

Ten Years in New Orleans

Public School Resurgence and the Path Ahead

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PUBLIC IMPACT

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NEW SCHOOLS FOR
NEW ORLEANS



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New Schools for New Orleans works to deliver on the promise of an excellent education for every child in the city. Since our inception in 2006, we have used strategic investments of time, expertise, and funding to support the improvement of New Orleans' system of charter schools. In the absence of a centralized school district, NSNO plays a vital role in proactively monitoring needs, developing innovative solutions, and above all, maintaining a focus on academic excellence with a range of partners.

Public Impact's mission is to dramatically improve learning outcomes for all children in the U.S., with a special focus on students who are not served well. We are a team of professionals from many backgrounds, including former teachers. We are researchers, thought leaders, tool-builders, and on-the-ground consultants who work with leading education reformers. For more on Public Impact, please visit www.publicimpact.com.

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Foreword

BY NEW ORLEANS MAYOR MITCH LANDRIEU

Like the city as a whole, the New Orleans public school system was devastated after the federal levees broke following Hurricane Katrina. Our school buildings were heavily damaged, and our teachers and students were scattered.

From that lowest of lows, in 10 short years a new system of schools has emerged. Indeed, we have created a new way—moving forward from what was a broken top-down system.

Today, over 90 percent of our public school students attend a public charter school, far more than any other city in America. Each public charter school is autonomous, so the principal can meet the needs of his or her particular students and freely innovate on everything from the length of the school day to incentives for top teachers.

However, what really sets New Orleans' charter school system apart is more than autonomy and the fact that nearly every student attends a public charter school—it is also our demanding accountability system and our special focus on equity. We've raised the bar, and schools must meet rigorous standards in order to remain open. Overall, we look at everything from test scores to individual student growth and graduation rates.

Another important part of our new system of schools is that families who once had only one option for their kids can now apply to nearly every school in the city through a centralized enrollment process. In New Orleans, it is no longer the case that a child's education options are strictly defined by where he or she lives.

Our charter schools have also centralized expulsion hearings with new standardized discipline policies designed to treat all students equally and keep struggling kids in school where they belong. Furthermore, we have demanded that our public charter schools follow the law so students with special needs have a place to attend school and get the services they need.

In addition to all these reforms, \$1.8 billion in FEMA funds is hitting the ground to rebuild, reno-

vate, or refurbish every school in New Orleans. Now, our kids will have the buildings worthy of their great promise.

That is not to say that our new system is anywhere close to perfect. There is still a long way to go, but we are improving faster here than anywhere else in America.

Before Katrina, the achievement gap between New Orleans and the rest of the state was over 25 percentage points. Now, we've nearly closed that wide gap with the state.

Before Katrina, the graduation rate was just over 50 percent. Now, our young residents are graduating 73 percent of the time.

Before Katrina, African-American student performance in New Orleans was well below the state average. Now, we beat the state average.

Because of this progress, by our 300th anniversary as a city in 2018, we can become the first city in America with no failing schools. That would be a remarkable milestone not just for us, but for the country as a whole.

We are building the city back not as it was, but the way we always dreamed she could be, and the reforms to our education system are the most important part of this effort. Now, more than any other generation, the pathway to prosperity goes directly through the schoolhouse doors. Indeed, the future of New Orleans will truly be decided not at City Hall or in downtown corporate board rooms, but in the classrooms of this great city.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mitch Landrieu". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.



From the CEOs

Ten years ago, Hurricane Katrina tore through our region, taking nearly 2,000 lives and forever altering hundreds of thousands more.

Though many of the storm's scars have healed, in many ways our city is still recovering. As we approach the 10th anniversary of that generation-defining moment, we mourn and we remember. But we also celebrate our resurgence.

This is the story of education in New Orleans since Katrina, the remarkable rebuilding of a school system in the wake of natural and man-made disaster. It is the story of steady progress, challenges, and breakthroughs, of educators, families, and students continually pushing toward the system our city deserves.

We would like to acknowledge the many people who helped reassemble our schools and our city. We thank the great educators who returned to New Orleans in the storm's wake and who fought to reopen our city's schools. We also thank those educators who moved to this city and made it their home. We thank the families who came back to the city to rebuild their communities. We thank our leaders, who have continually demonstrated through word and deed that great schools for all children must be a priority. We thank the people of New Orleans who continue to push our system of schools to become more effective and more equitable.

As we close the first decade after the storm, we begin to look to the next decade and our collective opportunity to make New Orleans the country's first great urban public school system. The past 10 years demonstrate that our city will settle for nothing less.

We look forward to working together to continue to deliver on that promise.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Maggie Runyan-Shefa & Michael Stone".

Maggie Runyan-Shefa & Michael Stone,
Co-Chief Executive Officers,
New Schools for New Orleans

economic life. By the 1870s, however, sustained federal involvement had fostered a racially integrated public school system — thought to be the only such system in the post-Civil War South. The backlash was fierce in the Jim Crow era. In 1900, the president of the Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB) dismantled the education system for black children. Publicly funded schooling beyond the fifth grade was restricted to white New Orleanians for a generation. In 1917, McDonogh 35 began offering high school grades for a limited number of black students, and Booker T. Washington added a vocational track in the early 1940s. Funding for black schools remained meager, however, never approaching white schools' allocations.

It took a steady barrage of lawsuits and petitions by local stalwart A.P. Tureaud and his civil rights colleagues to force the local board to comply with federal desegregation orders in the wake of *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954. Again, the reaction was dramatic. Most white families disengaged from public education in New Orleans. From 1964 to 1974, white enrollment in New Orleans' public schools dropped from 39,000 to 19,000. Ten years later, it was below 10,000.

There were few bright spots throughout the 1980s and '90s. Reports to Congress in 1995 about the condition of school facilities warned that “New Orleans public schools are rotting away” — the product of a weak economy, lack of dedicated funding, and mismanagement. The introduction of common statewide assessments showed that student achievement remained heartbreakingly low. Political bickering and outright corruption marred the local board. As mayors, both Marc Morial and Ray Nagin tried to intervene, but neither gained any traction despite strong citywide voter mandates.

Student enrollment dropped by 25 percent in the city's public schools from 1994 to 2004. Despite the efforts of many dedicated educators, the New Orleans school system was in a downward spiral.

The students who had access to excellent public schools typically possessed the right combination of attributes: good middle school grades, or political connections, or wealth, or racial privilege, or some combination. The vast majority did not.

What does it look like when the circle of “our kids” is narrowly drawn for so long?

White students in New Orleans, just 3 percent of the student population by 2005, outperformed their peers in each of Louisiana's other 67 school districts. In contrast, academic performance among low-income students and black students ranked 66th out of 68 districts statewide.²

In economic terms, children born into poor families in New Orleans in the early 1980s were worse off than their peers from nearly every other county in the United States. Of the 2,500 counties nationwide, just four left their young people with worse economic prospects in adulthood. If you grew up poor in New Orleans in the 1980s and '90s, in 2015 you should expect to earn about \$5,000 less each year compared with a peer growing up in an average low-income household elsewhere in America.³

Ineffective public schools were a primary factor in that civic failure. No community wants that for its kids.

