The State of Public Education in New Orleans

June 2007

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IN THE NEARLY TWO YEARS SINCE HURRICANE KATRINA devastated our beloved city, a fundamentally different public education system has emerged. This new system, although struggling, offers New Orleans the opportunity to transform and improve public education for every student in every public school.
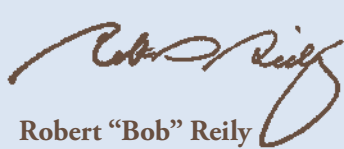
Never before have so much national and local attention and support been focused on public education in New Orleans. To take full advantage of this support, we must come together as a city and support actions, initiatives, and plans that will improve education for all public school students, regardless of race or socioeconomic background.

The State of Public Education in New Orleans is an assessment that provides a baseline of information about how the current system is doing and outlines a set of immediately actionable recommendations for the city that will help achieve the goal of quality education for all public school students. These recommendations are created to support transformation efforts over the next two to three years with the assumption that during this period the system's structure will remain largely unchanged. Although the agenda for the next few years is ambitious, requiring national, state, and local support, it can be achieved.

We have heard from many community members that the silver lining of Hurricane Katrina is the opportunity to rebuild and improve our public schools so that all students are provided 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 education 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 the ongoing transformation efforts, and thank all of you who have supported this effort and will continue to support public education throughout the city.

Sincerely,

Robert "Bob" Reily
Chair
Greater New Orleans
Education Foundation

Scott S. Cowen
President
Tulane University

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

The State of Public Education in New Orleans

Executive Summary

Before Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans Public Schools ranked as one of the lowest-performing school districts in the country. The district faced significant financial problems and was on the verge of bankruptcy. The physical condition of the school buildings was poor, with many in desperate need of long-overdue repairs and renovations.

In August 2005, Hurricane Katrina physically and financially devastated the city of New Orleans and its public schools. It displaced all 64,000 students and 7,500 public school employees. In the aftermath, a new "system of schools" emerged. This new system, while struggling, has the potential to fundamentally transform public education in the city. If it can, New Orleans will be able to provide every public student in every school with the opportunity for a high-quality education.

THE NEW MODEL

Since Hurricane Katrina, a new model for public education has emerged. The 58 public schools in New Orleans are now governed by two boards. The Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB), the local governing entity for all schools before the storm, has retained control of 17 schools: 5 managed by the district and 12 charter schools — public schools that are given increased autonomy in exchange for more accountability for student performance. The state-run Recovery School District (RSD) operates 39 schools: 22 district run and 17 charters. New Orleans has 57 percent of its students in charter schools — the largest percentage of any district across the country.

THE STATE OF PUBLIC EDUCATION

The new "system of schools" is struggling, but there are some early signs of progress. Reopening 58 schools in 20 months, after a major natural disaster, has been an enormous challenge. Operational problems in facilities, transportation, and meal service continue to plague the schools. School operators have had mixed success dealing with these issues. The RSD and the schools it operates have been hampered by operational disadvantages, inexperenced leadership, and insufficient district staff. The OPSB appears to be doing better than before Hurricane Katrina due to its significantly smaller scope, selective enrollment policies, and improved finances. Some charter schools initially appear strong; others are struggling. Yet without comparable information on student academic achievement, it is still too early to evaluate how well schools are helping students grow academically and developmentally.

Some building blocks for transformation are emerging. The emergence of public school choice is a promising element of the new system, although it is currently constrained by a lack of schools, inequitable access for students, and limited information. For many schools, the increased school-level autonomy — the ability to make budgeting, staffing, and curriculum

decisions at the school level — granted in exchange for greater accountability appears to have sharpened the focus on improving student achievement. In addition, the vast majority of public school operators have shown an initial commitment to developing the knowledge and skills of both principals and teachers, which ultimately should translate into improved classroom instruction.

System-level coordination is currently limited. A system with multiple operators can benefit students, parents, and school leaders by fostering innovation and allowing those closest to the classroom to make key decisions. However, without sufficient support structures, individual schools are not in a position to overcome the systemwide challenges that affect all of them, notably in the areas of facilities and finances. Also, without a single vision, unified plan, or entity guiding the long-term transformation of the system, many measures that could benefit all public school students have not been implemented.

The New Orleans community supports public education and hopes it will improve. The New Orleans community, nonprofits, and local universities have become increasingly involved and supportive of public education. Individuals and groups have worked tirelessly to rebuild and improve the schools. Although public opinion is mixed on whether public schools are currently better than before Hurricane Katrina, there is a strong belief that public schools should and will improve.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on these findings, we make six short-term, actionable recommendations focused on improving education for all public school students.

1. Ensure adequate capacity for the 2007–08 school year. Since the RSD is responsible for opening and operating the majority of schools, it should take the lead on creating a team and plan to ensure enough schools are ready to open in August. 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.

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.

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.

4. Attract, develop, and retain high-quality school principals, teachers, and staff for all public schools. 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.

5. Support school- and system-level excellence for all public schools. 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 marshalling resources, facilitating collaboration, and building local and national relationships to support school transformation.

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 systemwide 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.

The Objective of the Assessment

The public school system in New Orleans stands at a critical junction. Since Hurricane Katrina, substantial changes have occurred at both the system and school levels. Many of these changes have provided New Orleans with the building blocks to create an excellent public education system. Yet with change come challenges. Public education has many substantial obstacles to overcome before it can provide all students with a high-quality educational and developmental experience.

The objective of this report is to present an accurate and objective assessment of the progress made by, and the current challenges facing, the public schools in New Orleans since Hurricane Katrina. It highlights specific opportunities and successes as well as identifies barriers to progress and improvement. This report is intended to inform and engage the New Orleans community; local education, civic, and nonprofit leaders; and local, state, and federal legislators. It should serve as a starting point for a continued conversation focused on transforming public schools in New Orleans.

The report provides the New Orleans community and education leaders with a beginning set of realistic and actionable recommendations that are motivated by a strong desire to give every student in every public school the opportunity to achieve his or her potential. The recommendations focus on building on current system successes and addressing critical and immediate needs. The recommendations do not provide a long-term strategy or vision for New Orleans. Instead, they serve as a roadmap to get the system on the right path for the next two years.
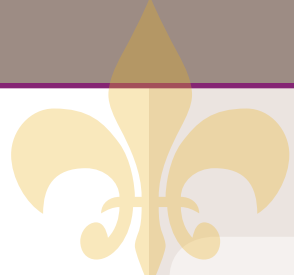
OVERVIEW OF THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS

This report is based on a comprehensive fact base and a thorough analysis of public education compiled by a team from The Boston Consulting Group (BCG). This assessment captures the views, concerns, and hopes of New Orleans parents, students, teachers, principals, community members, and education, civic, and business leaders.

During the assessment process, input from more than 3,000 New Orleanians was used to develop the report. More than 2,000 parents, students, teachers, and community members filled out surveys that were available both online and in paper form through schools, neighborhood groups, and local nonprofit organizations. More than 100 community organizations and all 58 public schools were asked to participate in the assessment. For six weeks beginning in March 2007, researchers met with approximately 1,000 community members through a series of community meetings, including:

- Two communitywide town hall meetings open to the public;
- 15 meetings with neighborhood groups and associations across the city; and
- 10 school meetings with teachers, parents, and students across the Recovery School District (RSD), the Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB), and charter schools.

More than 2,000 New Orleanians Answered Our Community Survey

Survey respondents by affiliation

Community members 33%
Other respondents[i] 5%
Teachers 18%
Parents 21%
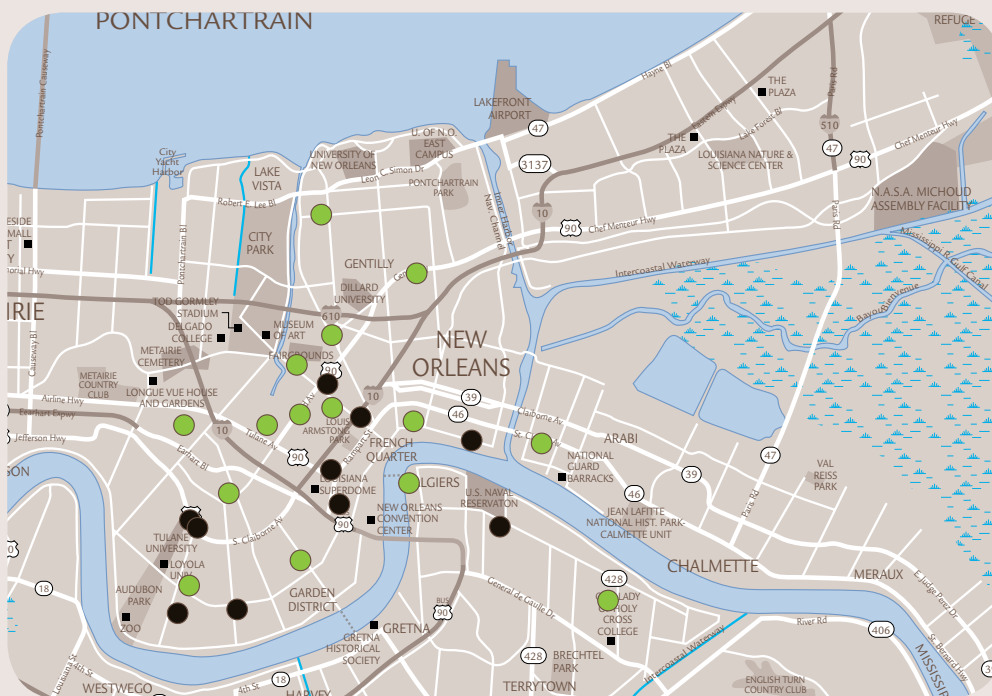Students 23%
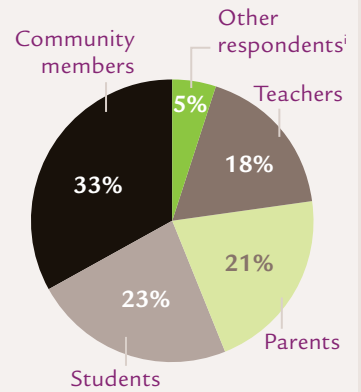
Note: Respondents include current and former Orleans Parish residents.

[i] "Other respondents" include survey respondents that did not identify themselves as current or former Orleans Parish residents.

Source: BCG community survey.

We Engaged Nearly 1,000 Community Members through 25 School and Neighborhood Meetings

● Neighborhood/ community meeting
● School meeting

In addition to the extensive community engagement process, BCG researchers:

* Created a survey specifically designed for school leaders and distributed it to all public schools in New Orleans;
* Conducted in-depth interviews with the Louisiana Department of Education (LDE), OPSB, RSD, and charter school leaders;
* Heard from more than 50 local education, civic, business, neighborhood, and non-profit leaders through a series of forums on education and interviews; and
* Reviewed research from focus groups in Treme and Algiers conducted by Dr. Silas Lee and Associates.

Through these interviews and meetings, researchers met with a diverse group of individuals with connections to every reopened public school in the city of New Orleans.

BCG also sought input from locally and nationally recognized experts in such fields as urban education reform, capacity building, and equity in education. Feedback from these experts was incorporated into the recommendations to ensure they were supported by national education best practices.

The State of Public Education in New Orleans before Hurricane Katrina

BEFORE HURRICANE KATRINA, the public school district in Orleans Parish — New Orleans Public Schools (NOPS) — was viewed as one of the worst urban public school districts in the country. In the 2004–05 school year, 63 percent of public schools in New Orleans were deemed "academically unacceptable" by Louisiana accountability standards, compared to 8 percent of public schools across Louisiana.[1] NOPS had a graduation rate of only 56 percent — a full 10 points below the state average, and 18 points below the national average.[2] NOPS was ranked the second-lowest performing district (out of 68 districts) in Louisiana — a state with poor academic performance. NOPS was failing to provide quality education to most of the 64,000 children in public schools in New Orleans.[3]

Did You Know?

In 2005, the "Nation's Report Card" ranked Louisiana *41st* for performance in 4th and 8th grade reading and math.[i]

Of the 68 parishes in Louisiana, New Orleans ranked *67th* in student performance in 2005.[ii]

In 2007, the Education Research Center ranked Louisiana *1st* for its standards, assessments, and accountability but *45th* in K–12 student achievement and *49th* in student success indicators.[iii]

[i] National Assessment of Educational Progress Nation's Report Card; rankings based on 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Department of Defense Education Activity.

[ii] Louisiana Department of Education District Performance Score Report, 2004–05.

[iii] "From Cradle to Career," *Education Week,* January 2007.

Only 2 in 10 New Orleans Public School Students Enroll in College
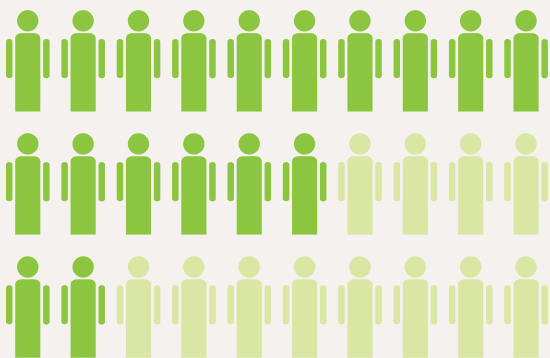
For every 10 students who enroll in the public high schools in New Orleans …

Fewer than 6 will make it to gradation …

And only 2 will enroll in college.

Note: Includes students retained in 9th grade from previous years and new students starting in the class of 2000–01.
Source: 2003–04 Orleans Parish District Accountability Report.

New Orleans Public Schools Largely Educated African American Students

NOPS enrollment did not mirror the racial composition of New Orleans as a whole

	Orleans Parish	NOPS	Private and parochial schools
Non African American	35%	6%	55%
African American	65%	94%	45%

- ■ Non African American
- ■ African American

Source: 2004–05 U.S. Department of Education data.

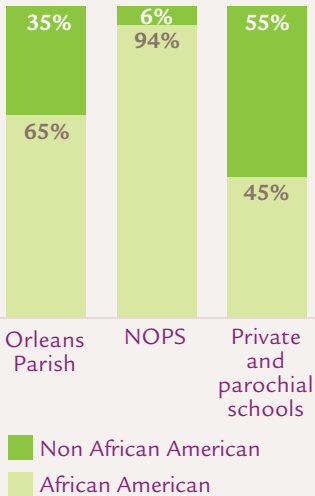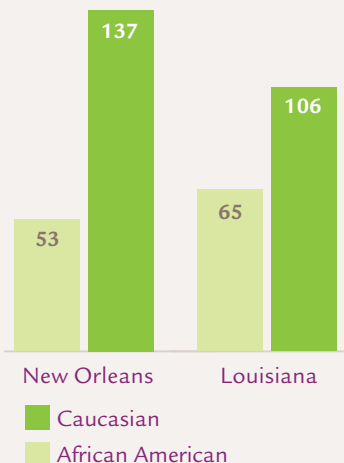### A Wide Achievement Gap Existed between African American and Caucasian Students

Performance score (indexed) 2004–05

	New Orleans	Louisiana
Caucasian	137	106
African American	53	65

- ■ Caucasian
- ■ African American

Source: Louisiana Department of Education Accountability Report — GPS Student Performance Scores, 2004–05.

Schools were divided along racial and socioeconomic lines

As a result of the public school system's inadequacies, most families with the financial means to do so took their children out of public schools. From 1995 to 2005, public school enrollment in Orleans Parish decreased 25 percent, while non-public school enrollment increased 5 percent.[4] By 2004, one out of three students in New Orleans attended a private or parochial school — a rate three times higher than the national average for private school enrollment.[5] As a result of this migration from public schools, NOPS did not reflect the overall demographic makeup of the community. By 2005, approximately 65 percent of New Orleanians were African American,[6] yet 94 percent of NOPS students were African American.[7] Citywide, 40 percent of children lived below the poverty line, yet 77 percent of NOPS students qualified for free or reduced-price lunch.[8] To many in the community, NOPS had become a school system of last resort, which increasingly divided students along socioeconomic and racial lines.

Even within the public education system, schools were largely segregated along racial lines. With the exception of a few high-performing, selective admissions public schools, the vast majority of public schools were underperforming and almost entirely composed of African American students.[9] This created a significant racial achievement gap within NOPS. On the 2004–05 Louisiana Educational Assessment Program (LEAP) standardized test, Caucasian students scored more than 50 points higher than African American students in both English and math — a gap twice as large as that between Caucasian and African American students statewide.[10] African American students in Orleans Parish performed worse than African American students in 65 of the 68 districts in Louisiana, while Caucasian public school students in Orleans Parish scored higher than any other district in Louisiana.[11]

Lack of leadership and financial management compounded problems

Lack of stable effective leadership at the district level contributed to the failing state of the public schools. NOPS district leadership suffered an astonishingly high rate of turnover. Eight superintendents served between 1998 and 2005 with an average tenure of only 11 months, a rate more than three times the 36-month national average for urban district superintendents.[12] Part of the reason for the turnover in leadership was the constant friction between the district superintendents and the vocal and influential Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB). Decisionmaking, often influenced by an active OPSB board, was centralized at the district level. Principals were left with little authority over school-level issues such as curriculum, budgeting, or staffing.

> *Poor-quality teachers, incompetent bureaucratic administration, nonexistent facility maintenance, dangerous environments, and lack of parental involvement all contributed to making New Orleans schools some of the worst in the nation.*
>
> ✣ COMMUNITY MEMBER

The district provided teachers with few resources to improve their classrooms. The professional development offered to teachers was not necessarily aligned with many of the skills that teachers needed to effectively manage a classroom and drive student achievement. As a result, an average of up to one full day of teaching time was lost each week to "off-task" activities causing student learning to suffer.[13]

NOPS also struggled with a legacy of financial mismanagement. In 2004, the Federal Bureau of Investigation indicted 11 employees on charges for criminal offenses against the OPSB.[14] By 2005, the district faced the threat of bankrupcy, with a debt burden of $265 million and annual expenditures to operate schools that exceeded revenues.[15] Before Hurricane Katrina, the state brought in a professional services firm and turnaround specialist, Alvarez & Marsal, to improve the district's dire financial situation.
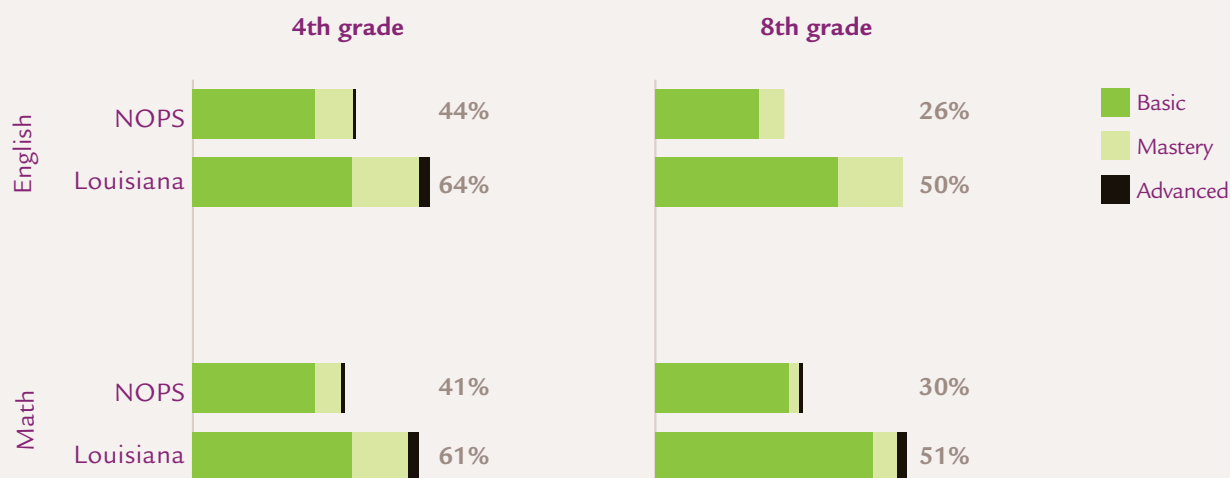
Compounding the district's growing challenges was the decaying state of NOPS school buildings. With more school facilities built before 1950 than after, maintaining the physical condition of the buildings was a huge challenge.[16] As of July 2005, many of the school buildings had severely deteriorated, suffering from years of neglect and deferred maintenance. The rundown school facilities became a visible symbol of the failure of NOPS.

