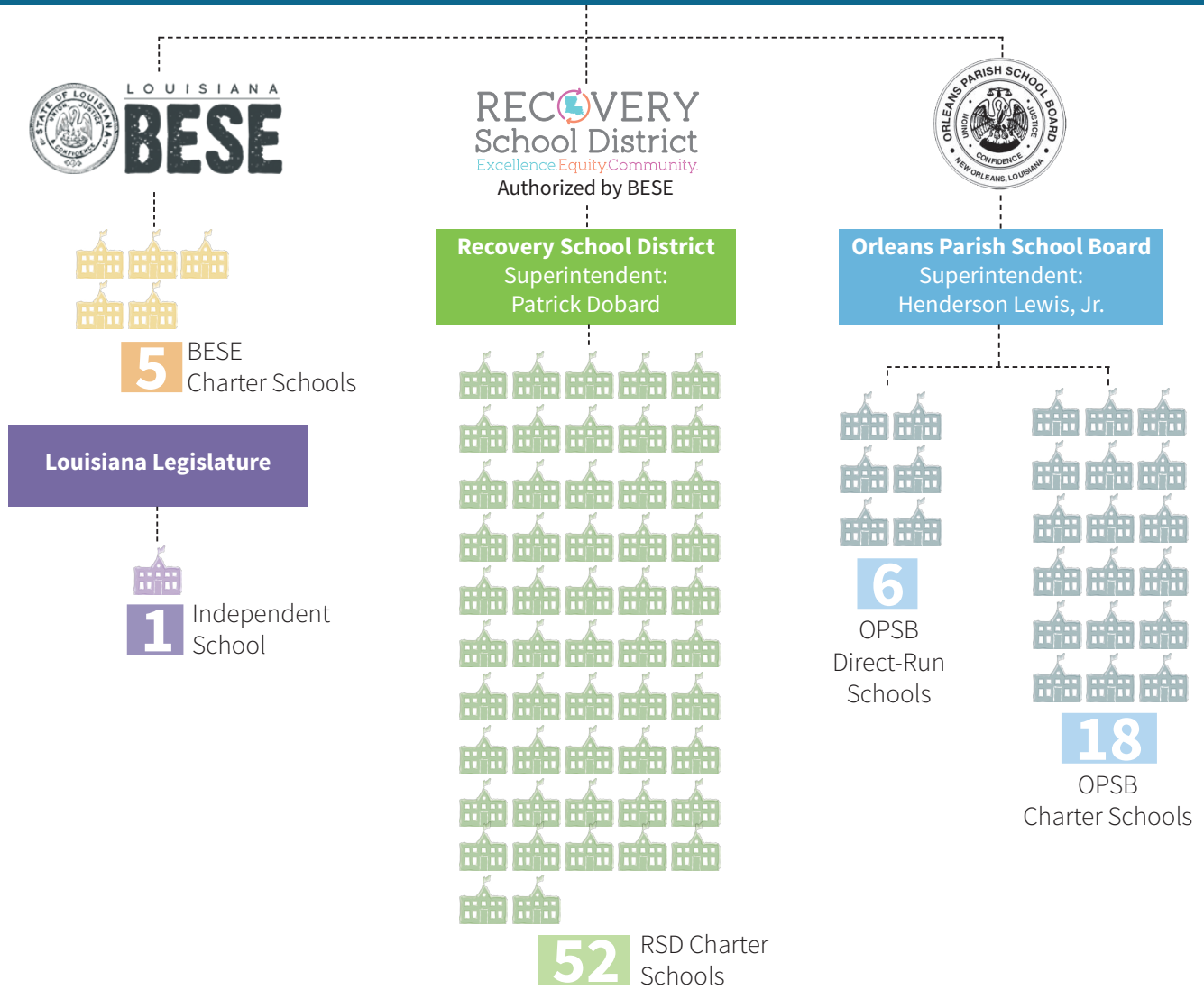
Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) & Louisiana Department of Education