New Orleans today

The improvement to public schools in New Orleans over the past decade has been nothing short of remarkable. One could argue that New Orleans had the worst urban school system in America before Hurricane Katrina. Now we're on par with major districts across the country—in many cases, we're beginning to surpass outcomes in those districts. No city has improved this much, this quickly. Though our schools are far from excellent, this transformation has positively impacted the lives of thousands and thousands of children who would have been left behind by the old system:

- **More students on grade level:** In 2004, 31 percent of New Orleans students performed on grade level on state assessments, earning a “Basic” or above rating. In 2014, that figure had doubled to 62 percent. Over the same period, the equivalent statewide figure increased from 56 percent to 68 percent.
- **Fewer students trapped in low-performing schools:** In 2004, 60 percent of New Orleans students —

40,000 kids — went to a school that performed in the bottom tenth of all Louisiana public schools. By any reasonable definition, these were failing schools. In 2014, just 13 percent of our students attended a school in the bottom tenth in Louisiana.

- **More students graduating on-time:** A ninth-grader entering a New Orleans public school in fall 2000 had barely a 50/50 chance to graduate on time four years later (54 percent). Today, 73 percent of students graduate on time.
- **Rigorous academic research affirms citywide improvement:** According to the Education Research Alliance for New Orleans, the effect of New Orleans reform on student learning surpasses the impact of major reforms studied in other communities, including preschool programs and reductions in class-size.⁴

Revolutionizing the role of government in public education enabled our transformation. The district moved from school operator to regulator of school quality and equity in the system. Nonprofit charter school organizations led the way on performance improvement and innovation, while simultaneously recognizing that they are not niche players—they are “the system.” They are responsible for ensuring that every child receives a great education.

We don’t confuse progress with success. While growth has been undeniable, we are still a below-average school district in a bottom-performing state. If New Orleans stalled today, the city would land squarely in the middle ranks of our country’s underperforming urban school systems. A fraction of students would receive an excellent education, while many of the rest would be consigned to economic insecurity and a host of other negative life outcomes because our schools did not deliver. “Better than before” is not our standard. With continued momentum, New Orleans can become a city where every child can attend an excellent public school. The road ahead is long but within reach.



IS THIS REPORT A HOW-TO GUIDE FOR OTHER CITIES?

No. This report is primarily intended to be descriptive, not prescriptive. It is a synthesis of a compelling and complicated story — not a call to action for other cities.

We deeply believe in the principles that inform the transformation of New Orleans schools: educator autonomy and empowerment, parental choice, and government transforming into a quality-focused regulator. Our doors are always open to talk about creating more school systems that embody those principles.

We encourage readers to explore “*New Orleans-Style Education Reform: A Guide for Cities*,” a 2012 collaboration between New Schools for New Orleans and Public Impact. That report includes a rich discussion of how to move to a decentralized school system. It remains a valuable resource.

This report

After a review of student performance data in New Orleans public schools, this report moves through six essential topics. In each chapter, we pull together the key trends and describe why developments in each domain matter to the system as a whole. Notable moments of success receive their due, and the discussion closes with an acknowledgement of persistent challenges and the work to come.

The six chapters are:

- 1. Governance:** Highlights New Orleans' decision to refocus the role of government to a regulator of educational outcomes and equity.
- 2. Schools:** Focuses on the autonomous public schools that now serve more than 90 percent of students in New Orleans' decentralized system as drivers of innovation and system leadership.
- 3. Talent:** Describes the unique environment in which New Orleans educators practice their craft.
- 4. Equity:** Clarifies the mechanisms adopted by public schools to ensure that reform created a system that served all New Orleans students well, particularly the most vulnerable.
- 5. Community:** Reflects on challenges and successes in building shared ownership among a diverse group of New Orleanians for the transformation of public schools.
- 6. Funders:** Outlines how one-time federal funds and philanthropic support have contributed to the past decade of reform.

The road ahead

We believe that what happened over the past 10 years demonstrates what's possible for the next 10.

Above all, New Orleans created a pervasive mindset that big problems can be solved. If something in the system does not serve the needs of students, it can be changed. If stubborn gaps appear, great educators will step in with innovative solutions. If a school is not getting the job done, another will take on the challenge.

Structural reform in New Orleans triggered a cycle of improvement that is still gaining speed 10 years later.

On the flip side, this dynamism places unprecedented demands on families, educators and citizens in New Orleans. Most school districts manage to push through a handful of incremental adjustments each year. The speed of change in New Orleans can be dizzying.

This rapid pace began within weeks of the storm's landfall as the state swept in to seize control of most of the city's schools. Since that time, there has been a persistent feeling among many in New Orleans that changes to public education happened "to" and not "with" communities served by the schools. The anger that some New Orleanians harbor toward "reformers," the Recovery School District (RSD), charter school organizations, and other supportive nonprofits is inextricably linked to larger issues of race, class, and privilege in New Orleans and in this country.

If we can harness the collective energy of all of our citizens, the future of New Orleans schools is indeed bright. The city's adults must develop a shared sense of ownership over education in New Orleans—including acknowledging real wounds, working to heal them, and moving forward together. Our public schools must become a point of civic pride. There is no other path to excellence.

Our vision is for New Orleans to become America's first great urban public school system: one whose schools perform on par with the best suburban districts in America; one that personalizes student experience for all children; one that provides multiple rigorous pathways through and beyond high school to help every child, regardless of background, flourish as an adult; and, in a city with a dark history of racial segregation, a system of schools that represent the racial and socioeconomic diversity of New Orleans.

We begin with the question that we believe should ground every discussion of public schools: How are students performing academically?

Student Performance in New Orleans

System at a Glance

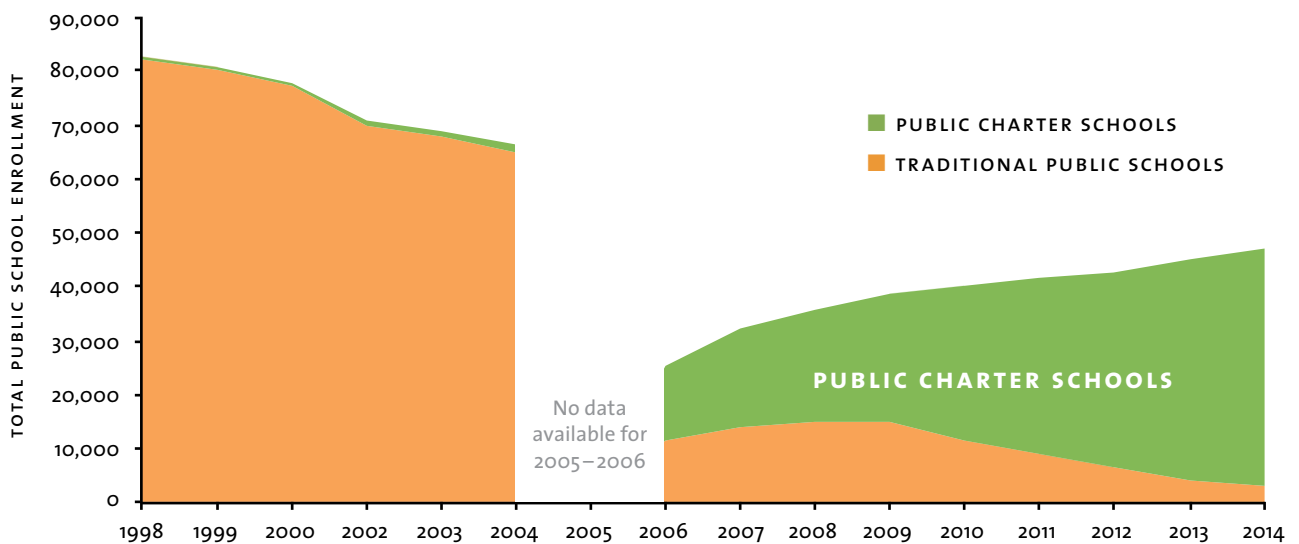
Approximately 47,000 students attend public schools in New Orleans.