Some promising developments made right before Hurricane Katrina

In the last days before Hurricane Katrina, the district was showing initial signs of improvement. The OPSB received a fresh start when five new members were sworn in during January 2005.[17] Academically, the schools were showing some promising developments. Seventy-nine percent of schools improved their Student Performance Scores on the 2004–05 LEAP test.[18] However, even with those improvements, the vast majority of NOPS schools performed below the state average.

New Orleans Public Schools Performed Significantly Below State Average on the 2004–05 LEAP

Percentage of students in New Orleans and Louisiana scoring "Basic" or above on the 2004–05 LEAP test

4th grade — 8th grade

English
- NOPS: 44% — 26%
- Louisiana: 64% — 50%

Math
- NOPS: 41% — 30%
- Louisiana: 61% — 51%

Legend: Basic, Mastery, Advanced

Note: Data is for all test takers.
Source: Louisiana Department of Education District Performance Score Report, 2004-05

A New Model for Public Education Emerged after Hurricane Katrina

Hurricane Katrina physically and financially devastated the city of New Orleans and its public schools. All 64,000 New Orleans Public Schools (NOPS) students were displaced, with the majority relocating to other parts of Louisiana, Texas, Mississippi, and Georgia. Public school leadership and teaching staff also were displaced. To prevent bankruptcy, the Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB) schools laid off more than 7,500 NOPS employees — nearly all of its workers. More than 4,000 NOPS teachers were included in the massive layoff.[19] Overnight, the principals and teachers of NOPS were scattered across the country.

Physically, the storm took an enormous toll on the schools. Thirty-five percent of the public school buildings suffered significant damage, many of which were rendered unusable.[20] Initial estimates by Alvarez & Marsal placed the total damage to school buildings at more than $800 million.[21]

Introduction of the state-run RSD created a new model

Hurricane Katrina served as a catalyst for change in the governance of the public schools. 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. Under the authority of Act No. 35, the state transferred the majority of OPSB schools (112 out of 128) to the state-run Recovery School District (RSD).[22] The RSD was given all "rights and responsibility of ownership regarding land, buildings, facilities, and other property" of the schools it took over. The RSD was empowered to lease, rebuild, or renovate the school facilities as necessary for the successful operation of schools, but it could not sell any school buildings as they belong to the local school board. The RSD was charged with opening and operating schools in New Orleans for an initial period of five years. At that time, the schools, and their buildings, could be transferred back to local control.[23]

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 local schools. The growth of charter schools (charters) has led to further decentralization. Charters are public schools funded by tax dollars and granted greater autonomy over decisionmaking, such as staffing, budgeting, and curriculum, than traditional public schools. In exchange for increased autonomy, charters are held account-able for meeting strict performance standards. The growth of charter schools in New Orleans was driven in part by the need to quickly reopen schools with limited support from the central district office. In addition, charters were able to access a $20.9 million grant earmarked specifically for charter schools.[24]

Twenty months after Hurricane Katrina, the New Orleans system of schools bears little resemblance to the prestorm school system. The new model has a fundamentally differ-ent governance structure. The once centralized, district-run school system is now frag-mented: 58 public schools are governed by two districts. The RSD operates 22 schools. The OPSB operates five schools. There are 31 charter schools in New Orleans. Eighteen charter schools are linked through six local and national charter networks, and 13 charter schools operate independently.[25] Fifty-three percent of the public schools — educating 57 percent of public school students — are now charters, making New Orleans the urban district with the highest proportion of charter schools in the nation.[26]

Today, New Orleans public schools and operators are experiencing varying levels of success. Much of this variance comes from the inherent advantages that some opera-tors enjoy, the disadvantages that some operators face, and the strength of the operators' management teams.

Act No. 35 Enabled the State to Take Over 112 Public Schools in New Orleans

In Louisiana, a school is considered "academically unacceptable" if its School Performance Score (SPS) is below a state set threshold. For the 2004–05 school year, the threshold SPS score was 60.[i]

Prior to Hurricane Katrina, Louisiana law allowed the state-run RSD to take over schools if one of the following three conditions existed:

1 The school was "academically unac-ceptable" and the local school board had not implemented a turnaround plan.

2 The school was "academically unac-ceptable" for four consecutive years.

3 The school was located in a district that is "academically in crisis," where

- more than 30 schools were "academi-cally unacceptable"; or

- more than 50 percent of district students attended schools that were "academically unacceptable."

Act No. 35, passed in November 2005, expanded the number of schools eligible for transfer to include those with a baseline School Performance Score below the state average — 87.4 for the 2004–05 school year — for schools in a district that is "academically in crisis."

Act No. 35 allowed the RSD to take con-trol of 112 schools in New Orleans.

[i] School Performance Score is a composite score based on a school's performance on student exams (e.g., LEAP), dropout rate, and attendance rate.
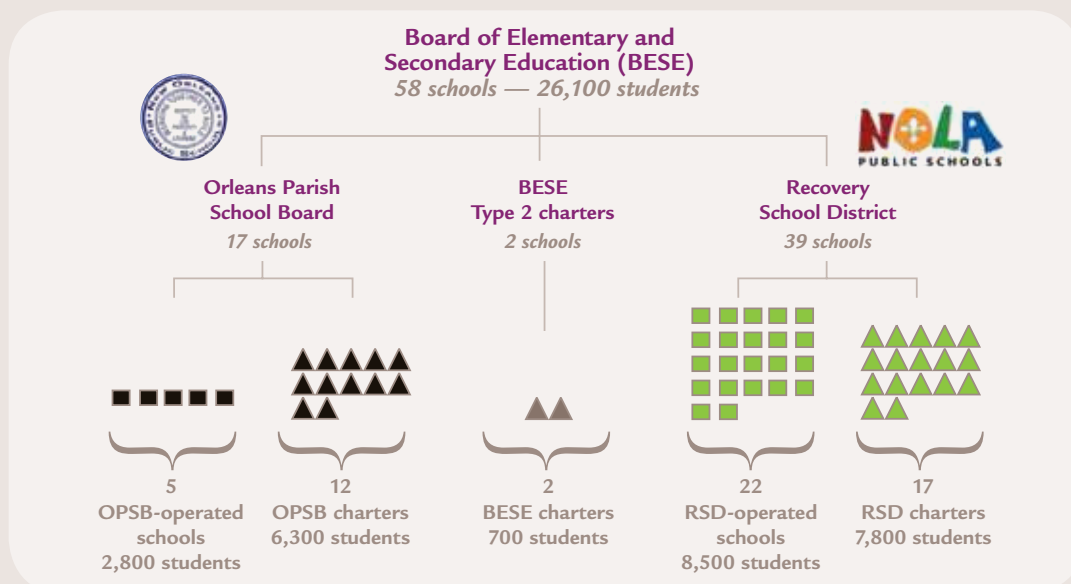
Source: Louisiana Department of Education Web site and "'National Model' or Flawed Approach," United Teachers of New Orleans and American Federation of Teachers, November 2006.

A New Decentralized Model for Public Education Emerged after Hurricane Katrina

Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE)
58 schools — 26,100 students

Orleans Parish School Board
17 schools

BESE Type 2 charters
2 schools

Recovery School District
39 schools

5
OPSB-operated schools
2,800 students

12
OPSB charters
6,300 students

2
BESE charters
700 students

22
RSD-operated schools
8,500 students

17
RSD charters
7,800 students

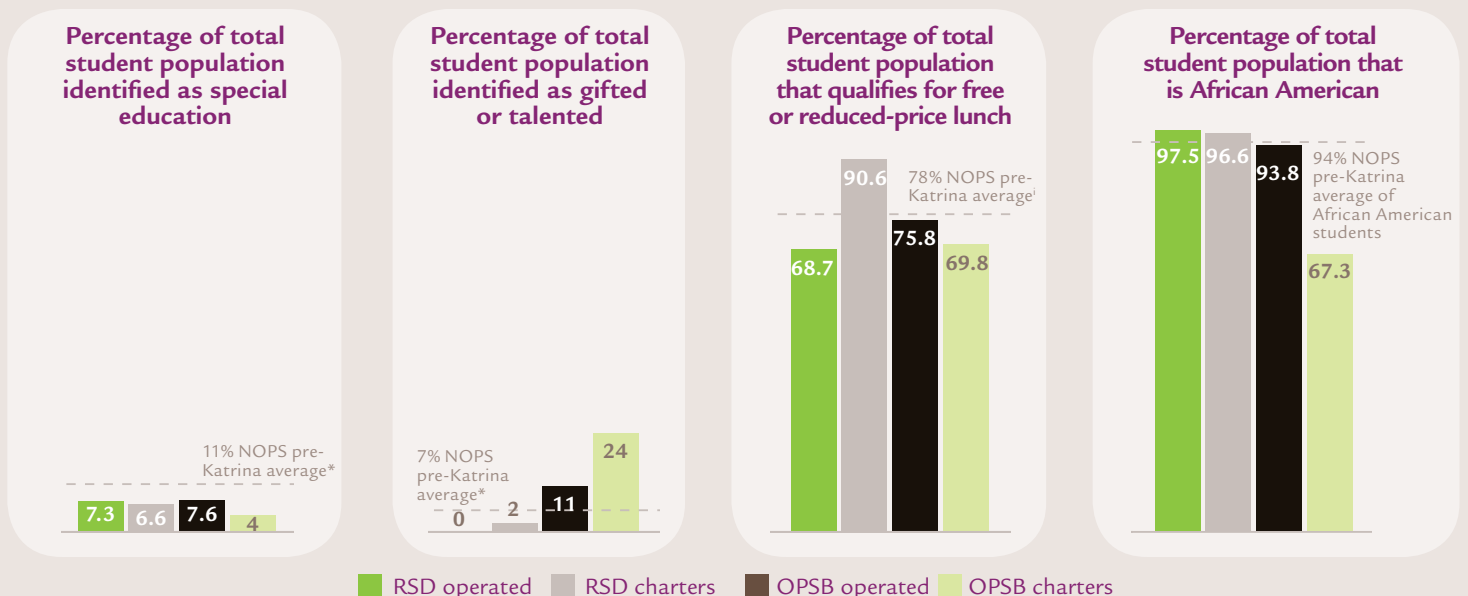## The state-run RSD is the largest school operator in New Orleans

As of May 2007, the RSD controls the largest number of public schools in New Orleans, operating 22 schools directly and authorizing 17 charter schools.[27] The RSD faces significant challenges in its efforts to turn around schools with a history of academic underperformance, financial mismanagement, and facilities negligence.

When the Louisiana State Legislature passed Act. No. 35 shortly after Hurricane Katrina, the RSD's role in public education significantly expanded. Upon taking over the majority of the public schools in New Orleans in late 2005, the RSD had to build a district office staff; reopen schools; buy and install new desks, books, computers, and supplies; hire more than 1,000 new teachers and principals; and develop or contract for support services such as transportation, meals, and security for 22 schools.[28] In addition, it had to provide facilities and oversight support to 17 charter schools. The RSD's task — creating a new school district from scratch immediately following a natural disaster — was unprecedented in recent U.S. public education history.

As outlined in Act No. 35, the RSD operates the public schools that have a history of low academic performance.[29] On average, the RSD opened schools later than other operators, significantly constraining its school leadership and staffing options and leaving it with more damaged facilities to repair and reopen. As a state entity, the RSD also had to contend with extensive bureaucratic and governmental oversight policies that created hurdles to accessing the funds necessary to repair facilities, hire teachers, and procure supplies.

The RSD is required to accept any incoming student and prohibited from having any selective enrollment policies. During the 2007 spring semester, more than 100 new students registered for public school in New Orleans every week, with almost all enrolling in RSD-

Public School Operators Serve Different Student Populations

Percentage of total student population identified as special education

RSD operated: 7.3
RSD charters: 6.6
OPSB operated: 7.6
OPSB charters: 4

11% NOPS pre-Katrina average*

Percentage of total student population identified as gifted or talented

RSD operated: 0
RSD charters: 2
OPSB operated: -11
OPSB charters: 24

7% NOPS pre-Katrina average*

Percentage of total student population that qualifies for free or reduced-price lunch

RSD operated: 68.7
RSD charters: 90.6
OPSB operated: 75.8
OPSB charters: 69.8

78% NOPS pre-Katrina average[i]

Percentage of total student population that is African American

RSD operated: 97.5
RSD charters: 96.6
OPSB operated: 93.8
OPSB charters: 67.3

94% NOPS pre-Katrina average of African American students

Legend: ■ RSD operated   ■ RSD charters   ■ OPSB operated   ■ OPSB charters

Note: Data are based on the most accurate information available at the time of the report. However, they are subject to change as student records continue to be updated.
[i] LDE Annual Financial and Statistical Report, 2004–05.
Source: Orleans Based Schools Multiple Statistics by Sitecode, Feb. 1, 2007; Louisiana Department of Education SER MFP AuditFile, Feb 1, 2007; 2004–05 US Department of Education data; Characteristics of the 100 Largest Public Elementary and Secondary School Districts in the United States: 2002–03, *National Center for Education Statistics.*

operated schools.[30] In addition, the RSD enrolls students that have been asked to leave OPSB or charter schools because of poor academic performance or expulsion. For many in the community, the RSD-operated schools are viewed as an unofficial "dumping ground" for students with behavioral or academic challenges.[31]

A dramatically smaller OPSB has emerged

Before Hurricane Katrina, the OPSB struggled to operate all of the New Orleans public schools. Now, it operates only five schools and authorizes an additional 12 charters. The dramatically smaller OPSB appears to be doing well with its limited scope. OPSB schools generally report fewer problems on the whole than RSD schools, particularly in the areas of teacher recruitment, class size, and operational support.

The OPSB has enjoyed a number of advantages such as maintaining control of schools with a history of academic success, enforcing enrollment caps, and using selective admissions policies. Three of the five OPSB-operated schools, all with a pre-Hurricane Katrina legacy of selective admissions, have retained their selective admissions processes, which limit student enrollment to higher-performing students. The decision to keep OPSB-operated schools selective was driven in part by the desire to make sure that student performance remains above the state threshold outlined in Act No. 35. If OPSB-operated schools do not maintain a minimum Student Performance Score, the OPSB could be obliged to relinquish control of them to the RSD.[32]

Charters have experienced dramatic growth

The 31 charters are a diverse group of public schools that share some financial and operational advantages. Seventeen of the city's charters are authorized by the RSD, 12 are authorized by the OPSB, and two are directly authorized by the Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE).

Some charter schools, like McDonogh 15 and McDonogh City Park, belong to national charter networks and organizations — KIPP and the Leona Group, respectively — which gives them access to support in areas such as curriculum, finances, recruiting, and leadership. Other charters, like the eight schools operated by the Algiers Charter Schools Association (ACSA) and the four University of New Orleans (UNO)-affiliated schools, are grouped into local charter school networks. These local networks centralize some operational functions — such as back office management, fundraising, and teacher recruiting — at the operator level, enabling schools to focus on student achievement and development.

Still other charter schools, like Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Charter School for Science and Technology and New Orleans Science and Math Charter High School, operate independently. Many of these independent charters are led by the same leadership teams as before

" We are helping to bring the community back to New Orleans. We are rebuilding an educational system that needed overhauling. "

✦ STUDENT

Charter Legal Structures

There are *five* legal types of charters and *two* types of authorizers in Louisiana — local school boards and the Louisiana's Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE).

A school's charter authorizer and charter type affects how a school receives funding and to whom it is held accountable for performance.

In New Orleans, there are *four* types of charter schools with two authorizers — OPSB and BESE

The RSD oversees *Type 5* charters, which are further divided into two categories:

- ⚜ *Five* charter schools act as their own local education authority (LEA).

- ⚜ The RSD is the LEA for *12* charter schools.

The OPSB oversees *one* *Type 1* start-up charter school and *two Type 3* conversion charter schools.[i]

BESE directly oversees *two* *Type 2* charters in Orleans Parish.

[i] A conversion charter school is an existing, traditional district-operated school that chooses to convert into a charter school.

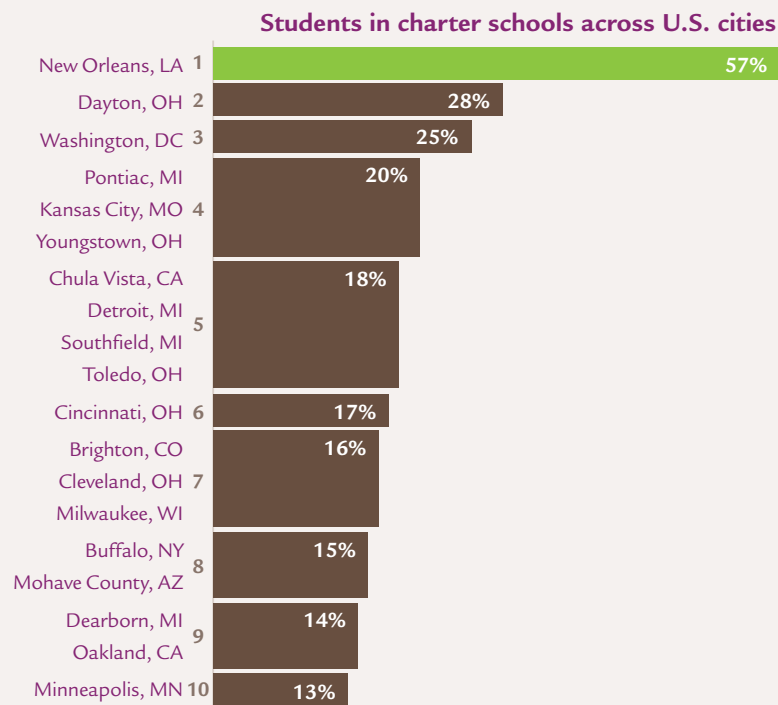*Source: Katherine Whitney, Louisiana Department of Education, BCG.*

Hurricane Katrina when they were traditional district schools. Through the dedication of faculty members, parents, and local organizations, these schools were converted to charter schools and reopened immediately after the storm.

Charters have some advantages over district-operated schools. They are provided with greater autonomy that allows them to be free from many of the bureaucratic district policies and procedures. Charters have used this autonomy to create various programs and school cultures focused on fostering student achievement. Many of programs provide innovation and bring best practices into public education in the city.