# New Orleans Public School Governance Structure

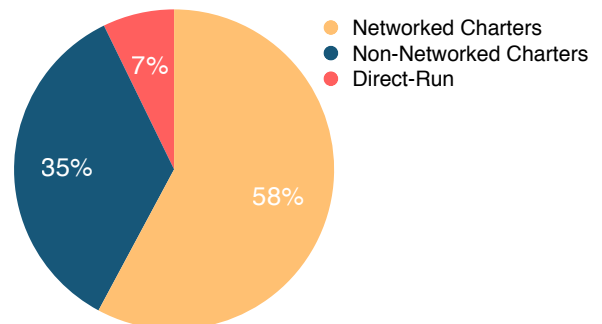
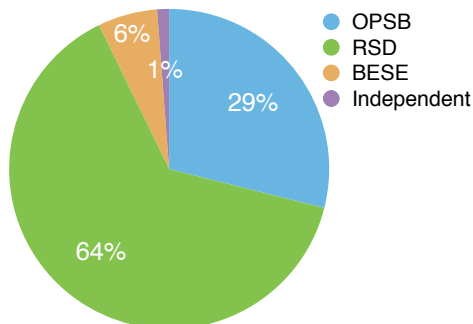
## 2015-16 School Year

Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) & Louisiana Department of Education  
State Superintendent: John White



### 82 Public Schools

6 Direct-Run Schools • 75 Charter Schools • 1 Independent School



Note: The charts reflect the percentage of schools, not student enrollment.

## Endnotes

1. Jewson, Marta, "New charter unexpectedly adds grade but appears short of enrollment goal," *The Lens*, August 13, 2015. <http://thelensnola.org/2015/08/13/foundation-prep-a-new-charter-unexpectedly-adds-a-grade-but-appears-to-fall-short-of-enrollment-goal/>.
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3. Dreilinger, Danielle, "'Historic': First Katrina state takeover school returns to New Orleans control," *The Times-Picayune*, April 14, 2015. [http://www.nola.com/education/index.ssf/2015/04/historic\\_first\\_katrina\\_state\\_t.html](http://www.nola.com/education/index.ssf/2015/04/historic_first_katrina_state_t.html).
4. Dreilinger, Danielle, "Lagniappe Academies principal steps down; state committee votes to close the school," *The Times-Picayune*, March 5, 2015. [http://www.nola.com/education/index.ssf/2015/03/lagniappe\\_academies\\_principal.html](http://www.nola.com/education/index.ssf/2015/03/lagniappe_academies_principal.html).
5. Ibid.
6. Dreilinger, Danielle, "Miller-McCoy Academy to close in the summer," *The Times-Picayune*, December 17, 2014. [http://www.nola.com/education/index.ssf/2014/12/miller-mccoy\\_academy\\_will\\_clos.html](http://www.nola.com/education/index.ssf/2014/12/miller-mccoy_academy_will_clos.html).
7. Dreilinger, Danielle, "InspireNOLA will take over Andrew Wilson Charter School in New Orleans," *The Times-Picayune*, February 24, 2015. [http://www.nola.com/education/index.ssf/2015/02/inspirenola\\_will\\_take\\_over\\_and.html](http://www.nola.com/education/index.ssf/2015/02/inspirenola_will_take_over_and.html).
8. Louisiana Act 2, R.S. 17:3992, 2012.
9. Dreilinger, Danielle, "McDonogh City Park Academy surrendering charter, joining ReNEW network," *The Times-Picayune*, March 2, 2015. [http://www.nola.com/education/index.ssf/2015/03/mcdonogh\\_city\\_park\\_academy\\_sur.html](http://www.nola.com/education/index.ssf/2015/03/mcdonogh_city_park_academy_sur.html).
10. Williams, Jessica, "Jefferson charter school Milestone Academy to move back to New Orleans," *The Times-Picayune*, March 5, 2015. [http://www.nola.com/education/index.ssf/2015/03/new\\_orleans\\_charter\\_catholic.html](http://www.nola.com/education/index.ssf/2015/03/new_orleans_charter_catholic.html).
11. Dreilinger, Danielle, "Jefferson charter school dispute: SABIS, Mileston argue over cause of break," *The Times-Picayune*, June 6, 2014. [http://www.nola.com/education/index.ssf/2014/06/sabis\\_definitely\\_out\\_at\\_milest.html](http://www.nola.com/education/index.ssf/2014/06/sabis_definitely_out_at_milest.html).
12. "Black college fund drops charter for SUNO middle school," *The Times-Picayune*, July 9, 2015. [http://www.nola.com/education/index.ssf/2015/07/black\\_college\\_fund\\_drops\\_chart.html](http://www.nola.com/education/index.ssf/2015/07/black_college_fund_drops_chart.html).
13. Ibid.

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