83% economically disadvantaged
93% students of color
11% students with disabilities

83 public schools operate in New Orleans' decentralized school system.

Public Charter Schools	77 schools	44,000 students
Operate under the Recovery School District (RSD)	55 schools	29,000 students
Operate under the Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB)	18 schools	12,000 students
Operate under the Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE)	4 schools	3,000 students
Traditional Public Schools	6 schools	3,000 students
Run directly by OPSB ("network schools")		

Nearly 95 percent of students attend autonomous, nonprofit charter schools.

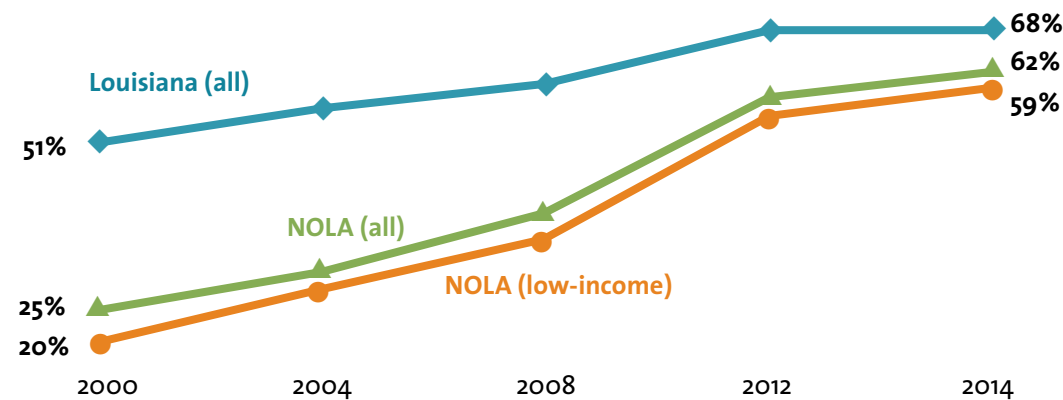


Celebrating the success of New Orleans public school students 10 years after Hurricane Katrina

Students in New Orleans are performing better than ever

Students are closing the achievement gap with peers across the state.

Note: Percent of students on grade level (grades 3–11). For grades 3–8, scoring “Basic” or above on iLEAP/LEAP is on grade level. For high school, scoring “Good” or above on End-of-Course (EOC) exams (formerly GEE) is on grade level.



ACT scores have reached an all-time high.

17.0 → 18.8
2005 2015

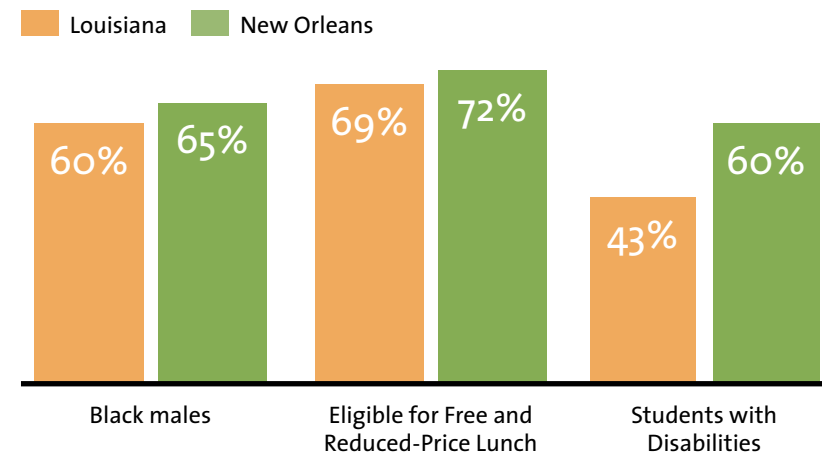
Nearly all seniors take the ACT.

55% → 95%
2005 2015

Graduation rates are up sharply.

54% → 73%
2004 2014

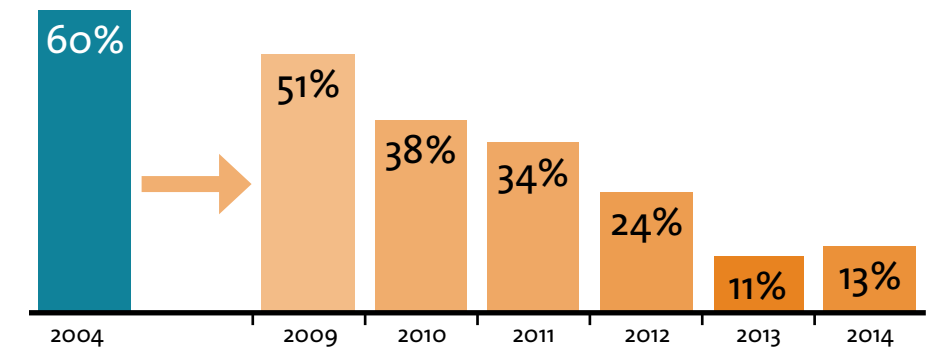
New Orleans graduation rates top the Louisiana average among key groups of students.



Note: 2014 Cohort graduation rate by student subgroup. Chart shows the percentage of cohort that entered 9th grade in fall 2010 and graduated within four years.

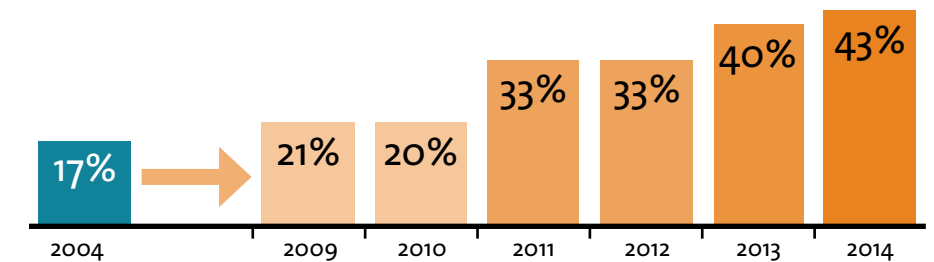
Only 13 percent of students attend schools in Louisiana’s lowest-performing decile, down from 60 percent in 2004.

Note: New Orleans students attending schools with state-issued School Performance Score (SPS) in bottom 10% statewide (10th percentile or below).



And 43 percent of students attend schools performing above the state average, up from 17 percent in 2004.

Note: New Orleans students attending schools with SPS above 50th percentile statewide.



Schools are creating better life opportunities for their students.

College Enrollment

37% → 59%
2004 2014

Eligible for TOPS merit scholarships

25% → 37%
2005 2014

Note: College enrollment is percentage of high school graduates that the National Student Clearinghouse reports as enrolling in any college or university. TOPS provides state-funded 2- and 4-year merit scholarships to Louisiana public colleges and universities.