Some charters are advantaged because of their enrollment policies. Six of the 12 OPSB charters have selective enrollment policies. The remaining six OPSB charters and all 17 RSD charters have open-enrollment policies although most require potential students to fill out applications — which may include essays, parental-involvement clauses, or specific behavioral contracts.[33] These kinds of requirements can serve as a subtle form of selection that can provide charter schools more flexibility managing their incoming classes, rather than having to accept every student who applies.

Charter schools also have enrollment caps that are written into their charter contracts. Charters are unable to remove or modify their enrollment caps without approval from their authorizer. In a system suffering from inadequate student capacity, these caps can help charters maintain low student-teacher ratios, which has proved to be a best practice for improving student achievement.

New Orleans Has the Nation's Highest Percentage of Public School Students in Charter Schools

Students in charter schools across U.S. cities

City	Rank	Percentage
New Orleans, LA	1	57%
Dayton, OH	2	28%
Washington, DC	3	25%
Pontiac, MI / Kansas City, MO / Youngstown, OH	4	20%
Chula Vista, CA / Detroit, MI / Southfield, MI / Toledo, OH	5	18%
Cincinnati, OH	6	17%
Brighton, CO / Cleveland, OH / Milwaukee, WI	7	16%
Buffalo, NY / Mohave County, AZ	8	15%
Dearborn, MI / Oakland, CA	9	14%
Minneapolis, MN	10	13%

Source: National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, "Top 10 Charter Communities by Market Share," September 2006.

Assessment of the Current System

THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS in New Orleans have had a range of experiences, both good and bad, since Hurricane Katrina. The system as a whole is still struggling to normalize operations and create strong educational experiences for every student. Decentralization has provided schools with significantly increased school freedom, but system-level collaboration is currently limited. However, several building blocks for transformation have emerged through public school choice, increased school-level autonomy, and a growing focus on capacity building — developing the skills and capabilities of principals and teachers. In addition, the community remains optimistic and dedicated to improving public education.

1. THE NEW "SYSTEM OF SCHOOLS" IS STRUGGLING, BUT THERE ARE SOME SIGNS OF EARLY PROGRESS.

While most urban school districts struggle to open only a few new schools a year, New Orleans has opened 58 schools in 20 months. Since Hurricane Katrina, district and school leaders have had to repair school facilities, hire principals and teachers, secure school services, build a central office infrastructure, and develop curriculum. The parents, teachers, administrators, and support personnel of the public schools have displayed tremendous commitment to reopening local schools. District and school leaders, faced with colossal challenges, have demonstrated remarkable dedication and perseverance as they have rebuilt the foundation of a fundamentally new school system.

The new system has faced significant hurdles in the past 20 months, including ongoing operational challenges, lack of equitable funding across schools and operators,

Post-Hurricane Katrina, Many of the First Public Schools to Open Were Charters

Timeline of school reopenings

- ■ OPSB operated
- ■ RSD operated
- ■ Charters
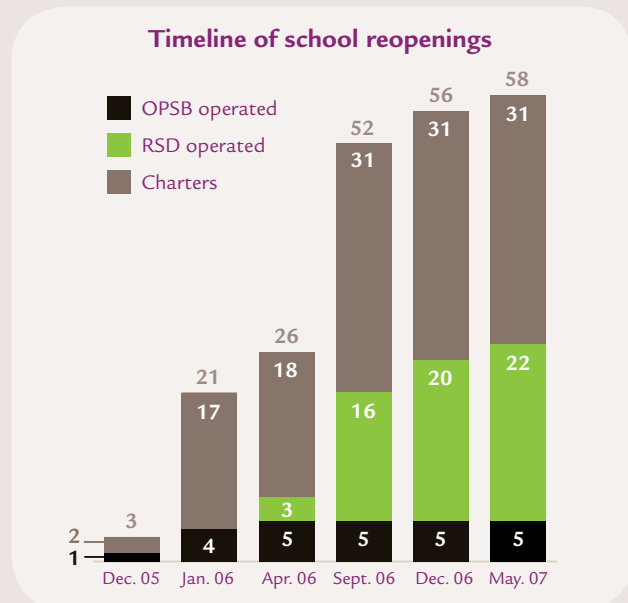
Note: The graph represents the number of public schools open.
Source: Louisiana Department of Education.

Facilities

The average age of buildings currently in use is **70 years old.**

Fifty percent of public school buildings were built before **1950.**[i]

Only **8 percent** of public school buildings were built after **1970.**[i]

Forty-eight facilities were so extensively damaged by Hurricane Katrina that they may not be able to reopen.

[i] Includes all public school facilities in New Orleans except for 26 school facilities in which data were unavailable.
Source: RSD/OPSB Facility Roadmap for 2007–08, Alvarez & Marsal.

and continuing barriers to admission at some schools. In addition, some operators have contended with managerial mistakes and operational disadvantages. However, the new system has shown signs of early progress in improving public education in New Orleans. It is too early to tell whether the new system of schools will succeed in providing superior opportunities for achievement to all public school students. Yet it is clear that New Orleans has the opportunity to transform all its public schools if it has the will and perseverance to address challenges head on and build on its emerging successes.

Public schools face huge operational challenges

Reopening 58 public schools presented huge operational challenges, which various school operators in New Orleans met with mixed success. With little available data on student performance or development — the real measure of the success or failure of the public schools — the media and the community have honed in on the districts' and schools' shortcomings in addressing these challenges.

The current rundown state of school facilities is a highly visible symbol of the challenges the schools face. Twenty-nine school buildings currently in use still require substantial repairs.[34] A few public school buildings destroyed by Hurricane Katrina remain ungutted, creating a highly visible "black eye" on public education to many in the community.[35] In addition, nonfunctional information technology, delays in supplies procurement, and problems with transportation have plagued the reopening process. In the months following Hurricane Katrina, many public schools struggled to provide hot meals and textbooks to all their students. Although these challenges have not been completely addressed, substantial progress has limited their impact.

Longstanding inequities in school access and resources continue today

Challenges that the public schools in New Orleans faced before Hurricane Katrina still persist — particularly the lack of access to good schools for all students and resource inequities among schools. Though these inequities developed over time, they have a significant impact on the schools and the public's perception of the schools today. Local residents have been vocal in asserting that the public schools remain a "tiered" system of "haves" and "have nots." Community members believe that in the current system, a select group of students has the opportunity to attend high-quality public schools, while the vast majority of students — for the most part poor and minority students — are stuck in low-performing schools in which they have little opportunity for growth and development.

Contributing to this perception is the belief among many community members that public schools in New Orleans do not have equal access to resources. For example, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE), the Recovery School District's (RSD) governing board, controls the distribution of $445 million in federal Restart funds allocated for all school districts in Louisiana affected by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Of the total $133 million funds allocated to rebuild public schools in New Orleans, the RSD-operated and charter schools received 91 percent of funds, and the Orleans Parish School

Board (OPSB)-operated and charter schools received 9 percent.[36] Although the RSD operates more than twice as many schools as the OPSB and occupies buildings that suffered severe damage from the storm, the dramatic difference in allocations has raised questions as to whether funds have been divided fairly.[37]

On the other hand, the OPSB has access to funds through property tax millages that the RSD does not. It must use these funds to service its $265 million "legacy" debt incurred by Hurricane Katrina.[38] Although it has recently increased its property tax mills, it is unclear whether or not the OPSB will have sufficient revenues to service the debt given its dramatically reduced size.[39]

Charter schools have the advantage of being eligible for some federal and private funding earmarked exclusively for charters. Individual charter schools in New Orleans have secured $10,000 to $250,000 in additional funding through private donations and foundation grants.[40] These grants and donations represent a new and much needed source of funding to public education. While the RSD, the OPSB, and charters all have some funding advantages and disadvantages, due to little transparency into school funding, systematic funding inequities cannot be conclusively identified or quantified.

RSD schools must deal with disadvantages and poor management

The entry of the RSD into New Orleans was a bold move with the goal of improving public education. Like many mayoral and state takeovers across the country, the decision was fueled by a desire to provide an influx of new talent, capacity, and best practices to improve failing schools. While the concept was well intentioned, the execution has fallen short.

In late 2005, the original structure proposed for the RSD in New Orleans was a far cry from what it is today. Originally, the RSD envisioned a district composed primarily of charter schools with a lean central administrative staff. However, by early 2006, when it became apparent that there would not be enough high-quality charter school operators, the RSD was forced to quickly reorient its structure to become a district able to open and operate schools.

Given the short time frame and lack of strong leadership, the RSD did not secure adequate management or staff to support the opening and running of schools. The staff members it did recruit were often strong educators or bureaucrats largely inexperienced in opening schools and running a school district — particularly one that needed to rebuild itself from the ground up. The RSD lacked the capabilities needed to support its growing district. As a result, the RSD was forced to rely heavily on outside contractors and staff from the State Department of Education to bridge its staffing gap and quickly open schools. Thus, the RSD began the 2006–07 school year at a severe disadvantage and has continued to struggle throughout the year.

As outlined in Act No. 35, the RSD is responsible for operating public schools that serve students most in need of academic and developmental support — a tall order for any management team. For the RSD, lacking a strong, consistent leadership team

and fully staffed central office, this task has been especially challenging. During the 2006–07 school year, there was more than 100 percent turnover in direct reports to the RSD superintendent.[41] Several key positions — including chief financial officer, chief operations officer, director of facilities, and director of human resources — were unfilled for much of the school year, with some still unfilled today. Many support staff positions also remained unfilled. As of March 2007, there were more than 60 positions open in the RSD's central office.[42] Additionally, many RSD schools did not have strong school-level leadership before Hurricane Katrina, which has made recruiting high-quality principals and teachers to support their transformation much more difficult. Thus, the lack of district and school staff at the RSD has hindered its ability to successfully operate schools.

In addition, the RSD had to open schools in buildings that had more severe damage and greater deferred maintenance. Compounding this challenge are the RSD's burdensome bureaucratic procedures from which the OPSB and charter schools are exempt. As a state-run entity, the RSD must abide by the state procurement process, which requires the superintendent to get three bids for every purchase greater than $500.[43] Although the RSD has made requests to the state legislature and governor to streamline the procurement process, as of May 2007, the procurement hurdles have not been removed.

To date, the RSD has been incapable of providing regular and timely operational support to the schools it operates. Though operations at most schools have improved since the start of the year, many schools still lack such basic amenities as working kitchens and functioning bathrooms.

As of May 2007, 10 RSD-operated schools still serve cold meals. Nine schools receive pre-prepared meals and heat them on-site. Only two RSD-operated schools prepare hot meals on their own, and one of these delivers hot lunches to another nearby RSD school.[44] With three-quarters of all students in the public schools eligible for free or reduced-price lunch,[45] many in the community are concerned that some of these students may only eat one meal a day — the meal they receive at school. If this one meal is a cold meal, some community members feel that students will be too hungry to concentrate on class work and learning.[46]

Additionally, many schools still have problems with water fountains and bathroom facilities.[47] At one RSD school, teachers reported that only two bathrooms — one for males and one for females — were available for the entire school, which included all students and faculty. The local community has vocalized its outrage over the poor state of school facilities, emphasizing that the quality of school restroom facilities reflects the lack of respect the school system has for students, teachers, and school leaders.[48]

Another issue that remains ongoing at the RSD is student safety and security. According to the Juvenile Justice Program of New Orleans, the RSD has one security guard for every 37 students — a rate nine times higher than New Orleans Public Schools (NOPS)
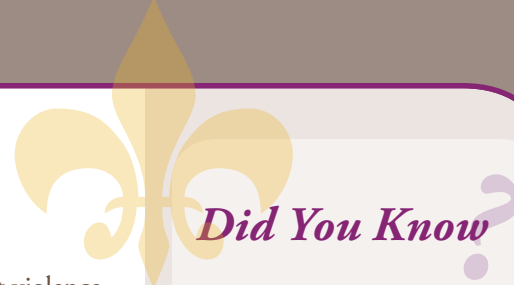
pre-Hurricane Katrina. Yet despite the high level of security, incidents of student violence continue at the RSD. The RSD has increased security by hiring additional guards, limiting access to school buildings, and requiring both high school students and some elementary students to pass through metal detectors. These security efforts have boosted the RSD's spending on security to $465 per student — a rate 10 times higher than it was for NOPS schools before Hurricane Katrina.[49] Some community members feel there is too much security, while others believe it is not enough. However, the community agrees that the quality of security in RSD schools is unacceptable. Complaints of young, inexperienced, and hostile security guards acting inappropriately have been made by parents and students.[50] As a result, 62 percent of community members currently do not think the public schools are safe and disciplined.[51]

One of the RSD's most enduring problems is its persistent teacher shortage. Because the majority of RSD schools opened after the OPSB and charter schools, there was a limited pool of teachers, administrators, and staff from which to draw. In February 2007, the RSD estimated that it had a staffing gap of about 100 teachers and 88 support staff — 10 percent of its fall 2006 staffing targets.[52] This gap will increase dramatically for the 2007–08 school year.

The teacher gap in RSD-operated schools has contributed to increased class size. Some RSD classes have more than 30 students, reduced student supervision and individual instruction, and increased disciplinary incidents. The teacher and support staff shortage has contributed to a widespread community consensus, supported by anecdotal evidence, that students are not receiving the support services they need at RSD schools — especially counseling, both emotional and academic. Special-needs students, in particular, have suffered because the schools lack the specialized staff needed to support the RSD's inclusion policy for special education, which integrates students with special needs into traditional classrooms.

The repercussions of these problems run deep. The media's unwavering attention to operational issues has distracted school leaders from focusing on student achievement and development. By reacting to the hot media issue of the day, the RSD has been dealing with problems as they occur — on an ad hoc basis. Although the RSD's Legislatively Required Plan spelled out a long-term vision and plan for systemic transformation of public education in New Orleans, the RSD has made only limited headway toward it. In addition, it has yet to develop a cohesive plan for reopening schools in fall 2007 — a challenge that is becoming more pressing as the days dwindle.

However, new leaders are taking steps to stabilize and improve the RSD. Beginning in April 2007, newly appointed State Superintendent Paul Pastorek made the timely reopening of schools for fall 2007 a top priority. To ensure schools are ready, he has secured the assistance of the Louisiana National Guard for school renovation and construction. State Superintendent Pastorek has made the timely processing of Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) claims another priority. As a result of his outreach efforts,
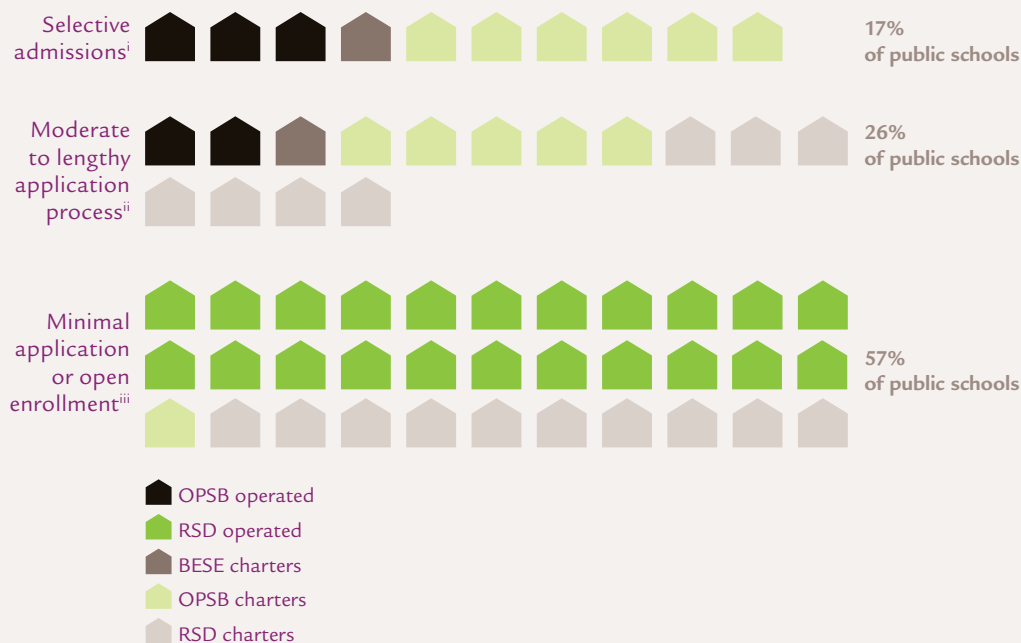
FEMA and the Governor's Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness agreed to dedicate more resources toward claims processing to speed up the delivery of much-needed funds. In other areas, such as teacher recruitment, State Superintendent Pastorek has created a series of "Tiger Teams" — teams charged with conducting 30-day feasibility studies — to examine a challenge and determine the district's plan and priorities to address it.

The new superintendent for the RSD, Paul Vallas, is bringing a similar level of hope and planning to the RSD. Coming from his position as superintendent of two large urban school districts (Chicago and Philadelphia), Superintendent Vallas feels that New Orleans, with its smaller size, abundance of universities, and active community presence, is poised for success.[53] In May, two months before he will officially take office, Superintendent Vallas announced plans for a summer school program to assist students who have fallen behind.[54] He also is planning to bring much-needed support staff to the RSD from his previous jobs, and he plans to actively engage local current and retired educators to assist as well.[55] The efforts of State Superintendent Pastorek and Superintendent Vallas are ambitious and promising and, if executed effectively, have the potential to go a long way toward improving student achievement and development.

Some charter schools and OPSB-operated schools appear to enjoy initial success

The OPSB enjoys several advantages that have contributed to its initial success. After Hurricane Katrina, the OPSB was left to operate only a few schools, which historically were the parish's highest-performing public schools. Many of these schools had strong leaders, staff, and community relationships that supported their reopening.

Admissions Policies Vary across Operators; RSD Is All Open Enrollment

Selective admissions[i] — 17% of public schools

Moderate to lengthy application process[ii] — 26% of public schools

Minimal application or open enrollment[iii] — 57% of public schools

- OPSB operated
- RSD operated
- BESE charters
- OPSB charters
- RSD charters

[i] "Selective admissions" schools require test scores or/and admission tests in addition to an extensive application process.
[ii] "Moderate to lengthy application process" requires basic documents as well as writing samples, parental involvement agreement, interviews, and/or multiple documents to support proof of residency.
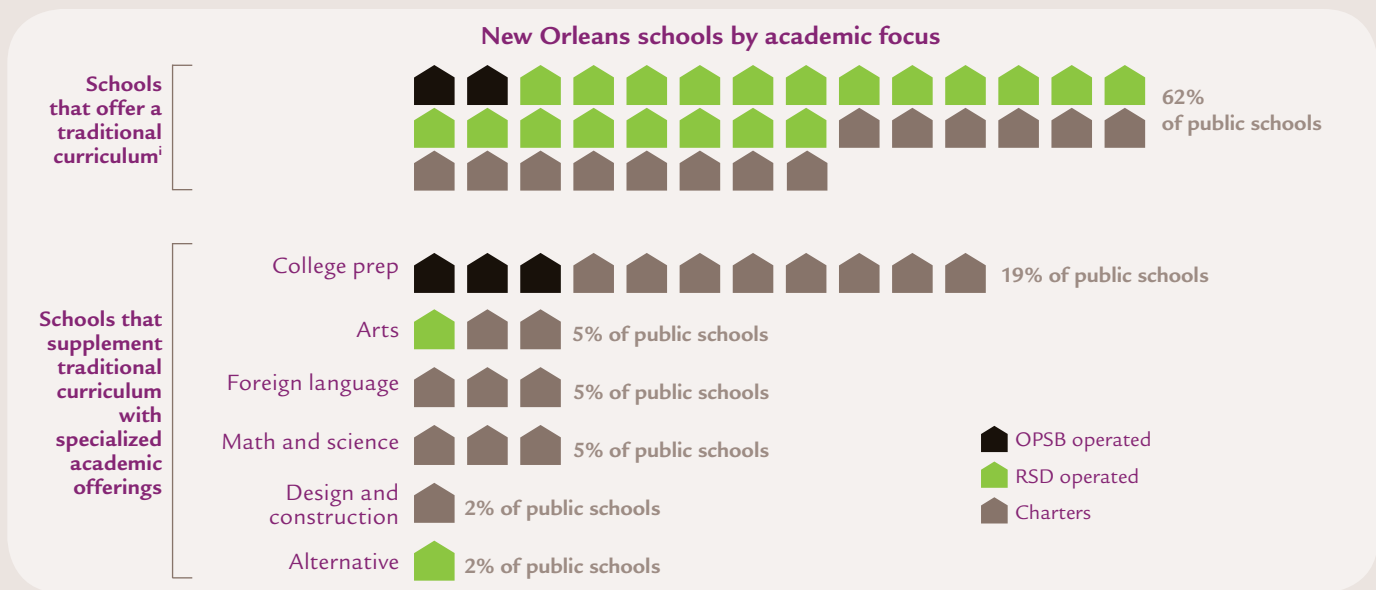[iii] "Minimal application process" or "open enrollment" require basic proof of residency and other supporting documents, such as immunization records, social security card, birth certification, and/or previous student records.
Source: BCG research.