New Orleans public schools have rapidly improved over the past decade

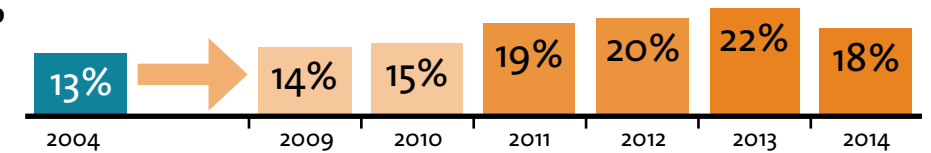


The Work Ahead

New Orleans students deserve nothing less than the country's first great urban public school system. Much work remains.

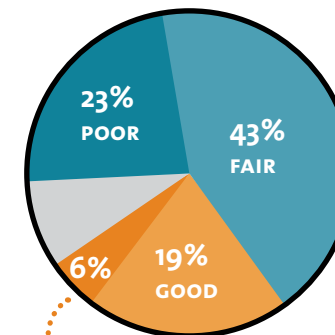
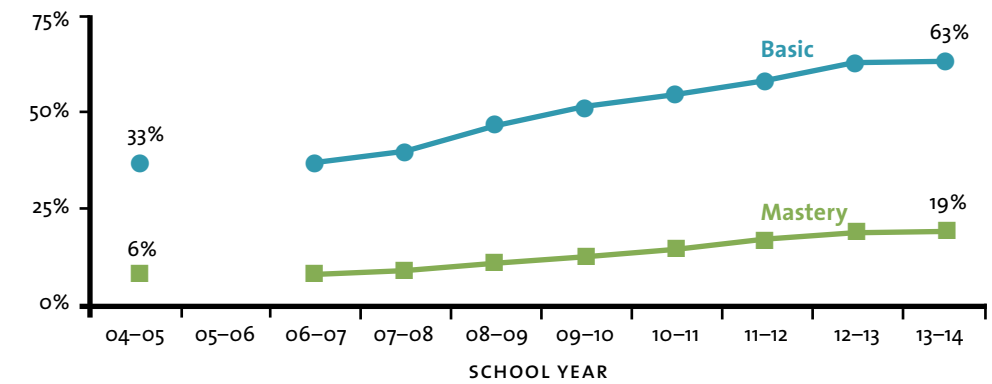
New Orleans still has too few transformational schools.

Note: New Orleans students attending top-quartile schools in Louisiana (SPS above 75th percentile statewide).

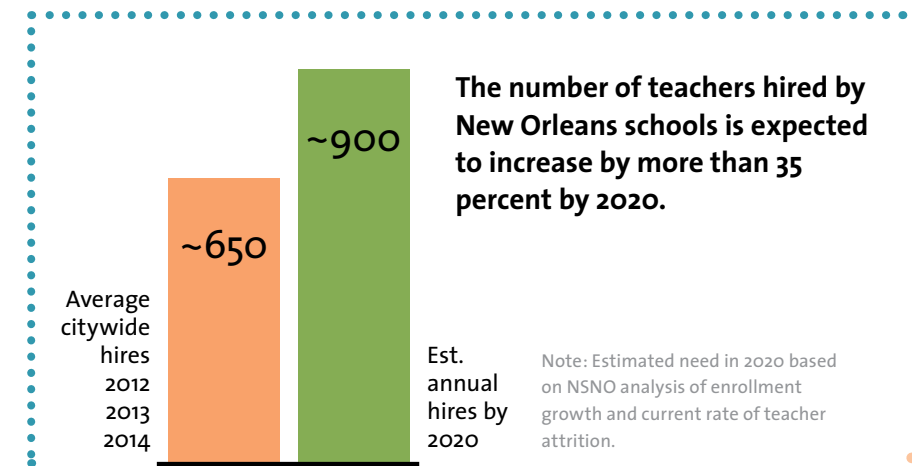


Less than 20 percent of students reach "Mastery" performance on state assessments.

Note: Percent of New Orleans students (grades 3-8) across all subjects. "Mastery" will be threshold for grade-level performance going forward and is equal to "Proficient" on the NAEP test.



Only a quarter of New Orleanians believe the system is doing a "Good" or "Excellent" job preparing students for college.



The number of teachers hired by New Orleans schools is expected to increase by more than 35 percent by 2020.

Note: Estimated need in 2020 based on NSNO analysis of enrollment growth and current rate of teacher attrition.

Our work will continue until every public school student in New Orleans attends an excellent school.

Timeline

YEAR	EVENT
1999	Louisiana's school accountability system launched with statewide administration of LEAP assessment for 4th- and 8th-grade students
2003	May: Recovery School District (RSD) legislation passed
2004	July: First OPSB school is transferred to RSD and converted to a charter school
August 29, 2005: Hurricane Katrina	
2005	November: State legislation puts most New Orleans public schools under RSD control. OPSB, no longer responsible for operating 100+ schools, lays off more than 7,000 educators and support staff
	December: RSD opens first charter school in aftermath of Katrina
2006	April: RSD opens its first direct-run schools to serve returning students
	New Schools for New Orleans founded
	BESE approves only 6 new charter applications to open in fall 2007
2008	July: After significant teacher shortages in 2006 and 2007, intensive national and local recruitment efforts produce a surplus of qualified teacher applicants for New Orleans public schools
2009	August: RSD opens school year with 34 direct-run schools (highest number before decline)
2010	August: NSNO and RSD receive \$28 million federal Investing in Innovation (i3) grant to restart failing RSD schools
	August: FEMA confirms \$1.8 billion settlement for construction and renovation. BESE had approved the School Facilities Master Plan (SFMP) in 2008
	October: Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) files lawsuit on behalf of 10 students with disabilities
	December: BESE adopts policy to permit return of RSD schools to OPSB
2011	December: RSD announces details of new centralized student enrollment system for families to rank their preference for school assignments
2012	January: OPSB authorizes first new charter school in the district since Katrina
	Spring: All RSD schools participate in OneApp online enrollment system
	Citywide expulsion process for RSD and OPSB schools developed
2013	August: More than half of New Orleans students are enrolled in charter network (CMO) schools
2014	May: RSD closes remaining direct-run schools, becoming the nation's first all-charter district
	October: Data from Louisiana's teacher evaluation system (COMPASS) indicate that about 35 percent of New Orleans teachers rank in top 20 percent statewide in student academic growth
	December: First RSD charter school (Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Charter School) votes to return to OPSB
2015	March: OPSB hires superintendent after nearly three years of interim leadership
August 29, 2015: 10th anniversary of Hurricane Katrina	

Student Performance in New Orleans Sources

All student enrollment and performance data provided by Louisiana Department of Education. Louisiana Department of Education. (2015). *10 years after Hurricane Katrina*. Retrieved from <http://www.louisianabelieves.com/resources/about-us/10-years-after-hurricane-katrina>

Public polling data provided by the Cowen Institute for Public Education Initiatives. *The New Orleans Advocate*. (2015, May). "K-12 public education through the public's eye: Parents' and adults' perception of education in New Orleans". Retrieved from http://www.cowen.institute.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/cowen.poll_2015.pdf

1 Governance

The most important reform to come out of New Orleans—the one that enabled every other key change in the system—involves reimagining the district’s role. In the vast majority of schools citywide, nonprofit charter school organizations now make core school-level decisions that affect teaching and learning, including curriculum, personnel, and instructional time.

With a smaller operational role, RSD could focus on becoming an exceptional regulator for school quality and system equity. RSD has continuously demonstrated the courage to close or transform failing schools, while simultaneously expanding top charter organizations. Very quickly, this strategy has resulted in fewer children in low-performing schools and more children attending the highest-quality public schools. RSD also tackled equity challenges like fair enrollment systems in partnership with a subset of charter schools that recognized they are “the system” now (see Chapter 4, Equity).

No definitive answers have emerged on what long-term structure can protect the autonomy of schools while ensuring meaningful accountability for low academic performance. OPSB is showing promise, but persistent worries about corruption dog the local board. And after squabbling for nearly three years to select a new superintendent, the board does not seem to share a common vision that would enable it to make tough decisions around school turnaround and policies to promote equity. If our local district cannot adapt and embrace those principles without political interference, the New Orleans community would be better off navigating the current bifurcated system that has resulted in transformational academic gains.

Numbers to celebrate

93%

Percentage of New Orleans public school students enrolled in charter schools, the highest concentration of charters in the country.⁵

3:1

Ratio of New Orleanians who agree vs. disagree in 2015 that “Schools that are persistently rated ‘D’ should be turned over to a different operator to be restarted”—indicating broad support for RSD’s primary strategy.⁶

350

Approximate number of governing board members across all New Orleans charter schools. About half are black.⁷

Numbers to motivate

989

Days that OPSB went without a permanent superintendent until the hiring of Dr. Henderson Lewis Jr. in spring 2015.⁸

44%

Percentage of New Orleanians who believe schools should return to OPSB governance within the next 5 years. 44% also believe that schools should have the right to choose to return (as in current policy) or not return to OPSB at all.⁹

1 of 73

Over the past four years, eligible RSD charters have voted 73 times on the question of whether or not to move to OPSB governance. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Charter School will become the first to transfer in fall 2015.

What happened?

New Orleans is the first large-scale effort to separate district governance from the work of directly operating schools.

The traditional school district is a central feature of public education in the United States. So central, in fact, that the average citizen might have difficulty describing what the district does. It just “runs the schools.”

The traditional district operates schools, yes. It also plans for growth and opens new schools. It monitors performance and holds schools accountable. It maintains school buildings. It hires and manages a district-wide workforce, and prescribes supports to improve educator effectiveness.

But this broad purview creates conflicting mandates and agendas that make it difficult for a single organization to perform all of these functions effectively (see “Local Context,” page 17).

Reform has clarified three distinct functions that make up the role of American school districts (see Table 1). In New Orleans, multiple entities lead components of this work rather than housing them under one roof. Most notably, New Orleans ended the district’s virtual monopoly over school operation. This is the revolution in New Orleans: the creation of a decentralized system of schools.

School Operation

In New Orleans, nonprofit organizations now operate the overwhelming majority of schools. Only a handful of traditional schools remain in the Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB).

Traditional school districts operate more than 90 percent of public schools nationwide.¹¹ Along with

state policymakers, central offices usually control curriculum, staffing, budget, school calendar, and so on. In unionized districts, collective bargaining agreements limit school-level flexibility even further.

Before Katrina, OPSB operated a traditional school district that had been declining for decades. By 2004, well over half of New Orleans Public Schools (NOPS) students attended a school ranked among the state’s lowest-performing 10 percent. If you were a Louisiana parent with a child trapped in an awful public school, you probably lived in New Orleans.

What does academic performance look like in a school in the 10th percentile statewide? NOPS’ A. D. Crossman Elementary fell right on the line in 2004.¹² Among Crossman’s fourth-graders, only 36 percent performed on grade level in English language arts. Only 22 percent did so in math, 21 percent in science, and 25 percent in social studies.¹³

When NOPS ran nearly every public school in New Orleans, 60 percent of students went to schools that performed *worse* than Crossman.

Governance changes were afoot before 2005 to resolve this crisis, but Hurricane Katrina kicked them into overdrive that fall.

The contours of New Orleans’ governance story are described thoughtfully elsewhere — notably the Cowen Institute’s comprehensive report, *Transforming Public Education in New Orleans: The Recovery School District 2003–2011*.¹⁴ We emphasize three key points about how school operation changed in New Orleans:

First, RSD directly operated schools after Katrina because no other entity — not OPSB, not the emerging charter operators — could muster the

TABLE 1. Functions of a traditional school district (simplified)

School Operation	Portfolio Management	Services and Support
Making the week-to-week, year-to-year decisions about curriculum, staffing, budget, school calendar, and so on.	Evaluating enrollment trends, program offerings, and school performance. Deciding when new schools open (and who operates them). Determining what to do about low-performing schools. ¹⁰	Stitching together the processes and support systems that schools need in order to function smoothly (e.g. enrollment, allocating public funding, facilities).

resources to open a large number of schools in a devastated city. The only way to avoid directly running schools would have been to open dozens of new charter schools and compromise the high charter authorization standards of the Louisiana State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE). That was a compromise that BESE was wisely unwilling to make.

Second, from the outset, RSD actively pursued strategies that shifted increasing responsibility for school operations to strong nonprofits. They sought to turn around low-performing schools, merge schools, and empower RSD principals to form their own nonprofits and directly manage schools. In 2009, RSD operated 33 so-called “direct-run” schools. The U.S. Department of Education awarded an Investing in Innovation grant (i3) to accelerate the transition. By fall 2014 — eight years into the transformation — RSD had fully withdrawn from school operation.

Third, OPSB plays only a small role operating schools today. More than 75 percent of OPSB students attend a school run by a nonprofit charter operator. That number is likely to increase going forward.

Very quickly a dividing line emerged between school operation and governance of the district. The following sections describe the impact of this shift on portfolio management and support functions. But the shift also had significant implications for school operators, New Orleans educators, equity issues, and the wider New Orleans community (see Chapters 2 through 5).

Portfolio Management

RSD has streamlined its role dramatically: district personnel focus their efforts on ensuring that quality charter operators serve more kids and that low-performing operators reduce their role. As OPSB’s charter portfolio grows, its oversight and accountability responsibilities will resemble RSD’s.

Traditional districts face conflicting priorities in having to both operate schools and hold schools accountable for performance. As a result, they’re often slow to close under-enrolled schools or bring in high-performing organizations to run schools that have shown chronically poor academic performance.

In New Orleans, stakeholders with a range of views make political hay in emphasizing the differences between OPSB and RSD. But this discourse can mask the fact that OPSB’s operating model today more closely resembles RSD than a traditional school district. On the spectrum of all school districts nationwide, RSD and OPSB are virtually twins — and notable outliers. RSD no longer runs schools in New Orleans, and OPSB operates only a handful.

It remains to be seen if OPSB will match BESE and RSD’s exceptional track record of holding schools accountable for their academic performance. OPSB’s schools inherited strong academic results and have sustained that performance over the past decade.¹⁵

By design, RSD’s primary responsibility was to take over the lowest-performing schools. RSD’s mandate to regularly intervene, coupled with its independent decision-making structure, enabled the district to push farther and faster on this front than



LOCAL CONTEXT: DECADES OF STRUGGLE TO BUILD AN EFFECTIVE ORLEANS PARISH SCHOOL BOARD

A local elected body must be part of the future public education in New Orleans. As Paul Hill argues, “In American public life, elections uniquely confer legitimacy.”¹⁶

But being locally elected does not guarantee shared civic ownership—nor do school boards have a track record of sustained academic success with low-income students.