The OPSB also has the ability to cap enrollment at its schools, allowing it to maintain its desired school size and its low student-teacher ratios, both proven national best practices that contribute to a positive learning environment and student achievement. OPSB schools have had less trouble recruiting and retaining certified teachers,[56] which has spared the OPSB the problems of overcrowding and teacher shortages that continue to plague the RSD.

In addition, the school buildings that the OPSB schools occupy received significantly less damage than buildings occupied by the RSD, which has allowed the OPSB to focus less on immediate operational needs. The OPSB also has gotten control of its finances — a problem that plagued the board before Hurricane Katrina. Cash flow has 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.[57] To keep its costs in line, the OPSB has made significant cuts to its central staff. Despite its reduced size, the OPSB's central office has been able to effectively manage its small portfolio of five schools. However, the OPSB would require substantial additional capacity to effectively manage and operate a large number of schools.

Charter schools appear to have done well in many of the same areas as the OPSB, in part due to their leaders' ability and resolve to focus exclusively on the performance of a single school or small set of schools. Like the OPSB, charters generally have better facilities, fewer procurement barriers, and fewer problems finding staff and keeping school and class sizes small. Charters also have taken advantage of federal funds earmarked for charter education, and many have sought out donations from private philanthropic organizations and individuals.

Nearly 40 Percent of Public Schools Have Specialized Academic Offerings

New Orleans schools by academic focus

Schools that offer a traditional curriculum[i] — 62% of public schools

Schools that supplement traditional curriculum with specialized academic offerings

College prep	19% of public schools
Arts	5% of public schools
Foreign language	5% of public schools
Math and science	5% of public schools
Design and construction	2% of public schools
Alternative	2% of public schools

■ OPSB operated
■ RSD operated
■ Charters

Note: All schools in New Orleans must have curriculum that meets or exceeds the state standards Grade Level Expectations (GLEs). All RSD and OPSB schools and most charters used the Louisiana Comprehensive Curriculum (LCC) as a their curriculum base. Specialized academic offerings supplement, not replace, the GLE curriculum.
[i] Traditional curriculum includes LCC, school-designed curriculum, and/or standards-based aligned curriculum that does not have any additional academic focus areas.
Source: RSD Web site; BCG interviews with school leaders.

Both the OPSB and charters have, on average, better facilities and fewer procurement obstacles than the RSD.[58] As a result, both the OPSB and charter schools have had less trouble stabilizing operations than RSD schools, which has enabled OPSB and charter school leaders to focus their time and attention on improving student achievement and development.

Many OPSB-operated and charter schools have incorporated specialized academic offerings and increased instructional time into their curriculum. Of the five OPSB charter schools, three offer college preparatory or advanced curriculum. Of the 31 charter schools, 40 percent offer specialized academic offerings such as college preparatory, arts, language immersion, or math and science.[59] Many of these schools also have adopted school calendars designed to increase instructional time. For example, in December 2006 the OPSB voted to extend the school day by a half hour in its district schools.[60] Many charters have longer school days and supplemental after-school tutoring, and some even offer summer school.

Community members frequently name specific OPSB-operated and charter schools as some of the strongest in New Orleans. Charters frequently named included Lusher Charter School, Benjamin Franklin High School, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Charter School for Science and Technology, New Orleans Charter Science and Math School, and charters run by KIPP and ACSA.

It is too early to evaluate the long-term impact of these changes on student achievement and development

Although some pockets of initial success exist, there are no directly comparable academic data available from which to judge the overall success or failure of the system to date. True success will come from improved student achievement and development over time. Since no systemwide baseline testing was performed at the beginning of the 2006–07 school year, there is no starting point with which to compare the 2006–07 end-of-year LEAP data. Citywide pre- and post-Hurricane Katrina student achievement is not comparable because of the high rate of displacement that has occurred within the student population before and after the storm. Consequently, school-level, operator-level, and systemwide academic improvement cannot be accurately measured until the end of the 2007–08 school year. Drawing conclusions about the relative effectiveness of individual schools or operators based on the current year LEAP scores is premature.

> *"What's going well in the public schools are the students, teachers, and principals who are all trying their best. We have gone through a lot during this rebuilding stage of our lives."*
>
> ⚜ STUDENT

For now, the New Orleans community is divided over whether the public schools are better or worse than before Hurricane Katrina. According to a survey of New Orleans community members conducted in March and April of 2007, 48 percent of New Orleanians believe that the public school system is worse than it was before Hurricane Katrina; 25 percent believe it is better; and 27 percent are unsure if it is better or worse.[61]

Transforming the public education system in New Orleans will take time, perseverance, leadership, and courage. It will take years to fully implement needed changes and accurately evaluate whether the new system of schools is yielding improved student performance and development. The 2006–07 academic year will not only provide the first baseline for comparison but also serve as a starting point to create the momentum needed for transformation.
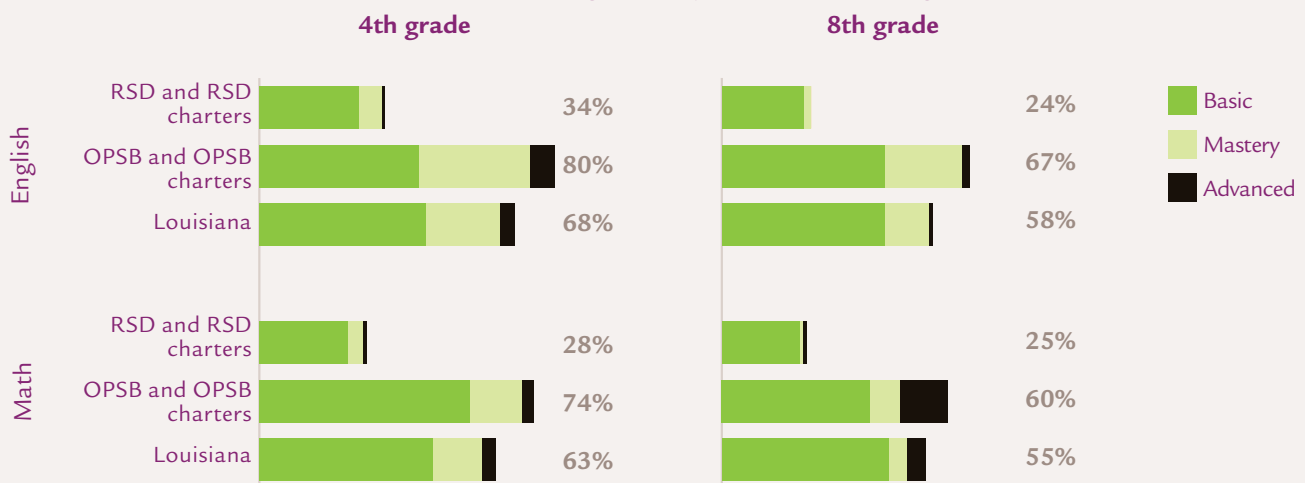
2. SOME BUILDING BLOCKS FOR TRANSFORMATION ARE EMERGING.

Transforming a failing school requires substantial resources and a strong commitment to change. Urban districts across the country are using various tactics and strategies to improve public education. Although there are many national best practices that support systemwide improvement, there is no single best strategy for transforming public education.

In New Orleans, the introduction of school choice, the expansion of school-level autonomy and accountability, and the increased emphasis on capacity building are serving as the building blocks to improve public education. While additional best practices can and should be explored, if the city can effectively capitalize on these three elements, public education for all students in the city will be substantially improved.

2006–07 LEAP Scores Serve as a Baseline

New Orleans Public Schools Performed Significantly Below State Average on the 2004–05 LEAP

	4th grade	8th grade
English		
RSD and RSD charters	34%	24%
OPSB and OPSB charters	80%	67%
Louisiana	68%	58%
Math		
RSD and RSD charters	28%	25%
OPSB and OPSB charters	74%	60%
Louisiana	63%	55%

Legend: Basic, Mastery, Advanced

"RSD and RSD charters" includes RSD-operated schools and Type 5 charter schools from New Orleans.
"OPSB and OPSB charters" includes OPSB and Type 1, Type 3, and Type 4 charter schools from New Orleans.
Source: LDE District Performance Score Report, 2006–07, and supplemental LDE interviews.
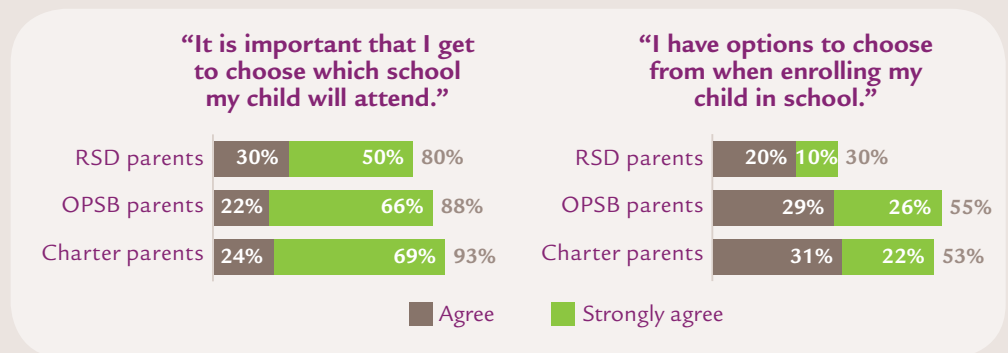
Public school choice offers promise but is not yet fully available

When the two-district model and charter schools were introduced after Hurricane Katrina, public school choice in New Orleans emerged. Students were no longer required to attend the public school closest to where they live; rather, in theory, they could select from any school across the city. The new model of school choice has the potential to address New Orleans's legacy of educational inequity and poor student achievement by providing all students the opportunity to enroll in a high-quality public school. In a school-choice market, families are empowered to select a school that they think will provide the best education for their children from multiple public school offerings. Although it is a relatively new element in urban education, national research on the impact of public school choice on parental satisfaction and student achievement is promising.[62]

Given the current governance model, school choice is an undeniable part of the new public education system. Many New Orleans parents have begun to embrace the idea of school choice, though choice means different things to different parents. To some parents, choice means having a high-quality school in their neighborhood that their children can attend. For others, it means having their children attend a school with a specific curricular emphasis, such as math and science, fine arts, or vocational learning.

In a recent survey of New Orleans parents with children in RSD, OPSB, and charter schools, 86 percent agreed that it is important for them to be able to choose which public schools their children will attend.[63] However, only 48 percent of New Orleans parents felt they had options when enrolling their children in public school.[64] The school-choice market in New Orleans, while developing, is imperfect. Several elements of an effective school-choice market are either not working efficiently or not currently in place.

Parents Believe School Choice, While Currently Limited, Is Important

"It is important that I get to choose which school my child will attend."		
RSD parents	30%	50% — 80%
OPSB parents	22%	66% — 88%
Charter parents	24%	69% — 93%

"I have options to choose from when enrolling my child in school."		
RSD parents	20%	10% — 30%
OPSB parents	29%	26% — 55%
Charter parents	31%	22% — 53%

■ Agree   ■ Strongly agree

Note: Total number of parent submissions = 389.
Source: BCG community surveys.

Inequitable access to all public schools

The current system does not provide all students with access to high-quality public schools. Ten schools (17 percent) have selective enrollment policies; 36 schools (62 percent) have caps on enrollment; and nine schools (16 percent) do not provide traditional school bus transportation for students.[65] In addition, as of April 2007, the application deadline for student enrollment for the 2007–08 school year had already passed at 36 percent of the public schools.[66] Students returning to New Orleans in or after May will not have an opportunity to attend these schools.

Selective enrollment policies and other more subtle forms of selectivity, such as parental contracts or student essays, can penalize some students — often those most in need of academic and developmental support — by restricting their ability to access some of the most successful schools in the city. This can create a vicious cycle in which students who are economically and socially advantaged are served by the best schools, while students who are economically and socially disadvantaged attend the worst schools. This trend further reinforces the "tiered system" of schools that has long existed in New Orleans.
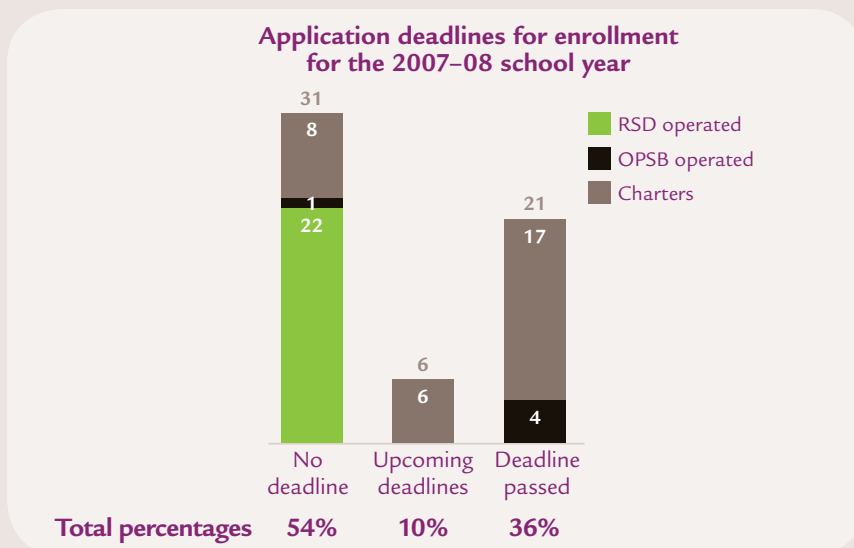
Inadequate number of schools in total, by neighborhood and by academic offering

Another key factor inhibiting effective school choice is inadequate total school capacity. At the start of the 2006–07 school year, there was enough capacity to enroll all returning students. Yet a continual influx of returning students mid-year exceeded the increases in

> *"I like having choice. I had choices when I selected a school for my child."*
>
> ❧ PARENT AND TEACHER

As of April 2007, Enrollment Deadlines for More Than One-Third of the Public Schools Already Have Passed

Application deadlines for enrollment for the 2007–08 school year

Legend:
- RSD operated
- OPSB operated
- Charters

	No deadline	Upcoming deadlines	Deadline passed
Charters	8		17
OPSB operated	1		4
RSD operated	22	6	
Total	31	6	21
Total percentages	**54%**	**10%**	**36%**

Source: BCG research.

school capacity. As a result, in January 2007, the RSD put 300 students on a waiting list to enter public school — a decision that received immediate and widespread public criticism.[67] Although the RSD quickly reversed its decision and made room for all incoming students, the cost was increased class sizes until additional schools were opened.

Currently, some neighborhoods still do not have any public schools. After Hurricane Katrina, public schools were initially reopened in the least devastated areas of the city. The rationale for this was pragmatic: School facilities in relatively "dry" areas were the least damaged, required the least amount of funds to reopen, and were largely in areas that had begun to repopulate. The dry areas were predominantly inhabited by higher income, Caucasian families. As a result, some neighborhoods that are repopulating, such as Broadmoor, Lower Ninth Ward, and Gentilly, do not have any public schools. Other neighborhoods, such as Eastern New Orleans, do not have enough public schools in their communities.

Without public schools in every neighborhood, some students are forced to travel across town to attend school. Since 42 percent of parents believe it is important for students to attend schools in their own neighborhood, not having an open-enrollment school in every neighborhood remains a source of contention and frustration for them.[68] Additionally, many New Orleanians in these underserved neighborhoods feel that the revitalization of their communities has been stunted by the lack of local public schools, which is a critical element for repopulating and rebuilding.

There also are not enough schools that provide various specialized academic offerings such as gifted and talented, vocational, and alternative programs. All RSD schools use the Louisiana Comprehensive Curriculum with limited supplemental curriculum offerings. The only schools that offer specialized academic offerings — including college-preparatory, math- and science-specific, and language-immersion programs — are almost exclusively charter schools and OPSB-operated schools.[69] If a student wants a specialized academic offering but is unable to access OPSB or charter schools — because these schools are full or the student is unable to meet enrollment criteria — he or she is left with no options.

The lack of high-quality alternative and vocational schools remains a key concern for many New Orleanians. Currently, there are very limited options for vocational programs in New Orleans, only one alternative school (run by the RSD) and one evening school (run by the OPSB). Without alternative options, many overage students with significant disciplinary and developmental needs are currently enrolled in traditional public schools. Some teachers, already strained due to lack of support staff and ballooning class sizes, do not have the resources and capacity to best serve these students.[70]

“*Because we do not have neighborhood schools now, parents without transportation options do not have school choice.*”

✤ COMMUNITY MEMBER

Lack of understanding and information about the new system

Another obstacle to effective school choice is that many parents do not understand how school choice works, which limits their ability to select the best schools for their children. In 2005, approximately 40 percent of adults read at or below the 5th grade reading level.[71] With low adult literacy rates, limited public transportation, and a low rate of Internet access, many families with students in public schools are unable to get information about the public schools.

The city offers no consolidated and easily accessible source of information for parents about enrollment and public school options in New Orleans, primarily because there are no transparent, comprehensive data on the public school system. For example, there is no systemwide tracking of student behavior/discipline issues (truancy, suspensions, and expulsions). Also, without any baseline performance testing from the beginning of the 2006–07 school year, it will be impossible to reliably assess a school's ability to improve student achievement until the end of the 2007–08 school year, when LEAP test results can be compared from the end of 2007 to the end of 2008. Parents are left with little or no systematic and citywide information about the public schools' ability to improve student performance and development.

As a result, some parents enroll their children in the nearest school or the school their children attended before Hurricane Katrina. Students may remain in low-performing schools, even when options to attend higher-performing schools are available, because parents are not given access to clear information about school performance.