As New Orleans begins to shape the second decade of reform, looking to the past is instructive. Deep structural weaknesses plague boards across the country, and in the years leading up to 2005, the worst tendencies of elected school boards played out in OPSB.

OPSB struggled to recruit qualified candidates to seek election. Board members worked a demanding, full-time schedule—managing a \$500 million budget in 2005—for minimal compensation. Few candidates had the expertise and citywide perspective needed to provide effective oversight of the city’s schools. Disagreement over the board’s mission and purpose ran deep: Were board members trustees of the system as a whole or representatives of the part of town that elected them? Board members seemed to spend more time and energy on politically motivated personal disputes than they did on policies and programs to benefit the city’s struggling schools.¹⁷ Spats and lawsuits between board members bred mistrust and disagreement—further narrowing the pool of candidates.

Board members owed their positions—some would say their allegiance—to the small fraction of citizens who turned out to vote in school board elections. In 2000, only 22 percent of registered voters voted in the school board election.¹⁸ And the 2004 races—seen to be hotly contested in light of an embarrassing, failed attempt to fire Superintendent Anthony Amato—saw only 27 percent of registered voters participate in the key September primaries. (In contrast, voter

turnout six weeks later soared when more than 60 percent of New Orleanians voted in the presidential election between John Kerry and George W. Bush.) National research suggests that interest groups (such as contractors and the United Teachers of New Orleans) participated disproportionately in these contests.¹⁹

Once elected, school board members were unresponsive to other elected local officials with stronger voter mandates. Before Katrina, consecutive New Orleans mayors threatened to take over certain school board functions. In 1997, Mayor Marc Morial, current president of the National Urban League, said, “Perhaps mayoral control of the schools by public referendum for a limited period of time is the way to bring stability and improvement to the system. We’re going to get more involved in education. . . . Right now, it’s not clear how. But I’m not going to stand on the side, sit on my hands.”²⁰ Morial ended up carving out a much smaller role in 1998: mediating a dispute between OPSB and the Orleans Parish district attorney, who had sued the board for violating open meetings law.²¹

Mayor Ray Nagin followed Morial’s lead. In 2003, Nagin attempted to wrest control of core administrative functions from OPSB, including budgeting, payroll and technology. The proposal was met with resounding silence by the board members, who refused to act. In February 2004, Nagin reflected, “Our school system scares the bejesus out of me. . . . To be totally honest with you, I don’t know what we’re going to do with that, but we’ve got to do something.”²² At the time, Nagin’s voter support was strong. More than 75,000 citizens put him in City Hall in 2002—more than double the combined votes cast for the six victorious OPSB candidates in 2000 (one ran unopposed). But the board could not be moved.

Constant turnover destabilized NOPS. Eight superintendents (three permanent, five interim) led the dis-

(continued on page 18)

trict in the decade ending in 2005. Between February 1999 and March 2005, five chief financial officers were named in OPSB audits, though sometimes it was unclear who was in charge.²³ Without consistent leadership, the district failed to articulate a vision, engage with the community, or follow through on tough decisions to benefit the city’s schools. Students and families suffered the most from this lack of leadership.

In 2004, local representatives pushed the state legislature to intervene.²⁴ Governor Kathleen Blanco signed Act 193 to set clear parameters around OPSB’s role in the system. The bill granted the local superintendent sole authority to make core administrative decisions without board approval and put in place additional job protections to insulate operational leaders from political meddling. As a precursor of future legislation, the changes applied only to districts that were in “academic crisis.” Of the more than 60 districts in Louisiana, only NOPS met that criterion.

A faction of the board moved to fire Superintendent Anthony Amato late on a Friday afternoon before the legislation went into effect. Only a federal restraining order blocked the maneuver. Amato had received a “B+” on his formal evaluation from the board just months before.

“In American public life, elections uniquely confer legitimacy.”

Local elections matter. At the same time, policy that shapes the role of elected officials is essential to get right. So too are the norms and values that board members embrace—particularly so in a city with a remarkable history of corruption and scandal among school board members and district personnel.²⁵ As New Orleans contemplates a larger role for its local board, it must remember the lessons of the past.

LOUISIANA: RAISING THE BAR FOR SCHOOL PERFORMANCE

Last year’s “good enough” is no longer good enough.

This maxim captures the fact that New Orleans public schools face an ever-increasing set of academic expectations. This trend began in 1999, when Louisiana first issued School Performance Scores (SPS) based on statewide assessments. It has gained momentum with repeated votes by Louisiana’s Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) to raise performance standards over the past decade. The standards for acceptable academic results have increased almost annually—jumping from an SPS of 30 (out of 200) to an SPS of 75 (out of 200).

In 2013, the state education department shifted to a 150-point scale to provide clarity to parents. (This makes sense: an SPS of 75 sounds just fine if you mistakenly assume that the scale only runs up to 100.) Persistently low-performing schools will continue to be identified based on SPS going forward.

Charter renewal standards set by BESE have followed the same pattern. For years, RSD charters with at least a “D” letter grade were eligible to continue operating—roughly above the 15th percentile statewide in SPS. But beginning in December 2015, charters signing their third operating agreement must show academic performance at a “C” or better—roughly above the 30th percentile statewide.²⁶ OPSB has put in place a more rigorous standard: Charters seeking renewal from the local board must demonstrate student performance at approximately the 40th percentile statewide.²⁷

any other in the country. Over time, RSD’s strategy evolved to rely on empowering charter operators to turnaround the city’s lowest-performing schools—including fellow charters that had not improved academic outcomes. The first of these interventions—bringing in Crescent City Schools to manage Harriet Tubman, an elementary school formerly run by Algiers Charter School Association (ACSA)—proved politically contentious. But the 2011 decision indicated that RSD and BESE would hold the line on school quality above any other consideration.²⁸

In contrast to RSD, OPSB never intended to reduce its operational role, but did so out of necessity. In 2004, OPSB was declared “academically in crisis” by state education officials.²⁹ After the storm and RSD’s large-scale intervention in New Orleans, OPSB’s portfolio shrank to fewer than 20 relatively high-performing schools. But the district retained its “crisis” designation due to financial instability and could not authorize new charters. Determined to serve returning students, the leaders of 12 OPSB schools submitted charter applications in order to reopen as charter schools as soon as possible.

In 2011, OPSB finally shed its “crisis” designation, and the board accepted its first round of new charter applications that fall. Like RSD, OPSB set a high bar for quality and sought the advice of the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA). District staff initially recommended turning down all seven applications received during the first round, though ENCORE Academy later received approval to open the first new OPSB charter after Katrina.³⁰ OPSB authorized eight schools from 2011 to 2015. It adopted a performance framework to evaluate the quality of those schools in 2014, brokering the agreement with school operators, district staff, and OPSB board members.³¹

Services and Support

With no blueprint for providing critical support infrastructure in a decentralized system, New Orleans had to improvise as the system evolved. Charter operators took on some of the work, while RSD and OPSB led on other key system-wide functions.

SEE CHAPTER 4 (EQUITY) FOR A DISCUSSION OF:

- Unified enrollment system
- Special education services
- Discipline policies

Decentralization spurred major innovations in each of these areas in New Orleans.

In traditional urban districts, the central office holds onto a significant portion of school funding to purchase or provide services for the schools it operates, including a facility and maintenance of that facility, student enrollment, transportation, food service, and services for special-needs students. In contrast, charter schools generally receive more of their budget in real dollars and are left to procure these services themselves.

In New Orleans, the shift to a decentralized system radically changed both what services schools needed from the district and how the district could best provide them. This introduced some of the thorniest implementation challenges in New Orleans — challenges that were, at least initially, largely overlooked or passed on to charter management organizations that were not always equipped and supported.

These difficulties are not entirely surprising. Supporting a school system requires careful strategic planning and a deep grasp of technical nuances. In addition to the work of running schools in a still-recovering city, having dozens of entities operate schools multiplied the logistical challenges of the decentralized system. New Orleans adopted a novel governance structure with no precedents to turn to for lessons. The connective tissue in the rapidly changing system had to constantly evolve to keep pace with an ever-changing list of supports that schools needed. Several major aspects of this work are captured in Table 2, on page 20.

TABLE 2. Services and Support in RSD and OPSB

	RSD Charters	OPSB Charters	OPSB “Network Schools” (operated by the central office)
Funding	<p>Each school receives per-pupil local and state funds, minus a 2 percent authorizer fee.</p> <p>Each school receives full federal entitlement funding based on student demographics, but is responsible for administrative activities.</p>	<p>Each charter receives per-pupil local and state funds, minus a 2 percent authorizer fee.</p> <p>OPSB receives federal funds as a single LEA and allocates to schools based on student demographics. It retains an administrative fee to process the funding.</p>	<p>By state law, principals of traditional district schools have significant influence over site-level budgeting and hiring. Most state and local funds are distributed to schools on a per-pupil basis.</p> <p>OPSB receives federal funds as a single LEA and allocates them to schools based on student demographics. It retains an administrative fee to process the funding.</p>
Special Education	<p>Acting as individual LEAs for special education, each RSD charter must serve all students who enroll, regardless of ability. Each school receives federal IDEA funds directly, with per-pupil amounts differentiated according to student need.</p>	<p>OPSB controls IDEA funds through central office. Charters work with district to bring IDEA-funded services and staff into their schools to meet student needs.</p> <p>District personnel also assist families with school placement across all OPSB schools.</p>	<p>OPSB controls IDEA funds through central office. District brings IDEA-funded services and staff into network schools to meet student needs.</p> <p>District personnel also assist families with school placement across all OPSB network schools.</p>
Facilities	<p>Law requires the provision of a public facility for all RSD charters.</p> <p>In fall 2015, 3 of 54 will operate in private facilities.</p>	<p>Traditional public schools that convert to charters retain their building, so all 11 that operated before 2005 have public facilities.</p> <p>Newly authorized charters are not guaranteed a facility. In fall 2015, these schools will occupy a mix of public and private facilities.</p>	<p>All 6 in public facilities.</p>
Enrollment	<p>All participate in EnrollNOLA, per BESE policy.</p>	<p>10 out of 18 participate in EnrollNOLA. All others were open before the launch of EnrollNOLA and currently run their own public lotteries. They can elect to join at any point, but OPSB policy dictates that they must enter EnrollNOLA when their charters are renewed (between 2017 and 2021).</p>	<p>All participate in EnrollNOLA, per OPSB policy.</p>
Transportation	<p>Required to provide transportation.</p> <p>Several high schools offer public transit passes rather than yellow bus service.</p>	<p>Required to provide transportation.</p> <p>Of 14 schools serving grades K-8, 5 offer public transit passes rather than yellow bus service. 2 of 6 high schools do the same.</p>	<p>Required to provide transportation.</p> <p>All provide yellow bus transportation funded and managed through central office.</p>

Note: Local Education Agency (LEA) is a public administrative unit within a state that is charged with control and direction of a designated set of elementary and/or secondary schools. By law, each RSD charter acts as an independent LEA.

Over the past 10 years, both school districts working in New Orleans have shed most, though not all, of their responsibility for school operations, allowing them to focus instead on oversight and accountability and providing key school supports and services. The transformation didn't happen overnight, and it wasn't easy. The remaining chapters of this report take a hard, honest look at some of the challenges. But the results speak for themselves.

Why is it important?

In 2005, New Orleans was infamous for being the lowest-achieving, most corrupt school system in Louisiana. In 2015, it is now acknowledged nationwide for demonstrating what is possible to accomplish in urban education if policymakers reimagine public school governance.

New Orleans redistributed traditional school district functions. Today, the city has a decentralized system where nonprofit charters operate autonomous schools and the district holds them accountable. Although the system is not entirely insulated from corruption and ineffective leadership, New Orleans' model mostly eliminates the inherent conflict of interest when the same organization is responsible for both of these functions. New Orleans pushes operational decisions down to the school level, thus enabling talented teachers and leaders to deliver academic and social-emotional services that best meet student needs. RSD holds schools accountable for high levels of academic performance — and OPSB will be positioned to do the same in the coming years. The reimagined system offers the country's most promising governance conditions for fostering excellence.

What were the successes?

When nonprofits run most of the public schools in a city, the government can devote its attention to two questions: What portfolio of school operators would improve academic outcomes? What mechanisms and policies will ensure fairness and equity

for all students, regardless of their circumstances or background?

Traditional central offices can rarely give these questions their full attention. They have limited capacity remaining after resolving such pressing operational issues as human resources, school policy, curriculum, and calendar. No longer bogged down with school operation, RSD focused mainly on issues of school quality and equity. The points below highlight system-wide successes in portfolio management. (Also see Chapter 4, Equity.)

Government intervention in low-performing schools has become the norm

The most important success to celebrate is that all schools — charter and direct-run — have been held accountable for their academic performance. For an entire decade, there has been no slippage on accountability. RSD has acted on every charter school that missed performance standards for charter renewal. Very few other urban school systems can make that claim.

Much credit here goes to BESE board members and staff at the Louisiana Department of Education and Recovery School District. Every time a school did not meet its clearly established performance agreement, there was a consequence — usually a charter takeover, though in rare instances outright school closure. And because schools knew they would be held accountable, some school boards opted to close before the state intervened.³²

Resolve and consistency around school accountability need not be an exclusive feature of state-led forms of governance. OPSB will begin to face this test with its school portfolio in the next few years. For New Orleans to continue its academic improvement, the local board must commit to holding schools accountable for performance in the same way the state board has done.

Multiple entry points for school operators — each with a rigorous approval process

RSD and OPSB built multiple pathways for charter school organizations and talented educators to operate schools in the new system. At a high level,

educators could convert district schools to charters, replace operators of low-performing charter schools, or launch fresh-start charters. In the fluid post-Katrina environment, it was important to foster multiple potential sources of effective, autonomous schools. Though most of the activity in the early years was within RSD, OPSB's exit from "crisis" status in 2011 opened yet another avenue for prospective school operators.