Reopened Public Schools Concentrated in Areas Least Affected by Hurricane Katrina, Leaving Some Neighborhoods without a Public School
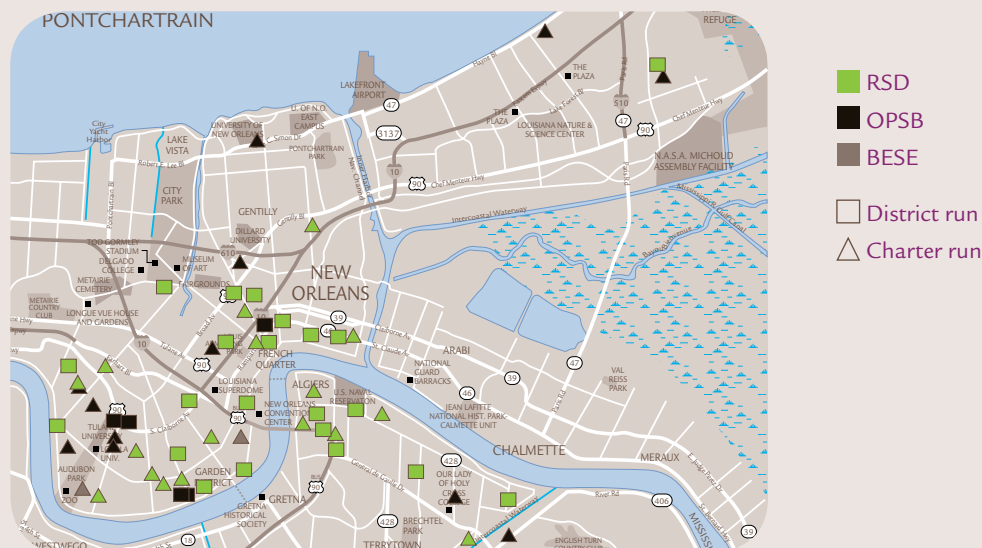
Note: Fifty-eight public schools had opened as of May 2007.
Source: BCG research.

Did You Know ?

What We Learned from Other Districts about School Autonomy

Boston, Massachusetts

In 1995, Boston Public Schools (BPS) launched a pilot reform program in 10 percent of its schools (19). They were given autonomy similar to that of charters, including school-level freedom over budgeting, staffing, curriculum, policies, and scheduling. They have already seen some successes — college enrollment rates at these schools have risen 12 percentage points higher than BPS at large.[i]

New York, New York

In 2004, the New York City Department of Education established "autonomy zones" that combine collaborative leadership development with increased school-level freedoms and accountability. Participating principals can determine their schools' curriculum, calendar, and professional development programs. By 2007, 332 schools had joined the autonomy zone. Of the principals at these schools, 99 percent are glad they joined, and more than 90 percent feel that their overall classroom instruction has improved since becoming an Empowerment School.[ii]

Because the school-choice market does not function efficiently in New Orleans, students and families with greater resources often have more opportunity to take advantage of available choices. Thus, 62 percent of New Orleanians feel that all students are *not* given the opportunity to attend a good public school.[72] Seeking out the information needed to make a fully informed choice about school enrollment — and going through the process of enrollment — takes resources that are above and beyond what many families in New Orleans have. Some students with few resources may find it difficult to enroll in OPSB and charter schools. As a result, many of these students will attend a struggling RSD-operated school.

Some schools have been granted greater autonomy in exchange for increased accountability, encouraging sharper focus on student achievement
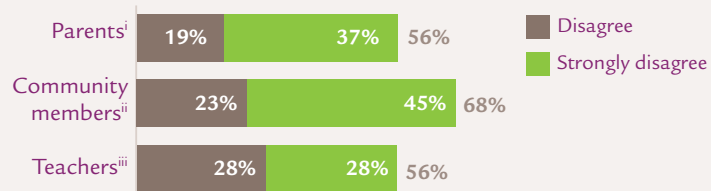
Increased school-level autonomy, coupled with increased accountability, has been identified as a national best practice that can improve student achievement and development.[73] Giving school leaders the freedom to make their own decisions on school-level issues, such as budgeting, staffing, curriculum, and scheduling, allows them to better serve the needs of their specific student populations. In exchange for greater school-level autonomy, schools must be held accountable for raising student achievement through regular reviews and monitoring.

Charter schools are premised on this theory. However, chartering schools is not the only way to increase school-level autonomy and accountability. School districts across the country have adopted elements of school-level autonomy at traditional (noncharter) schools.

After Hurricane Katrina, education leaders at BESE deliberately chose to charter a significant number of schools in New Orleans to put key decisions closer to the students as well as quickly reopen schools and gain access to federal funds earmarked specifically for charters.[74] The OPSB also chartered the majority of its schools to gain access to these funds. In addition to charter schools, both the RSD and OPSB have selectively introduced some

Parents, Teachers, and Community Members Do Not Believe All Students Have Equal Opportunities

Respondents disagreeing with the statement, "All children have the opportunity to go to a good public school in New Orleans."
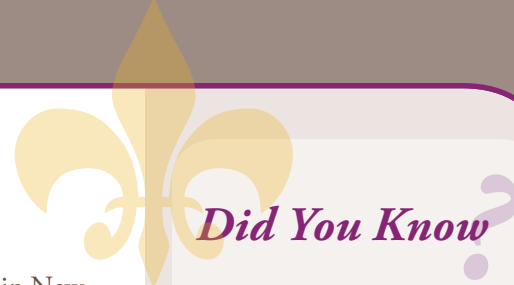
	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total
Parents[i]	19%	37%	56%
Community members[ii]	23%	45%	68%
Teachers[iii]	28%	28%	56%

[i] Number of parents responding = 389.
[ii] Number of community members responding = 571.
[iii] Number of teachers responding = 319.
Source: BCG community surveys.

autonomy to the public schools they operate directly. Today, most public school in New Orleans (charters and noncharters) enjoy significantly more school-level autonomy than they did before Hurricane Katrina.

Some school operators have taken advantage of their newfound autonomy by adopting innovative practices in academics and teaching time (both the number of hours in each day and the number of days in each year). Fifty two percent of New Orleans charter schools have adopted a specific academic focus — such as the arts, science, or college preparation.[75] In addition, almost half of local charter schools have modified the traditional school calendar to provide students with additional instruction (for example, longer school days, more school days, and the option to attend summer school), which has been identified as a national best practice for improving student achievement.[76]

Charter schools also have control over their own budgets, enabling them to allocate funds in ways that will best benefit their students. Whereas traditional schools must use services from or through the central office, charters are empowered to select providers with appropriate trade-offs for service and cost. For example, instead of contracting school buses for transportation, one charter school purchased its own buses to ensure high-quality transportation for all its students. This decentralization of purchasing power has created a market for shared services among charter schools, laying the building blocks for gains in efficiency and improvement in services.

All public schools, charters and non-charters alike, have gained a level of increased autonomy over staffing decisions because no operator in New Orleans is currently bound by a collective bargaining agreement. District and charter school operators are empowered to hire, allocate, promote, and fire teachers and staff based on their performance and schools' needs, not seniority or union contracts. Teachers are held accountable for their performance through year-to-year renewable contracts.

In return for increased autonomy, schools are held accountable for student performance — and the Louisiana Accountability Standards are among the most rigorous and respected in the nation. The Editorial Projects in Education Research Center ranked Louisiana as best in the nation for its standards, assessments, and accountability, reporting that the state "has standards that are clear, specific, and grounded in content."[77] When the state made the bold move of taking over the failing OPSB schools, it sent a strong signal to public schools that they will be held accountable for improving student performance.

Accountability for charters has taken the form of renewable, five-year charter contracts. If charters do not adhere to the terms of their contracts and improve student achievement, their contracts will not be renewed.

> ❝ *Putting decisionmaking closer to the students increases the chance of getting things right.* ❞
>
> ❧ SCHOOL LEADER

Did You Know?

What We Learned from Other Districts about School Autonomy

Seattle, Washington

By having greater budgetary control and the authority to make entrepreneurial decisions, principals in Seattle have implemented small-group teaching and a 12-month school calendar in inner-city schools, resulting in the elimination of the 3rd-grade achievement gap and an increase in math proficiency from 12.3 to 43.9 percent.[iii]

Edmonton, Alberta, Canada

Edmonton's public schools are among the world's best. Principals in Edmonton control 92 percent of the school budget, allowing them to find creative ways to decrease spending in utilities and security and to invest those funds on improving instruction.[iv]

[i]Report on Pilot Schools, Center for Collaborative Education, 2006.

[ii]New York Department of Education Web site.

[iii]William G. Ouchi, "Power to the Principals: Decentralization in Three Large School Districts", 2005; Seattle Public Schools School Outcomes Profiles.

[iv]Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), 2003.

Initial commitment to capacity building

According to national best-practice research, building teacher and principal capacity can be a key lever for improving classroom instruction and student learning.[78] The better educators New Orleans has, the better schools it will have.

Since Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans has demonstrated an initial commitment to building the capacity of public school teachers and principals. Before the 2006–07 school year, the RSD, OPSB, Algiers Charter Schools Association (ACSA), and several local non-profits teamed up to create the NOLA Collaborative to provide professional development opportunities to local public schools. Professional development seminars were facilitated by education experts with track records of improving student achievement. The NOLA Collaborative has focused on building the capacity of principals, school leadership teams, curriculum coordinators, and teachers. It also fostered collaboration among various school operators.[79]

The RSD also has demonstrated an ongoing commitment to capacity building by ear-marking one hour of professional development per day for all teachers in its schools. Although teachers give the program mixed reviews, it shows the commitment of the RSD to building capacity at the classroom level.[80] The OPSB also has added time to its day for professional development. In December 2006, the OPSB voted to add 30 minutes to each day specifically for professional development.[81]

In addition, both the RSD and OPSB have sponsored various supplemental professional development programs for their teachers. The OPSB has offered these sessions to all teachers at their charter schools at no cost, fostering a supportive atmosphere for teachers across all of the schools it oversees.[82]

Nonprofits and local universities have stepped in to provide additional opportunities for professional and leadership development. New Leaders for New Schools (NLNS), a national nonprofit organization, has promised to recruit and train 40 school principals over the next four years to lead the city's public schools. NLNS provides aspiring principals with an intensive summer training program and year-long residency during which they complete a rigorous course of study and build skill sets in instructional and organizational leadership. Principals also receive additional coaching and mentoring for their first two years as a principal.

Local college Our Lady of Holy Cross also is focusing on building school leadership capacity through a two-year master's program. The 18 candidates currently enrolled are receiving their education free of charge in exchange for promising to serve in the ACSA for two years after graduation.[83]

TeachNOLA, an initiative of New Schools for New Orleans (NSNO), and Teach for America (TFA), a national nonprofit, also are committed to identifying and training new teachers for New Orleans. Both organizations train prospective teachers, help them become certified, and provide them ongoing support once they are in the classroom.

Additionally, the Center for Development and Learning (CDL) and The Greater New Orleans Education Foundation (GNOEF) are working to establish a citywide Teacher and Learning Center that would serve as a clearinghouse for all local teachers — from the RSD, the OPSB, and charters — to receive relevant and high-quality professional development.[84]

3. SYSTEM-LEVEL COORDINATION IS CURRENTLY LIMITED.

A multi-operator system can be a powerful level to raise student achievement by placing decisionmaking authority close to the student, fostering innovation, offering diverse academic and development opportunities, and providing parents with a choice in public education. However, the current system in New Orleans remains balkanized and lacks a general systemwide view of public education that crosses all districts and operators citywide. Public schools in New Orleans — no matter what district they are in or what type of school they are — face many of the same challenges. Yet the majority of public schools and public school operators are focused on meeting these challenges on their own, instead of working together as a system. There is no systemwide responsibility, accountability, vision, or leadership to guide the transformation of *all* public schools for *all* New Orleans students.

There is limited systemwide support for many of the challenges that all schools face

In traditional public school districts, district officials control and support many elements of school operations, including back-office functions, staffing, facilities maintenance, transportation, and food services. All of these services can substantially benefit from larger scale and centralization. However, in the new system of schools, most charters receive very limited services from their authorizers. Even though the 31 charters have actively embraced autonomy in the areas of curriculum, staffing, and budgeting, some charters would welcome support for other functions. Local nonprofit organizations and charter school networks, such as NSNO, ACSA, and University of New Orleans (UNO), have stepped in to support charters, but additional support and collaboration are needed.

In the few areas where districts are required to provide support to their charters, the OPSB and RSD are not consistently providing high-quality support. Nationally, two of the top reasons that charters fail are lack of funding and problems securing facilities.[85] In New Orleans, the RSD is not adequately supporting these two critical functions for its charter schools. For example, in April, the RSD announced that it would use federal

> "*True educators, and there are plenty of them in New Orleans public schools, are working in these challenging jobs because they really care about enriching the lives of students through education.*"
>
> ✦ COMMUNITY MEMBER

Restart funds to attract out-of-state teachers instead of distributing them directly to schools. While allocating these funds to teacher incentives will help address the growing teacher gap, many New Orleans charters found themselves in a cash flow crisis, having created budgets with the assumption that they would receive a portion of the Restart funds. ACSA estimated it would miss out on $2.5 million and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Charter School for Science and Technology reported it would lose $300,000.[86] Without these funds, some charter schools believe they will have difficulties continuing some academic programs, providing purchasing materials and supplies, and offering extracurricular student-enrichment activities.

In addition, neither the RSD nor the OPSB is providing adequate support in terms of facilities upgrades and maintenance. The OPSB has spent approximately 20 percent of its allocated FEMA funds to repair school buildings. The RSD, in an effort to conserve its money to create a long-term plan for facilities, has spent only 10 percent of its allocated FEMA funds.[87] Many charter school operators feel that neither district has been proactive about resolving many of their facilities concerns.[88]

The OPSB and RSD also are responsible for monitoring the charter schools they authorize to ensure that the schools adhere to the terms of their charter agreements and promote student achievement. Currently, there is very limited transparency into the compliance and monitoring processes for OPSB and RSD charter schools. Neither the OPSB nor the RSD has codified clear compliance and monitoring policies, leaving some charters unclear for what they will be held accountable. Unless these policies are clarified and enforced, there will be no way to ensure that charters are held accountable for their students' academic achievement.

The OPSB and RSD also are failing to provide some support services to the schools they operate directly. In interviews, RSD-operated schools reported insufficient support in such key areas as food services, facilities maintenance, and supplies. OPSB-operated schools cited a lack of classroom supplies and funding as their main concerns with the district.

Local and national nonprofit organizations are working to fill the gaps in support services. For example, over the past two years, many nonprofits — including TFA, The New Teacher Project (TNTP), NSNO, and NLNS — have built a strong presence in New Orleans to support teacher and principal recruitment and development efforts. In addition, long-established local nonprofits such as the School Leadership Center (SLC) and the Center for Development and Learning (CDL) have broadened their efforts to support teacher and principal capacity building.

However, despite these and other efforts, the magnitude of challenges facing the new system of public schools in New Orleans has left many gaps in such key areas as back-office support, facilities management, teacher recruitment, and student enrichment programs.

“*Leadership is nonexistent, and we remain in a constant crisis mode that is debilitating for our students, our faculty, and our community.*”

❧ SCHOOL OPERATOR
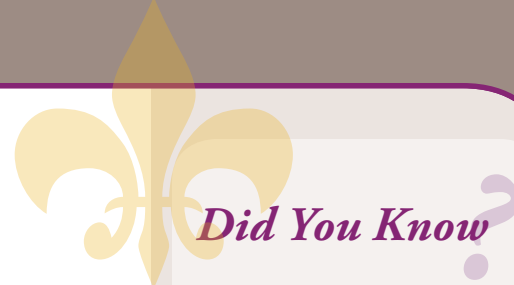
No single vision or unified plan guides long-term transformation of public education

There is no unified, widely endorsed vision or plan to guide the long-term transformation of public education in New Orleans. Because short-term issues often dominate discourse at the school level, there has been little discussion of the city's vision for public education. Until there are enough teachers to fill schools and schools to educate students, it is understandable that long-term planning often takes a backseat to more immediate challenges. However, establishing a common goal for the system is a key step in creating momentum for transformation.

No single entity is responsible for the new system of schools

In the diverse new system of schools, there is no single entity focused exclusively on supporting all of the public schools in New Orleans. In the absence of this single entity, the need for cooperation is great. However, currently there is limited cooperation among operators. Increased autonomy has allowed school operators to focus on improving student development and achievement at their schools. As a result, measures have been implemented that benefit some schools but hurt others, and other measures that would help the entire system of schools have been unable to get off the ground.

One example of the unintended negative consequences of operators focusing on their schools is the RSD teacher-salary policies. The OPSB and some charter schools accuse the RSD of creating a "bidding war" for teachers with its increased salaries and incentive packages. Higher teacher pay and incentives can be a powerful way to attract and retain high-quality teachers for public schools in New Orleans. However, given the current constraints on the supply of teachers, some feel the RSD is trying to "steal" teachers away from other operators by offering incentive packages that some OPSB and charter schools cannot match.[89]

The OPSB schools and charters, on the other hand, have implemented enrollment and admissions policies that have a negative impact on the RSD. Some OPSB schools have selective enrollment policies. All of the OPSB and charter schools maintain low student-teacher ratios and cap enrollments — some by choice, others by law. Although the policies of maintaining low student-teacher ratios and small schools are supported by national best-practice research and should be commended,[90] their implication for the current system in New Orleans is that more students are forced into already overcrowded RSD schools.

In addition, some community members and parents claim that certain OPSB and charter schools are turning away students with special needs, low academic performance, or behavioral problems. Yet there are no systemwide data to confirm or refute these claims. However, records from the Louisiana Department of Education indicate that 7 percent of RSD students are special-needs students whereas only enroll 4 percent of students at OPSB charters are special-needs students.[91] In response, some schools say that they would like to enroll any student but believe they lack the specialized staff and resources to properly educate some special-needs students.

The unintended consequence of these capacity limits, rigorous selection criteria, and imbalanced distribution of students with special needs is that not all students have the same access to high-quality schools. Some students, many of whom may be in the most need of support, are denied entrance into high-achieving public schools — either formally through the application process or informally through discouragement by a school leader. Without a single entity overseeing the entire system of schools, it is challenging to correct this type of behavior since every school has the incentive to maximize its own performance rather than the performance of all students across the system. Although it is important to have incentives for schools to focus on student achievement, there are times when a system-optimizing view is necessary.

Similarly, operators that oversee multiple schools tend to focus support on their own networks. The RSD and OPSB concentrate attention on the schools they operate directly — not their charter schools. Charter networks, such as ACSA and UNO, are very successful at providing back-office, recruiting, and operational support to charter schools within their networks. Some non-networked charters are left with limited support and few opportunities to affiliate with established or new networks.

In addition, key initiatives that could benefit all public schools in New Orleans are not being implemented because they go beyond the capabilities of individual schools. With the exception of a long-term facilities plan, limited collaboration has occurred across the RSD, the OPSB, and charter schools. Issues that would benefit from collaboration — including funding, facilities, social and special education services, parental outreach, and teacher recruitment — have not been adequately addressed due to low and varying levels of systemwide cooperation.

For example, given the high rate of student mobility in New Orleans, the public school system could benefit from a common student information system. Such a database would enable students to transfer schools with limited difficulty and without losing their academic records. Currently, the OPSB, the RSD, and some charters have adopted different student information systems, which create challenges for student who switch between districts. Compounding these challenges is the fact that the RSD student information system has encountered numerous problems. The RSD is currently evaluating alternative systems that could allow it to align with OPSB — a potential step toward collaboration.

Student mental health is another system-level issue that affects all students and would benefit from collaboration across the RSD, the OPSB, and charters. In a recent study by Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center Department of Psychiatry of the Greater New Orleans area, it was determined that 54 percent of displaced and returning children were experiencing symptoms that put them in need of further mental health care.[92] Students, families, and community members all voice the need for improved mental health support for students in the public schools. Many schools report that they

lack sufficient numbers of counselors and mental health professionals, which they believe has led to a growing difficulty engaging students in learning and an increase in disciplinary incidents.[93] Thus, the need for increased mental health services for students spans districts and individual schools. By combining efforts, pooling resources, and attracting high-quality mental professionals, students across all schools could benefit by receiving increased mental health services.

In the new system, information is scattered across schools, operators, and districts, which decreases information transparency. The data that are available, such as for free and reduced-price lunch and special education, could be incomplete due to the thousands of records that were lost in Hurricane Katrina. Additionally, there is no central repository to collect and track information such as student achievement data, current and projected student enrollment, school and district finances, and facilities. Without readily available systemwide data, it is extremely challenging to evaluate and quantify systemwide needs, equitably allocate resources, and most important, ensure every student is provided with a quality education. The transformation of all public schools will be increasingly difficult without accurate and timely information to assess progress to date and plan for the future.

Despite the clear benefits for schools to work together, operators have made little progress in this area. While there have been some efforts by the OPSB and RSD to work together on a range of issues, little visible progress has been made to date. In addition, many charter schools — nursing memories of dysfunctional NOPS leadership — eagerly embraced their autonomy when it was offered and are now wary of relinquishing any of it to forge collaborations.

However, since April 2007, there have been some initial signs of collaboration. Through the creation of "Tiger Teams," State Superintendent Pastorek has illustrated his commitment to unified action and progress.[94] So far, these teams appear to have made some progress in narrowing the teacher gap and creating a plan to upgrade facilities. These efforts, although still very new, appear promising. Over time, this fragmented set of activities may serve as the starting point for a unified plan of long-term transformation.

With systemwide leadership, including a long-term vision for public education in New Orleans and a champion to promote it, New Orleans can make great strides toward increased achievement for all students.

4. THE NEW ORLEANS COMMUNITY SUPPORTS PUBLIC EDUCATION AND HOPES IT WILL IMPROVE.

One of the greatest assets of public education in New Orleans is the renewed interest and support of the community since Hurricane Katrina. The New Orleans community wants an improved system of schools that provides opportunities for all students to achieve their full potential. In addition, the community has high expectations for the new system of schools, and it is optimistic about the prospects for success.

New Orleanians have a new aspiration for public education

The New Orleans community has begun a series of conversations about the public schools that centers on providing high-quality education to all students. Today, the community's top priorities for improving schools are high-quality teachers; clear and ambitious goals for students; and a safe, disciplined public school environment.[95] Other priorities include more decisions made at the school level, small classes, and a strong core curriculum for all students.[96]

New Orleanians also want to see open-access schools in every repopulated neighborhood, so that every student in New Orleans has the option to attend a public school in the neighborhood in which he or she lives. The community believes that this will enable neighborhoods to attract families and rebuild around schools, which can serve as community centers to foster local ties. However, although families *may* select their neighborhood school for their children, many parents also want options that go beyond their neighborhood schools.

In addition, New Orleanians want public schools to focus on both academics and student development, so that all children have the opportunity to reach their full potential. In school and community meetings, students and parents emphasized the importance of re-engaging students in education by providing them with appealing extracurricular activities such as sports or music. Students are eager for opportunities that focused on learning outside of a traditional classroom setting. When students in the public schools in New Orleans were asked if they would participate in a variety of extracurricular activities

Top Community Priorities for Public Schools

Percentage of respondents ranking the issue as one of the top three things that make schools good

Priority	Percentage
High-quality teachers	44%
Clear and high goals for students	40%
Safe and disciplined schools	36%
More decisions made at the school level	29%
Small classes	24%
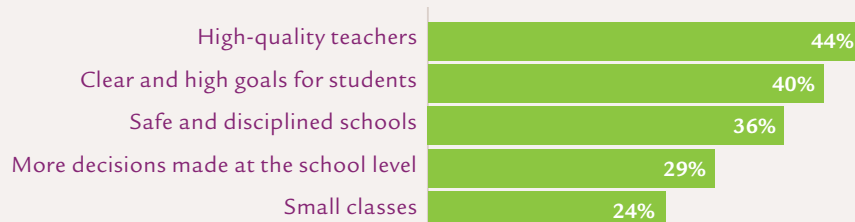
Note: Total responses from teachers, parents, and community members = 1,279.
Source: BCG community surveys.

> *The systems can maintain their styles and their separate missions but still find ways to support each other. … If we could only coordinate their efforts, I believe all students in New Orleans would benefit. It's a cliche, but it is a good one: 'A rising tide lifts all boats.' Let's collaborate to lift the educational opportunities in New Orleans to new heights.*

✣ COMMUNITY MEMBER

if their schools offered them, more than 30 percent said they would participate in band, volunteer organizations, and athletic extracurricular activities, and more than 25 percent said they would participate in art programs or tutoring sessions.[97]

There is increased community support for improving the public education system

The New Orleans community has become much more supportive of, and involved in, efforts to improve the public education system and individual schools. Citywide planning efforts have raised awareness of the importance of public education to the rebuilding process. The Unified New Orleans Plan called education a "vital component in the restoration and recovery of the City of New Orleans, the region, and the entire State."[98] The Education Committee of the Bring New Orleans Back Commission plan states, "The availability of high-quality public education is one of the most important issues facing both the city of New Orleans and the United States as a nation."[99] These efforts have elevated public education as a key priority for New Orleans civic, business, and education leaders.

Local universities also are increasing their involvement in K–12 public education. UNO has chartered its own elementary and high schools — staffing them with recent graduates of its teaching program. Educators from Southern University of New Orleans operate and support Sophie B. Wright Charter School. Tulane University, which has had a standing affiliation with the Lusher Charter School, has recently expanded its support for public education through the establishment of the Scott S. Cowen Institute for Public Education Initiatives. The Cowen Institute is serving as a clearinghouse for education policy, legislation, programming, and research for public schools systemwide. Xavier University is currently planning to provide professional development sessions for local schools focused on math and science, and Our Lady of Holy Cross College is partnering with ACSA to develop 18 school leaders.[100]

Nonprofits also are becoming more involved in public education. Local education nonprofits, such as NSNO, CDL, and SLC, provide support to teachers, principals, and schools. A consortium of nonprofits led by the GNOEF has begun a process to create community schools — school facilities that provide both educational and community services. Civic and faith-based organizations, such as the Urban League, the Committee for a Better New Orleans, and Baptist Community Ministries, also are increasing their involvement in and support of public education.

In addition, New Orleanians and individuals across the country are increasingly volunteering their time and efforts to help improve public education in the city. Many organizations such as AmeriCorps, KaBoom!, City Year and the Common Ground have spent thousands of hours working to enrich the public schools.[101] These volunteers have done everything from tutor underprivileged children before the Louisiana Educational Assessment Program (LEAP) test to repaint school buildings and build playgrounds.

✦ TEACHER

New Orleans community members have taken many leadership roles in charter schools. After Hurricane Katrina, many civic, business, and education leaders along with teachers and parents worked to open local schools, previously under the authority of NOPS, as charters. Currently, all 31 charter schools are led by local nonprofit boards. Charter boards represent a new opportunity for more New Orleans community members and parents to become actively engaged in public education.
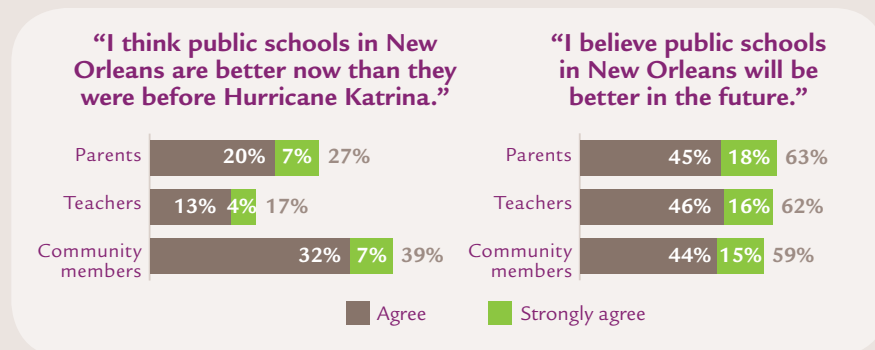
It is a time of high expectations and optimism

Since Hurricane Katrina, parents, teachers, and the community have higher expectations both for students and for the new system of schools. Many community members view Hurricane Katrina as the catalyst that "wiped the slate clean" of a failing public education system. In addition, displaced students enrolled in high-quality school systems around the country, which opened the eyes of many parents and students to the possibilities for improvement back home. Now more than ever, the community is determined to make high-quality education available to all students in New Orleans, and it will no longer tolerate what President George W. Bush described as the "soft bigotry of low expectations."[102]

To ensure that longstanding failures of the system are adequately addressed, media outlets and community organizations have become increasing vocal about the need to remedy continuing inequities and meet the challenges facing the public schools. For example, in April 2007, the RSD was forced to revise its lenient promotion policy when it became the target of harsh public criticism.

Despite all of the challenges the current system of schools faces, the New Orleans community remains optimistic about the future of public education. Although only 25 percent of New Orleanians believe that schools are better now than before Hurricane Katrina, 59 percent believe that schools will be better in the future.[103] Public education has the support and faith of the community. It is time to build on this foundation of hope.

Few Believe Schools Are Better than before Hurricane Katrina, but Most Believe They Will Improve

"I think public schools in New Orleans are better now than they were before Hurricane Katrina."

	Agree	Strongly agree	Total
Parents	20%	7%	27%
Teachers	13%	4%	17%
Community members	32%	7%	39%

"I believe public schools in New Orleans will be better in the future."

	Agree	Strongly agree	Total
Parents	45%	18%	63%
Teachers	46%	16%	62%
Community members	44%	15%	59%

■ Agree   ■ Strongly agree

Note: Total responses from teacher, parent, community member, and former resident surveys = 1,375.
Source: BCG community surveys.

Call to Action

A RANGE OF OBSTACLES AND BARRIERS stand in the way of transforming public education in New Orleans. Some of these challenges — most notably opening new public schools in time for the start of the 2007–08 academic year — must be dealt with immediately. Other challenges are less urgent but could impede long-term transformation if they are not addressed. If New Orleans loses its momentum, the city could lose critical financial and leadership support from national and local foundations and nonprofits, and the desired transformation of its public education system may be significantly delayed.

There is an immediate, critical need to open new public schools for the 2007–08 academic year

The most immediate challenge facing public schools in New Orleans is accommodating the constantly increasing enrollment. Projections released May 2007 estimate that somewhere between 6,000 and 7,000 new students will seek space in the public schools in New Orleans for the 2007–08 academic year.[104] These new projections — down from projections in April of 10,000–12,000 students — forecast a 25 percent increase in total enrollment for next year. If these projections are correct, the total number of public school students for the 2007–08 school year will be roughly 33,000 — 52 percent of the pre-Hurricane Katrina levels.[105]

Between 21 and 24 new schools are expected to open for August 2007 to create adequate space for all incoming students, including nine charter schools that already have been approved.[106] The RSD plans to open the remaining 12 to 15 schools. However, several major hurdles have yet to be overcome that could delay school openings.

Finding physical space for the new schools remains a huge challenge. Until April 2007, the RSD did not have a district manager or department in charge of the massive repair and construction program.[107] This lack of management capacity has slowed rebuilding efforts and could be part of the reason that the RSD has used only 10 percent of its $241 million FEMA allocation.[108] The facilities renovations currently under way have already suffered serious setbacks owing to theft and vandalism, which are delaying the completion date of some buildings.[109] The RSD also has received sharp criticism from the public over the roughly $68 million it plans to spend on installing highly unpopular modular buildings.[110] Like the renovations, modular buildings also have faced scheduling setbacks.

To address these challenges, State Superintendent Paul Pastorek has made the renovation of school facilities in New Orleans a top priority. As of April 2007, he has created a facilities team within the RSD that includes National Guard construction experts and CSRS, a Baton Rouge-based architecture and engineering firm. This team is tasked with preparing school sites for the fall and speeding up the development of a master plan for facilities.

In May, CSRS reported that nine school sites are expected to be ready for use by August, which will make room for approximately 3,790 students. In addition, the RSD will likely gain control of facilities currently being used by the OPSB to create an additional 1,700 spaces. Nine other locations have "moderate probability" of being ready by August 1, and five others have a "low probability" of completion.[111] Even with renewed efforts, the RSD has been unable to ensure there will be adequate school facilities to house the schools slated to open in August 2007.[112]

In addition, with new public schools opening, the current gap between the number of school leaders and faculty in place and the number needed continues to grow larger. Based on current projections, New Orleans public schools will need to attract between 600 and 800 new teachers and 20 new principals for the 2007–08 school year.[113] Additional teachers will be needed if the teachers enrolled in emergency certification programs do not complete these programs before the 2007–08 school year. To fill this gap, New Orleans is relying on partnerships between the RSD, charter schools, and nonprofit organizations. The RSD's internal recruiting efforts are expected to bring in about 100 teachers, Teach for America (TFA) should bring in between 80 and 95

"*ALL schools should be of good quality. EVERY neighborhood should have a school. Our recovery STARTS with our schools.*"

✤ PARENT

teachers, and TeachNOLA/ The New Teacher Project (TNTP) is projected to attract an additional 125 to 165 teachers.[114] Despite these reinvigorated teacher-recruitment efforts, it is estimated that up to 375 teaching positions could remain unfilled at the start of the 2007–08 academic year in the absence of additional efforts.[115]

Finally, the current RSD management team lacks the manpower and expertise to open a sufficient number of public schools in time for the 2007–08 academic year. As the only operator in New Orleans required to provide capacity for every public school student, the RSD has been, and will be, responsible for opening nearly all of the new public schools in the city. However, the RSD lacks the staff to undertake this challenge. The RSD has at least 50 unfilled central staff positions.[116] It also has lost substantial institutional knowledge about and experience in opening schools — only one member of the RSD team that opened schools for the 2006–07 school year is still working at the RSD.

Unless immediate and decisive action is taken, there will not be a sufficient number of public schools open for the 2007–08 academic year.

Once the new public schools are opened, New Orleans must continue to push forward with reforms that will transform the system

A first-rate public education system could serve as a cornerstone for the revitalization of New Orleans. The availability of good public schools will entice families to return to the city and rebuild neighborhoods. A better-educated work force will attract new businesses and industry and empower existing businesses to hire New Orleanians rather than seek talent from outside the city — which, in turn, will encourage talented individuals to remain in New Orleans. The combination of better education and increased job offerings in the area should contribute to a reduction in crime and an increase in the earnings

New Orleans Could Be Short 375 Teachers for Fall 2007

100	Current teacher gap[i]
+ 190	Teacher attrition at existing schools[ii]
+ 490	Teacher gap for new schools[iii]
780	
- 405	Existing contracts and staffing plans[iv]
375	Net estimated gap

Note: All figures are estimates.
[i] Estimation based on February projections.
[ii] *RSD Staffing Action Plan*, February 2007; BCG interviews and analysis.
[iii] Gap based on RSD, OPSB, and charter school enrollment estimates for the 2007–08 school year.
[iv] Existing contracts include Teach for America (90), TeachNOLA (145), RSD's existing teacher recruitment efforts (100), and OPSB's and OPSB charter schools' existing efforts (70).
Source: New Orleans School Staff Recruitment Tiger Team Memo, April 24, 2007; RSD Staffing Action Plan, *February 2007*; BCG interviews and analysis.

potential of residents, creating a higher tax base. A better public education system will develop the next generation of government, business, and civic leaders for New Orleans and the nation.

The children of New Orleans have waited long enough for the opportunity to have a quality education. With dropout rates of 44 percent and dismal academic performance, the public schools, under the control of the local board, have failed New Orleans's students for decades.[117]

Never before has so much attention or so many resources been focused on New Orleans. Locally, the community is engaged and eager for change. New nonprofit organizations — including New Schools for New Orleans — have been created since Hurricane Katrina with the sole purpose of supporting public education in the city. Existing nonprofits, such as Center for Development and Learning and School Leadership Center, have expanded their staff and broadened their service offerings to better serve public schools.[118]

The nation also is watching and standing by New Orleans. On a visit in March 2007, President George W. Bush remarked that even though Hurricane Katrina "did terrible devastation, it gave a great chance for renewal. And one of the areas where renewal is most evident is in the school system of New Orleans."[119] Since Hurricane Katrina, nationally respected nonprofit organizations such as TFA, TNTP, and New Leaders for New Schools have dramatically expanded their presence and support for public schools in the city by giving millions in donations and recruiting hundreds of teachers, principals, and volunteers for the public schools.

Given this impressive base of local and national support, the revitalization of the New Orleans public education system should be poised for success. Yet almost two years into the effort, little systemwide progress is visible. Operational challenges that should have been addressed a year ago — such as security and meal services — still plague the system. The RSD, once again, is ill prepared to open new schools. Even with a solid foundation for transformation in place and pockets of success sprouting up, the public education system has yet to make meaningful systematic progress toward creating a world-class education system.

New Orleans has a limited window of time in which to act and take advantage of the outpouring of public support and national attention. The public is growing tired of waiting for change, and national funders are reluctant to commit resources until progress is visible. There is an urgent need to capitalize on the hope and support of the community before the window of opportunity passes. The foundation for transformation has been laid. But without clear and collaborative forward progress, the foundation could begin to crumble.

> *If you want a Fortune 500 company to come to New Orleans, you have to give our students a Fortune 500 education.*
>
> ✤ TEACHER

Recommendations

The following six recommendations should be implemented to meet the current and long-term goal of providing an excellent education to all public school students in New Orleans. Underlying each recommendation is the belief that improving student achievement and transforming public education require students, families, teachers, principals, and district and community leaders to work together to put students at the center of education.

To do this, public education in New Orleans must:

1. Ensure adequate capacity for the 2007–08 school year.

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

3. Strengthen the Recovery School District (RSD).

4. Attract, develop, and retain high-quality school principals, teachers, and staff for all public schools.

5. Support school- and system-level excellence for all public schools.

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

These six core recommendations represent a starting point to improve education. Although not exhaustive, they establish priorities for the current system of schools focused on implementing national best practices. Given the current leadership, staff capacity, and financial constraints of public education in New Orleans, it will be impossible to execute all of the six core recommendations at once. The following proposals introduce action steps in two phases, with the first set to be implemented before the 2007–08 school year and the second to begin before the 2008–09 school year.

New Orleans has an opportunity to dramatically and fundamentally improve public education for all of its children. Implementing these recommendations is a first step toward accomplishing this goal. The agenda is ambitious. Yet through the support and collaboration of New Orleans families, teachers, and school and community leaders, it can and should be done.

1. ENSURE ADEQUATE CAPACITY FOR THE 2007–08 SCHOOL YEAR.

Rationale for action

Every student who wants to attend a public school in New Orleans in September 2007 deserves a seat in a safe and disciplined school with high-quality teachers, school support staff to assist in student development, and the necessary books and supplies to learn. This should be the top priority for all schools, but particularly for the RSD, which is responsible for opening the vast majority of new schools.

As of May 2007, State Superintendent Pastorek publicly announced that there may not be enough schools or classrooms for all returning students. In addition, nearly 600 teachers must be recruited by September to meet the anticipated demand. Finally, due to the bureaucratic state procurement process, it is unclear whether new schools will have adequate textbooks and supplies by September.

School leaders have launched initial efforts to address these challenges. Starting in April 2007, Superintendent Pastorek's Tiger Teams have made promising steps in recruiting teachers and renovating facilities. In addition, new RSD Superintendent Paul Vallas already has announced that one of his top priorities will be getting facilities up to standard and ready to open. These recent developments represent a solid starting point and should be supported and expanded.

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.
- ✤ Potential individuals for this team include:
    - Members of the teacher recruitment and facilities Tiger Teams;
    - Senior staff from the RSD and Louisiana Department of Education (LDE) in the areas of finance, teacher and staff recruitment, facilities, and procurement; and
    - Leadership and staff of local nonprofit organizations focused on supporting public education
- ✤ Use the updated demographic forecast to evaluate the number of students returning, which will drive the number of schools, teachers, support staff, and supplies needed.

Develop an aggressive and innovative recruiting strategy to attract new principals, teachers, and support staff to all public schools.
- ✤ Finalize and implement efforts to create a competitive recruiting package that could include relocation allowances, housing assistance, and signing bonuses.
- ✤ Evaluate alternative and innovative programs to attract teachers, such as international teaching programs, university programs for recent alumni, and two-year exchange programs with districts across the state and nation.
- ✤ Expand and deepen relationships with key local and national nonprofits dedicated to supplying New Orleans with principals, teachers, and staff.

Develop an aggressive and innovative retention strategy to retain high-quality principals, teachers, and support staff at all public schools.

❦ Continue efforts to create competitive retention packages for high-quality school employees that could include items such as housing assistance, mental health support services, and retention bonuses.

❦ Ensure current employees are provided with retention incentives commensurate with their commitment and track record of improving student achievement.

Ensure adequate capacity is available by evaluating innovative options for streamlining the procurement of adequate facilities, which could include:

❦ Constructing modular school buildings;
❦ Converting commercial space into schools; and
❦ Renting space from parochial or private schools.

Evaluate innovative alternatives to reduce the number of schools the RSD needs to open for the 2007–08 school year, which could include:

❦ Asking the Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) to evaluate increasing enrollment caps for successful New Orleans charter schools that have expressed an interest in serving more students and can maintain a quality educational experience for all students they serve.

❦ Soliciting additional high-quality national charter schools or principals to open schools in New Orleans.

Benefits to all students

Public education in New Orleans cannot improve unless there is adequate space for every student to enroll in school. Turning away a single student is unacceptable. Improvements in student achievement and development should be for all students, not just a subset. Ensuring that every student can enroll in public school is a first and necessary step toward providing every student with a high-quality educational experience.

2. EQUIP AND EMPOWER ALL FAMILIES TO CHOOSE THE BEST PUBLIC SCHOOLS FOR THEIR CHILDREN FROM A RANGE OF HIGH-QUALITY SCHOOL OPTIONS.

Rationale for action

The creation of the RSD and a critical mass of charter schools established the foundation for public school choice in New Orleans. Over time, the new system will enable students and their families to choose the schools that will best fit their specific academic and developmental needs. In theory, as students flow to high-performing schools, the strongest schools will succeed and the lowest-performing schools will either be forced to improve or shut down — creating better educational options for all students. However, the system is currently constrained by a lack of capacity, inequities in access and funding, and insufficient information to help students and families make good choices.

Initial efforts by a Tiger Team to evaluate the feasibility of a centralized registration process, as well as an effort led by the Urban League to create a parent resource center, are promising steps toward ensuring that all students have equitable access to high-quality public schools. These efforts represent a starting point to improve public school choice for all students and families in New Orleans.

Recommendations to be implemented before the 2007–08 school year

Provide information to families and students about the public schools, which could include:
❧ Launching a multimedia communications campaign with TV, radio, and print messaging.
❧ Creating "family and student handbooks" that:
  • Give families and students an overview of the new system of schools, school choice, and information on how to select a school;
  • Detail students' rights and how to report concerns (for example, safety, discipline, and special education); and
  • Provide an overview of each public school in New Orleans.
❧ Partnering with public schools, libraries, local nonprofits, and faith-based organizations to distribute information.

Create resource centers for parents.
❧ Open one or more resource centers in locations around the city that parents can telephone or visit to get information such as a school handbook or school directory about all public schools in New Orleans.
❧ Help parents and families complete public school applications for their children.

Recommendations to begin implementing before the 2008–09 school year

Evaluate the creation of registration centers and a unified registration process.
Currently, not all students have access to all schools. This lack of equitable access to public schools is a key challenge in the current system. One solution would be to create centralized registration centers and/or a centralized registration process. New Orleans should evaluate the feasibility of having central registration centers located across the city. Parents could telephone or visit these centers to register and enroll their children in any public school. The centers could track and publish information on public schools, operators, and districts (for example, school capacity and current enrollment, enrollment policies, academic performance, and financial information). To assist in the enrollment process, centers could be staffed by impartial "enrollment counselors," who would help parents understand school options and assist them in the application process.

A centralized registration process could facilitate students' enrollment in the schools of their choice. The process could include a common calendar for enrollment (e.g., there should be only two or three deadlines for applications throughout the year) that all public schools must use. In addition, the centralized registration process could use a common enrollment algorithm, which could equitably match students and schools based on common guidelines, student preferences, and school requirements.

Create a strong performance-management system for all public schools.
With the Louisiana Accountability Standards as a base, the city should establish a performance-management system for all public schools in New Orleans to make school-, operator-, and district-level student achievement and development information transparent.

The performance-management system could include a variety of components. For example, a school score card could provide transparency into schools' performance and allow parents to evaluate school options in New Orleans based on a set of common metrics, such as student academic performance, enrollment policies, academic offerings, student development index, and parental satisfaction. School score cards could be made available to families through multiple channels, including online, at schools, and at registration centers.

A performance-management system also could include a clear set of actions to support and improve underperforming schools. Initial actions should focus on improving school leadership and teaching. Such actions could include additional capacity building opportunities for leadership and teachers or additional support from district leaders. If these actions do not improve a school's academic performance, New Orleans should evaluate consequences, such as removal of leadership, the loss of autonomy, or closure.

Given the high concentration of charter schools in New Orleans and their unique contractual structure, the performance-management system should include additional oversight- and compliance-monitoring mechanisms for them. Across the nation, states, districts, and other chartering authorities have taken multiple approaches to the oversight function. Some have centralized or outsourced compliance monitoring. One option for New Orleans could be to create an entity at the state level to perform compliance and monitoring functions for all charter schools. Creating a central entity would allow all charters to be measured by a consistent rubric and help create an effective evaluation process. This entity would not make decisions regarding charter authorization, reauthorization, or closure, but instead it could assist in the charter review process and provide data and recommendations to the school's authorizer (the RSD, Orleans Parish School Board [OPSB], or BESE). The authorizer could then take action, as needed, at the local level.

Ensure capital and ongoing funds adequately and equitably follow students.
The city needs a long-term funding plan for the New Orleans system of schools that addresses both operating and capital costs. The plan will help ensure that once the schools are no longer under state control, local-school entities will have adequate funds to cover the expenditures of the entire school system without incurring a deficit. Additionally, the plan could develop an equitable process to pay down the OPSB's legacy debt.

National best-practice research supports the equitable and timely distribution of funds so that all public schools have the same opportunity to meet the needs of their unique student populations. Research also supports the creation of an equitable weighted-funding formula to ensure funds follow individual students, recognizing that the neediest students need more resources to meet established standards. Thus, students with special education needs, a history of academic underperformance, or those that are deemed "at risk" would receive a higher funding allocation. Additionally, the funding model should be aligned with school districts' educational philosophies. For instance, if a school district wanted to create equity of access across all schools, the funding formula could create incentives for schools with open-enrollment policies.

Given the challenges that charters have experienced receiving funds in a timely and equitable manner, the school system should evaluate whether individual charter schools or charter school networks could become their own Local Education Agency (LEA). Doing so would decrease the level of bureaucracy within the current system so that charters would not need to rely on their authorizer to be their financial intermediary.

Last, given the history of financial mismanagement in New Orleans, the LDE, RSD, and OPSB should work to provide transparency in their finances. With so many sources and types of funds flowing into the public schools, providing financial transparency at the district and school levels is a critical step to improving funding

equity. Such transparency could be accomplished through an annual financial report on the public schools in New Orleans describing the federal, state, local, and private funds that each school and district receives.

Ensure that all students have a choice of public schools so that their academic and developmental needs can be met.

Every repopulated neighborhood in New Orleans should have a high-quality, open-access public school so that all families have the option to send their children to a school in their community. In addition, alternative school options should be available to students. One solution would be to recruit proven, high-quality vocational and alternative school providers to charter or open schools in New Orleans; these would offer students with nontraditional academic needs an opportunity to learn and develop.

Reduce formal and informal barriers to access to all public schools.

Decreasing enrollment barriers to all public schools is a key part of ensuring equity of access for all students. Potential solutions would be to cap the number of selective enrollment schools or limit the percentage of schools with selective enrollment policies in New Orleans. Another option would be to provide all students with alternative transportation, such as city bus passes, so that students are not constrained by geography when selecting a public school.

Nationally, many states and districts have developed centralized student-records databases to allow students to seamlessly move between schools. A centralized student-records database would ensure that students do not lose credits and academic records when they change schools, making it easier for students to transfer if their current school does not meet their academic or developmental needs. This type of database also can help ensure that no student gets lost in the system. This kind of tracking is extremely important in a district such as New Orleans because of the high rate of student mobility.

Actively reassess whether New Orleans has an appropriate, diverse mix of high-quality public schools.

The city's multi-operator system offers an opportunity for innovation and diversity among public schools. One approach would be to periodically reassess the mix of public schools, taking into consideration the current needs and wishes of the diverse New Orleans student population. The range of public school options could include schools focused on the fine arts or technology and science, as well as alternative or vocational schools. If a gap is identified, New Orleans could attract a high-quality school operator to open one or more schools in the city. Additionally, school operators in New Orleans with proven track records could be encouraged to serve more students by increasing their enrollment, expanding classes or grade offerings, or adding schools or facilities.

Benefits to all students

Offering high-quality academic options will better serve all students by providing them with a range of specialized academic experiences from which to choose. If all New Orleans families are given accurate school descriptions and performance information and are equipped with the tools needed to enroll their children in any public school in the city, many more students will be able to attend the school that will best meet their academic, social, and developmental needs. A leveled playing field will provide students with fewer resources — those who were previously confined to the worst schools in the city — greater access to the best schools in New Orleans.

3. STRENGTHEN THE RECOVERY SCHOOL DISTRICT.

Rationale for action

As the largest operator in New Orleans and the operator charged with opening the majority of new schools, the RSD will be responsible for leading many transformation efforts. It is currently tasked with opening from 12 to 15 new schools by fall 2007 — a challenging mission. During the 2006–07 school year, the RSD struggled to serve its students, creating overcrowded classrooms and schools, delays in operational assistance, and a persistent teacher gap. If the RSD is not immediately strengthened, the situation will be even worse for the 2007–08 school year.

The poor performance of the RSD to date has fueled critics of the state's takeover of the local public schools. Nevertheless, the fate of all public schools in New Orleans is linked to the success of the RSD. For public education in New Orleans to improve, the RSD must improve. Supporting and strengthening the RSD will expedite the return of successful public schools to local control and, more important, provide all public school students the opportunity for a high-quality education.

State Superintendent Pastorek's success in attracting and hiring Paul Vallas to lead the RSD may represent a turning point. With his proven track record in large urban education systems, such as Philadelphia and Chicago, Superintendent Vallas brings with him a wealth of knowledge and experience. Although he does not officially take over the RSD until July, his initial efforts — such as focusing on facilities, creating a summer school program, and actively engaging the community in a dialogue on public education — represent critical steps toward improving and strengthening the district.

Recommendations to be implemented before the 2007–08 school year

Build out leadership and operational capacity at the RSD.
- Immediately hire a proven and recognized senior management team for the RSD with a record of accomplishment in education and business transformation (for example, a COO, CFO, human resources director, and facilities director).
- Immediately expand senior and mid-level operational expertise by hiring full-time staff, transferring LDE employees to the RSD on a temporary basis, contracting individuals on a temporary basis, and/or embracing other innovative staffing options.

Develop a 100-day turnaround and stabilization plan for the RSD with input from the community and collaboration with other operators.
- Use this assessment as an initial starting point for the 100-day plan.
- Ensure the plan is robust and well vetted, which could include:
  - Engaging RSD parents, students, teachers, and principals in the planning process, and
  - Developing the plan in collaboration with the OPSB, charter schools, and local civic and nonprofit organizations.
- Ensure the plan is focused on critical issues such as:
  - Preparing adequate public school capacity for the 2007–08 school year;
  - Realigning the central office structure to transform the RSD into a school-focused district;
  - Streamlining operations and pushing decisionmaking authority and accountability down to schools, while building the capacity of school principals; and
  - Building instructional and leadership capacity.

Evaluate the effectiveness of the special education inclusion model and develop an improvement plan, which could include:

❧ Commissioning a team of special education experts to evaluate the effectiveness of the current special education inclusion model.

❧ Ensuring that all students with special needs are properly identified and have up-to-date individual education plans.

❧ Determining — on a district and school-by-school basis — what additional staff, resources, and training are required to effectively serve students with special needs through the inclusion model.

❧ Creating a plan to educate and train principals, teachers, and staff to best serve students with special education and developmental needs, which could include:

  • Designing comprehensive training programs to provide teachers and staff with the tools and techniques necessary to effectively implement special education, and

  • Providing opportunities for teachers who have mastered special education instruction to coach and mentor teachers unfamiliar with or unskilled in serving this student population.

❧ Creating an independent authority to track, investigate, and resolve parental, student, and teacher grievances and concerns about special education.

Evaluate the state of students' mental health, discipline, and safety policies and develop an improvement plan, which could include:

❧ Commissioning a team of student-health experts to evaluate the implementation and effectiveness of the RSD's policies on student behavior, discipline, and safety.

❧ Providing RSD schools with additional emotional- and mental-support counselors, which could include:

  • Creating a team of counselors to rotate through RSD schools on a periodic basis, and

  • Decreasing the student- counselor ratio at all RSD schools (initially beginning at the high school level).

❧ Revising the RSD's policies on behavior, discipline, and safety and creating a plan that could include:

  • Determining the appropriate level and staffing for security;

  • Codifying and publicizing student behavior policies to all students, families, principals, teachers, and staff;

  • Providing training to all RSD principals, teachers, and staff on positive behavior support techniques and disciplinary policies and procedures; and

  • Strengthening the enforcement of student behavior policies by increasing the number of district staff who support these activities.

Recommendations to begin implementing before the 2008–09 school year

Evaluate creating aligned school networks within the RSD that can share services and develop productive learning communities.

National best-practice research supports the creation of school networks or "learning communities." The RSD should evaluate whether it can group its schools into networks to promote the collective sharing of experiences and resources. Through these networks, public schools could learn from and provide support for one another, which will create better schools.

Create new channels to engage families at the district and school levels.

The RSD should evaluate ways to increase family engagement in public education. Activities could include creating parent/family support organizations at each RSD school. At the district level, the RSD could create a family advisory council that selects representatives from school-level parent and family support groups at each RSD school. This council could provide input and feedback to senior RSD leadership on a monthly basis. In addition to these formal channels, the RSD leadership should focus on creating a family-friendly environment at both the RSD district office and the schools. Parents and family members should be actively engaged and welcomed at schools, as they are a critical part of a child's educational experience. Putting children at the center means ensuring that educators, families, and district leaders communicate to ensure that each student is receiving a high-quality educational and developmental experience.

Create a teacher and principal evaluation system.

High-quality classroom and school leadership is essential to improve student achievement. The RSD could create a system that evaluates teacher and principal performance by measuring their impact on student achievement. Those teachers and principals with high performance would be actively retained and provided with increased autonomy. Those teachers and principals who perform poorly would first be given an opportunity to improve through access to appropriate professional development, mentoring, or other capacity building options. If performance does not improve, low-performing individuals should not be retained.

Clarify the criteria and process for the return of RSD schools to local control.

Although the return of RSD schools to local control cannot occur for another three years, BESE should begin creating the criteria and process for determining when, how, and to whom RSD-operated schools are transferred. Since the return of the schools affects many stakeholders, it is essential that families, students, and community members be provided with an opportunity to voice their opinions and concerns about the criteria and process.

Criteria to consider when evaluating the return of the schools to local control could include the return's impact on student achievement and development and on the system's long-term transformation. Other issues to consider are how the RSD can ensure that the local accepting entity has adequate capacity to manage the schools and how to stage the return of schools (for example, whether schools are returned to local control in stages or all at once). Once the criteria and process are determined, they should be clearly communicated to the community and all public school stakeholders. The criteria and process for returning the schools should be finalized no later than November 2009 — one year prior to the initial five-year operating period.

Benefits to all students

Strengthening the RSD will directly impact more than 60 percent of the public school students in New Orleans. If the RSD can better support its district and charter schools, school leaders will be able to focus more attention on improving student achievement and development — creating enhanced educational experiences and choices for their 16,300 students.

4. ATTRACT, DEVELOP, AND RETAIN HIGH-QUALITY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS, TEACHERS, AND STAFF FOR ALL PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

Rationale for action

Following Hurricane Katrina, the RSD and OPSB showed signs of a strong commitment to teacher quality and professional development. Both districts hosted numerous professional development sessions for teachers, and the RSD introduced a minimum-skills test that all teacher applicants had to pass to be considered for a teaching position in New Orleans. In addition, since no schools are bound by collective bargaining agreements, public schools are allowed to hire, train, promote, and fire teachers based on teacher performance and school needs.

However, a significant teacher gap persists and is projected to increase as more public schools are opened in New Orleans for the 2007–08 school year. This enduring teacher gap limits hiring flexibility. It also negatively affects the quality of education because the inflow of high-quality teachers has not kept pace with the increases in student enrollment, causing class size at some schools to swell.

Initial efforts to attract new teachers by providing substantial incentives are encouraging. However, additional action must be taken to ensure that there are enough high-quality teachers, principals, and support staff for all New Orleans public schools — both now and in the future. In addition, the system must focus on building the capacity of current principals and teachers and retaining high-quality educators. High-quality classroom instruction will help ensure that students have the best learning environment possible.

Recommendations to be implemented before the 2007–08 school year

Develop a pipeline to attract high-quality principals.
- Design an aggressive and innovative recruiting strategy to attract principals to New Orleans, which could include compensation, relocation, housing assistance, and retention and performance bonuses.
- Expand and accelerate existing partnerships with organizations such as New Leaders for New Schools to ensure high-quality principals are available for the 2007–08 school year and beyond.
- Secure new partnerships with nonprofits to attract principals and increase their capacity once in office (for example, The Broad Foundation and the KIPP School Leadership Program).

Develop a pipeline to attract and build the capabilities of high-quality teachers.
- Finalize an aggressive and innovative recruiting strategy to attract teachers to New Orleans, which could include compensation, relocation, housing assistance, and retention and performance bonuses.
- Equip teachers with the skills and information to succeed in public schools, which could include:
  - Providing all teachers new to New Orleans with the opportunity to attend a comprehensive induction program that provides an overview of the public schools, and
  - Creating professional development opportunities for teachers focused on skills such as understanding and tracking student achievement, inclusion, special education, differentiated instruction, student discipline, and positive behavior support.
- Expand existing partnerships and secure new partnerships with universities and nonprofits to add teacher capacity (for example, with Teach for America [TFA], The New Teacher Project [TNTP], transition-to-teach programs, international teacher programs, and the Center for Development and Learning [CDL]).

Develop a program to retain high-quality teachers.
- ✤ Finalize an aggressive and innovative retention strategy to keep high-quality teachers in New Orleans, which could include retention and performance bonuses.
- ✤ Create clear career pathways and options for teachers, such as the Louisiana Distinguished Educator Program, department chairs, or school leadership programs.

Develop a pipeline to attract high-quality counselors, nurses, and other support staff.
- ✤ Develop an aggressive and innovative recruiting strategy to attract high-quality counselors, nurses, and support staff to New Orleans, which could include compensation, relocation, housing assistance, and retention and performance bonuses.

Recommendations to begin implementing before the 2008–09 school year

Build capacity of principals.
With the increase in school-level autonomy following Hurricane Katrina, strong school-level leadership is critical for the success of public schools in New Orleans. Building the capabilities of principals and assistant principals has been a proven instrument in improving classroom instruction. One approach would be to implement a mentorship program in which new principals are paired with "master principals" for on-the-job, one-on-one training. The district would hire school leaders of distinction from around the nation, who would focus on mentoring new and current school leaders. Master principals would be matched with 5 to 10 new principals for a period of two to three years. During this time, master principals would spend most of their time in the public schools, providing on-the-ground support. Extensive efforts should be made to find and attract the best master principals both from across the state of Louisiana and from around the country, and sufficient financial incentives and housing assistance should be provided to attract them to New Orleans.

Another option would be to match school leaders with accomplished business and civic leaders who would serve as mentors over a two-year period. School leaders and mentors would meet on a regular basis to discuss challenges facing their schools and ways to address them. Additionally, mentors and school leaders would create strategic plans for their schools, focused on improving student achievement.

Build the capabilities of teachers.
Ensuring a sufficient number of high-quality teachers for New Orleans public schools is critical — both in the short and long terms. After the immediate push to recruit teachers for the 2007–08 school year, districts should begin planning for the future. One approach would be to strengthen relationships with organizations that provide schools with high-quality teachers, such as TFA, TNTP, universities with colleges of education, and other pipeline organizations.

To ensure schools will be filled with high-quality teachers, more capacity building opportunities should be created. The school system should expand professional development opportunities for teachers in key areas such as literacy, numeracy, special education, and student well-being. Approaches could include partnering with local universities, bringing in nationally and locally recognized professional development experts, and partnering with local nonprofit organizations. New Orleans also could create a teaching and learning center, which would act as a clearinghouse, coordinator, provider, and evaluator of professional development services. This center could serve all public schools and provide professional development on topics directly linked to increasing learning and achievement for all students.

Ensure uncertified teachers have access to quality certification programs.
Under No Child Left Behind, teachers are required to be "highly qualified." To ensure that New Orleans teachers meet this standard, uncertified teachers should become certified and licensed. Districts, operators, and nonprofits should work together to increase access to high-quality certification programs.

Build the capabilities of and continue to expand the pipeline of all support staff.
Schools cannot run without adequate numbers of counselors, nurses, secretaries, and other support staff. One approach to attracting school support staff would be to expand and build partnerships with local universities that offer nursing and counseling programs. Additionally, schools could build or expand partnerships with national and local nonprofits and programs focused on student mental and physical health, such as Project Fleur-de-lis, the Louisiana Public Health Institute, or AmeriCares.

Benefits to all students

The teacher and school support staff gap within New Orleans has significantly contributed to a deteriorated learning environment in some schools. It also has led to the widespread community perception that the public schools are still a "tiered" system. Increasing the quality and pool of teacher and school support staff would make a tremendous difference in improving classroom learning and student development. Providing RSD, OPSB, and charter school teachers and principals with high-quality capacity building opportunities will strengthen classroom instruction citywide and offer all students an improved educational experience.

5. SUPPORT SCHOOL- AND SYSTEM-LEVEL EXCELLENCE FOR ALL PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

Rationale for action

Currently, decisionmaking authority and responsibility for public education in New Orleans are spread across the OPSB, the RSD, and 21 charter school operators. The multi-operator system has removed many of the bureaucratic processes and structures that have long hindered the system, and it has empowered many school leaders to make decisions on how to best educate their students. The new structure has the potential to serve those students most in need by fostering innovation and allowing families to choose the best schools for their children from a range of high-quality school options.

However, the multi-operator system also has introduced several new challenges to public education in New Orleans. In the decentralized system, individual school operators make decisions and focus on initiatives to provide the highest-quality education for their students. This can become a problem when decisions that are best for an individual school are at odds with what is best for the entire system. In addition, with operators focusing all of their efforts on their schools, there is little capacity or incentive to address systemwide issues. Some of the most critical initiatives that would support the transformation of all public schools — such as eliminating obstacles to attracting talent to and retaining talent in New Orleans, coordinating requests for support from national organizations, optimizing services for children with the highest academic and developmental needs, and improving school facilities — are currently not being sufficiently addressed.

The decentralized nature of the system of schools also creates confusion for many members of the community. In the new system of schools, community members do not have a single group or channel to which they can provide their views on or show their support for public education. As a result, many key stakeholders in public education — such as parents, teachers, and students — feel they have no voice in the decisions being made about public education in New Orleans.
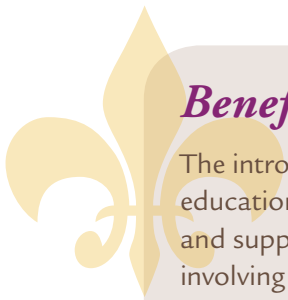
Without an entity to engage the community in an ongoing dialogue on public education and to support systemwide initiatives to improve all public schools, achieving transformation will be more challenging. Therefore, an entity focused exclusively on supporting the transformation of a multi-operator system should be created. This entity should serve as a community and systemwide convener, facilitator, and supporter. It also should be created to ensure that additional bureaucratic processes are not created that would hinder the efficient and successful operations of individual schools or districts.

Given the current state of public schools in New Orleans, such a group could take many shapes. As the city's public education system continues to evolve, the composition and structure of this entity may change. Yet creating a group focused on systemwide issues, which is credible to both the community and those in school leadership, is a critical step to raising student achievement for *all* public school students in *all* public schools in New Orleans.

Recommendations to be implemented before the 2007–08 school year

Create a group focused exclusively on supporting initiatives that benefit all public schools in New Orleans.

❦ Create an independent, action-focused entity to support efforts that will improve all public schools — the RSD, the OPSB, and charter schools — in New Orleans.

❦ Outline a set of primary activities for this entity, which could include:
  • Catalyzing action to improve public education by identifying solutions and facilitating their implementation for the most critical and immediate needs;
  • Supporting initiatives that transcend the scope or capabilities of individual school operators;
  • Securing and marshaling funding from private sources — for example, nonprofit organizations and/or private foundations — to support high-priority initiatives;
  • Providing transparency into system, district, and school funding, operators, and policies;
  • Facilitating collaboration among school operators;
  • Building relationships with local and national nongovernmental organizations, foundations, and education nonprofits to funnel much-needed resources to the public schools;
  • Facilitating an ongoing community engagement and communications process that can serve as an input to transformation and can inform the New Orleans community on public education issues; and
  • Partnering with local businesses and civic organizations to sponsor key education initiatives.

❦ Build the entity's membership around a small group of community and/or business leaders who have:
  • A strong desire to improve public education for *all* New Orleans students;
  • A strong commitment to ethics and a proven history of integrity;
  • A demonstrated record of professional accomplishment; and
  • The respect and regard of the New Orleans community, New Orleans school operators, and the state superintendent of education.

❦ Create a small staff to adequately support the established entity.

❦ Secure funding from private sources.

Benefits to all students

The introduction of a multi-operator system can be a powerful force to transform public education in New Orleans. However, without an entity focused on engaging the community and supporting systemwide initiatives, the new system is not fulfilling its potential. By actively involving and listening to families, students, and teachers, district and school leaders will have a clearer sense of the key initiatives required to improve the schools. They will then be able to support key systemwide activities that will help raise the collective bar for public education. Over time, the system will be able to achieve its full potential to serve all students in all classrooms equitably and excellently.

6. CREATE AND ENDORSE A SHORT-TERM ACTION PLAN AND A LONG-TERM STRATEGIC PLAN FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION.

Rationale for action

Although education leaders, teachers, parents, and the New Orleans community want to build a high-quality public education system that will serve all students in their city, there is no unified vision for the school system. There also is no short-term or long-term plan and consensus on how this goal can be achieved. Given the limited resources and capacity of education leaders, it is not possible for all activities necessary for transformation to be initiated immediately. An endorsed plan that prioritizes the critical steps and clearly delineates responsibility for transformation will help keep the reforms on track for the long term.

Recommendation to be implemented before the 2007–08 school year

Adopt and communicate a short-term action plan for system transformation.
* Use the "Recommendations to be implemented before the 2007–08 school year" from *The State of Public Education in New Orleans* as the basis for a short-term action plan for public education in New Orleans.
* Ensure the plan clearly prioritizes activities and identifies key owners who are accountable for each initiative.
* Communicate the short-term action plan through partnerships with local city officials, nonprofits, and faith-based organizations.

Recommendation to begin implementing before the 2008–09 school year

Adopt and communicate a unified vision and long-term strategic plan for public education.
One of the key concerns of senior education leaders, locally and nationally, is the lack of a unified vision and long-term plan for public schools in New Orleans. Change management and transformation research identifies a vision as a critical element for any change process.

During the past 20 months, various citywide and community-focused planning efforts have been completed. Plans such as the *Unified New Orleans Plan*, *Bring New Orleans Back Plan on Education*, and *The State of Public Education in New Orleans* could provide a base of information to begin a vision and strategic planning process. In addition, this plan should use the building blocks for transformation currently in place, such as school autonomy, accountability, capacity building, and parental choice.

All of the aforementioned plans included an extensive community engagement process. The vision and long-term planning process also should include widespread engagement from families, students, teachers, and the community.

The long-term plan should be endorsed by local and state education leaders. In addition, endorsement could be solicited from city officials, nonprofits, and faith-based organizations to help mobilize the community to support the transformation of public education.

Benefits to all students

Creating a clear vision and plan for public education will help galvanize local and national support for public schools in New Orleans. All students will benefit from a renewed commitment to improving public education. The more attention and resources that are focused on transforming public education, the greater likelihood that real change will occur so that every student in every classroom will have the opportunity to succeed.

Conclusion

FOR DECADES, the New Orleans public schools, attended primarily by students from low-income families, have ranked among the poorest and lowest performing in the country, whereas the city's elite private schools increasingly became the destination for students from middle- and high-income families. It has long been the dream of many New Orleanians that one day all students, regardless of their income, race, or school, will receive an education that positions them for success.

When the waters subsided from Hurricane Katrina, the promise of a new and dramatically improved public school system for New Orleans captured the imagination of people across the nation and around the world. In September 2005, this vision became a beacon of hope for the nation. It was an opportunity, unlike any known before, to radically transform an urban public school system into a world-class system of schools. This innovative system would provide schools with autonomy and accountability, and it would give parents, who felt they had lost their voice in public education, the opportunity to choose the best schools for their children.

With generous federal and private funding, and an influx of educational talent, the renewal of the New Orleans public school system initially appeared poised for success. Although pockets of promise exist and the foundation for transformation has begun to be laid, the city has made few systematic strides toward building a world-class system of schools. Unless immediate and dramatic action is taken to revitalize transformation efforts, one of the greatest educational opportunities in the past century, and one of the strongest rays of hope for urban education across the nation, will fade. Yet if New Orleans has the perseverance and the will to rally around and support high-quality education for all students, it can create a better future for students in New Orleans, in Louisiana, and across the nation.

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Public Schools in New Orleans

	School	Grades Served	Enroll-ment	Percentage African American	Percentage free/ reduced lunch eligible	Percentage disabled	Percentage gifted/ talented
RSD	A.P. Tureaud	K–5	252	99	75	5	0
	Albert Wicker	K–8	462	99	72	9	3
	Benjamin Banneker	PK–8	394	97	83	12	5
	Cohen	9	-	-	-	-	-
	Dr. Charles R. Drew	PK–8	545	98	73	6	0
	Fredrick A. Douglass	9–12	790	99	55	5	0
	James W. Johnson	PK–8	444	99	77	8	0
	John Dibert	PK–8	376	98	77	7	0
	John McDonogh	9–12	832	100	64	9	0
	Joseph A. Craig	PK–8	565	99	78	7	2
	Joseph S. Clark	9–12	470	99	50	10	3
	Laurel	PK–8	531	98	72	10	0
	Live Oak	PK–8	394	95	77	7	1
	McDonogh #42	PK–8	82	99	39	-	-
	Murray Henderson	PK–8	303	97	75	7	3
	Paul B. Habans	PK–8	342	94	70	3	0
	Rabouin	9–12	709	97	65	5	0
	Rosenwald	6–8	-	-	-	-	-
	Sarah T. Reed Elementary	PK–8	452	98	77	6	5
	Sarah T. Reed Senior High	9–12	520	87	51	8	2
	Schwarz Alternative School	6–12	54	98	67	-	-
	Sylvanie Williams	PK–8	-	-	-	-	-
RSD charters	Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.	PK–8	429	99	100	2	0
	Dwight D. Eisenhower	K–8	559	85	87	5	0
	Harriet Tubman	PK–8	500	96	85	7	0
	James M. Singleton	PK–8	703	99	100	4	0
	KIPP Believe	5	88	100	70	10	6
	Lafayette Academy	K–7	1,006	94	98	5	3
	Martin Behrman	PK–8	571	98	90	7	0
	McDonogh #15/KIPP	PK–8	409	92	93	10	3
	McDonogh #28 City Park	K–8	257	99	78	3	0
	McDonogh #32	K–8	311	99	95	5	0
	Medard Nelson	PK–8	248	98	94	9	0
	New Orleans Free School	K–8	223	96	72	10	0
	O. Perry Walker	9–12	863	99	80	10	0
	P. A. Capdau	PK–9	424	99	88	8	0
	Samuel J. Green	K–8	348	98	99	7	1
	Sophie B. Wright	K–8	371	95	91	7	1
	William J. Fischer	PK–8	476	99	91	7	0

(continued)

	School	Grades Served	Enroll-ment	Percentage African American	Percentage free/ reduced lunch eligible	Percentage disabled	Percentage gifted/ talented
OPSB	Benjamin Franklin Elementary	PK–6	480	96	88	11	20
	Eleanor McMain	7–12	696	83	96	6	16
	Mary Bethune	PK–8	299	92	89	11	1
	McDonogh #35	7–12	982	99	54	6	8
	Orleans Parish PM School	7–12	158	98	59	9	1
OPSB charters	Alice Harte	K–8	618	83	79	9	15
	Audubon	PK–8	565	52	56	2	35
	Benjamin Franklin High	9–12	616	24	46	1	70
	Edna Karr	9–12	766	92	78	3	14
	Edward Hynes	PK–8	337	74	77	6	27
	Einstein	K–8	473	55	83	3	5
	Lake Forest	K–7	338	94	96	1	13
	Lusher	K–11	1,267	40	54	3	37
	N.O. Science and Mathematics	9–12	279	83	58	6	1
	Priestley School of Architecture	9	72	96	65	11	3
	Robert Russa Moton	K–6	207	99	68	3	2
	Warren Easton	9–12	782	96	92	4	3
BESE charters	International School	K–6	334	46	44	-	-
	Milestone SABIS	K–8	383	98	93	-	-

Note: Data are based on the most accurate information available at the time of the report. However, they are subject to change as student records continue to be updated.
Source: LDE; RSD Web site; OPSB Web site.

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Pontilly Association, Inc.

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McDonogh 35 High School

Cynthia Willard-Lewis
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Frank Williams
Greater New Orleans Education Foundation

Florida Woods
Professionals' Association of New Orleans Public Schools, Inc.

Hilda Young
Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Charter School for Science and Technology

Glossary

Academically unacceptable: Label assigned to public schools that obtain a School Performance Score below the Louisiana state designated threshold

Achievement gap: Disparity between the academic performance of various groups of students based on gender, race/ethnicity, or socioeconomic status

Alternative school: School designed to accommodate students with disciplinary or behavioral needs that cannot be adequately addressed in a traditional public school environment

Authorizer: Entity charged by state law with the authority to approve and monitor the performance of charter schools

Best practice: Technique or methodology that, through experience and research, has proven reliably to lead to a desired result

Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE): Louisiana's administrative policymaking body for elementary and secondary education; serves as the governing board of the Recovery School District

Capacity building: Development opportunities for principals, teachers, and school staff to cultivate a certain skill or competence

Charter school: Public schools — operating under a written contract with a state, district, or other entity — that are provided increased authority over school-level decisions in exchange for greater accountability for student performance

Enrollment cap: Legal or self-imposed limit on the total number of students that can be enrolled in a given school

Equity: Fairness or justice, usually referring to the equitable distribution of something valued; in the education field, this term refers to the fair distribution of funding, technology, facilities, services, or equal education opportunities for students

Inclusion: Policy of educating children with disabilities alongside their nondisabled peers

Louisiana Educational Assessment Program (LEAP): Louisiana's standards-based testing program that evaluates student academic performance

Louisiana School Accountability System: Educational standards and accountability system for all public schools in the state of Louisiana, focused on rewarding schools that grow academically and supporting schools and students who need additional assistance

New Orleans Public Schools (NOPS): Orleans Parish school district governed by the Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB)

Operator: District and/or charter leadership teams that manage all aspects of a school

Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB): Locally elected school board for Orleans Parish that governs New Orleans Public Schools

Recovery School District (RSD): An entity, governed by the Louisiana State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, dedicated to improving chronically underperforming public schools across the state of Louisiana but most notably in New Orleans

School choice: Parents or families can select a public school from a set of public school options

Selective admissions: Enrollment or retention policies that require students to meet various academic criteria to attend a school

Specialized academic offering: Curricular focuses that supplement the Louisiana Comprehensive Curriculum, which can include language immersion, arts or music, math and science, technology, and vocational studies

Student Performance Score: Composite school evaluation based on the school's attendance rate, dropout rate, and scores from student performance exams

Title I funding: Federal funding distributed to schools and school districts with a high percentage of students from low-income families with the goal of providing supplemental educational services to students who have a high likelihood of being educationally disadvantaged

Abbreviations and Acronyms

ACSA	Algiers Charter School Association	**LDE**	Louisiana Department of Education	**OPSB**	Orleans Parish School Board
BESE	Board of Elementary and Secondary Education	**LEA**	Local Education Agency	**RSD**	Recovery School District
CDL	Center for Development and Learning	**LEAP**	Louisiana Education Assessment Program	**SLC**	School Leadership Center
FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency	**NLNS**	New Leaders for New Schools	**TFA**	Teach for America
GNOEF	Greater New Orleans Education Foundation	**NOPS**	New Orleans Public Schools	**TNTP**	The New Teacher Project
		NSNO	New Schools for New Orleans	**UNO**	University of New Orleans