Louisiana added automatic renewal and replication provisions for high-performing charters in 2012, and this entry point will grow more significant in New Orleans in the years to come.³³ Inspire-NOLA, which runs an "A" K-8 school and a "B" high school, will be the first to automatically replicate at Andrew Wilson Charter School in the fall of 2015.³⁴

Regardless of pathway, New Orleans maintained high standards for opening new schools, with a third party evaluating each application and making a recommendation to BESE or OPSB.

What are the persistent challenges and remaining work?

Despite strong academic gains, concerns remain about the link between traditional democratic processes and the city's school governance structure.

Direct voter input on every government decision is unrealistic. But what is the appropriate link between the voting public and government action that affects their lives?

Act 35, which expanded RSD's authority to govern most schools in New Orleans, passed the Louisiana House of Representatives 89-14 in November 2005. It passed the State Senate by a 33 to 4 margin.³⁵ Governor Kathleen Blanco, who earned the support of nearly 70 percent of Orleans Parish voters in 2004, signed the bill into law.³⁶ Though dramatic and unprecedented, the intervention was certainly the product of a democratic process.

New Orleans has seen unprecedented academic growth under the current structure. Some might wish that tangible results would ease the perennial American desire for a strong local democratic voice in public education. Legitimate calls for an increased local role in school governance persist. For many, New Orleans' system of public schools seems too disconnected from familiar processes like local school board elections.

This is an unsettling reality in a Southern city that has seen intense, sometimes violent struggles over the right to vote and participate in self-governance. In New Orleans, 85 percent of public school students are black, a group whose claim on civil rights remains tenuous to this day.

Long-term sustainability of New Orleans education reform will require resolving the tension between rapid progress sparked by a state takeover and remaining dissatisfaction from local voices who feel the progress has come at too high a cost.

No consensus on the long-term answer for public school governance

While the bifurcated state of governance has yielded unprecedented academic gains, the current structure for managing New Orleans public schools is untenable in the long term. Wholesale return to an unchecked local board seems equally unpalatable, though. Such a return would reintroduce major risks that have harmed the system in the past: political jostling, inefficiency, patronage, and meddling by special interests. While unlikely, such a system could drift toward government reasserting its role as the monopoly operator of public schools. Those are real threats to student learning. The lessons of the past decade could be lost.

Ultimately, New Orleans will have to build a system of long-term governance that accounts for those risks. The ongoing sustainability of the system's transformation will require a unified system with a more substantive local voice in system governance.

It remains to be seen if OPSB can be that system. Leaders of RSD charter schools have not yet seen consistent leadership and a track record of policy decisions that promote equity.³⁷ In fact, some level

of corruption has persisted.³⁸ The lack of shared vision prevented OPSB from hiring a permanent superintendent for nearly three years.³⁹ Neither major local newspaper endorsed a bill mandating local control within the year.⁴⁰ Most important, public opinion is sharply divided: 44 percent believe schools should return to OPSB governance within the next 5 years, and 44 percent believe that schools should have the right to choose (as in current policy) or not return to OPSB at all.⁴¹

Largely dormant since 2011, creative local efforts to design a new way forward on school governance will need to come to life again.⁴² New Orleans needs an innovative structure to channel public will in ways that support autonomous schools, while also holding them accountable for performance. Local elected officials need the political mandate to implement strong equity policies, including special education, student discipline, and unified enrollment. Local governance should lead careful long-term planning for our decentralized system. And its scope of responsibilities should be clearly outlined to insulate schools from politics and policies that arbitrarily constrain their autonomy.

Collective efforts may not generate consensus on a novel governance structure to meet these principles. In that case, student performance data suggest that New Orleans is better off remaining in the current bifurcated state of governance that has yielded unprecedented academic gains.

In the meantime, RSD and OPSB need to work in tandem—not in parallel silos

As citizens and leaders hash out the governance structure of the future, OPSB and RSD must deepen collaboration in their shared work, especially on:

- *Opening new schools.* If RSD and OPSB operate in parallel silos, new schools will open without thorough analysis of citywide demographic trends and programmatic needs. RSD is opening fewer new schools as the number of low performers in New Orleans subsides. OPSB has already begun to take the lead, though the districts have not formalized a shared understanding of their respective roles in assessing needs, selecting

new operators, and opening new schools. The districts need to anticipate how their roles will evolve as New Orleans' decentralized system of schools matures.

- *Managing facilities.* Nowhere is the need for coordination more apparent than in managing the city's school facilities. OPSB serves as the taxing and bonding authority for the city, but RSD is responsible for a majority of the buildings. In effect, the two districts run dual facilities management offices—an arrangement that legislation and a recent millage vote preserved. As New Orleans nears the end of its historic, federally funded program to rebuild school facilities, resources for additional capital construction will have to be identified from other sources. The two districts will need to coordinate policy and efficient use of limited space to ensure that schools have adequate learning environments.⁴³
- *Charter oversight and accountability.* Operating in tandem, RSD and OPSB could create consistency around standards of financial health, academic performance, and commitment to equity (fair enrollment, special education, and so on).⁴⁴ Thus far, RSD's overall track record on oversight is mixed, with lapses in keeping track of state property and ensuring timely financial reporting by charters.⁴⁵ While RSD moved to sanction Lagniappe Academies when monitoring uncovered egregious special education violations, the behavior had allegedly gone on for years without discovery. On the other hand, as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Charter School debated returning to OPSB control, RSD issued the charter a formal notice of breach of contract for violating enrollment procedure.⁴⁶ Shortly after, the charter became the first to return to OPSB control.⁴⁷

Working more closely together will require OPSB and RSD leadership—as well as leaders of each district's charter organizations—to communicate clear priorities and develop trusting, collaborative relationships. This work is essential to developing governance structures that allow New Orleans public schools to thrive and serve students and families well.

2

Schools

Like urban districts across the country, New Orleans needs more great schools to meet the needs of its student population, one that is overwhelmingly composed of low-income students of color. Unlike other cities, New Orleans will not look to a central district bureaucracy to meet this challenge.

This responsibility is shared by a growing constellation of public charter schools, which serve 9 of 10 public school students. These charter school organizations are tasked with accelerating academic improvement, educating a growing student population, and collectively diversifying the range of school options offered to New Orleans families.

This is a homegrown movement. Of the nearly 90 charters that will operate in 2015–16, only eight have any national affiliation. This is also a movement that gives families real choice. New Orleans parents have an array of options—including International Baccalaureate, arts-focused, language immersion, and blended learning.

Academic performance improved significantly with this transition — particularly among the schools that were once among Louisiana’s lowest-performing campuses. Despite these improvements, too many New Orleans charter schools do not yet adequately prepare all students for college and careers. There is much work to be done.

Numbers to celebrate

19,191

Number of students in New Orleans schools above the 50th percentile statewide, according to SPS. This represents nearly 200% growth since 2009–10, when just 7,774 students attended schools above the state median.

13%

Percentage of New Orleans public school students attending a school in the lowest-performing decile in the state (i.e., SPS at 10th percentile or worse). This is down from 60% in 2004.

1.8

Increase in average ACT score across all public schools citywide since 2005. This catapulted New Orleans to the 46th percentile among Louisiana districts, compared with the 9th percentile in 2005.

Numbers to motivate

18%

Percentage of New Orleans public school students attending a school in top quartile of performance statewide (i.e., SPS at 75th percentile or better), up only marginally over the past decade.

0

Number of RSD schools that have earned an “A” letter grade from the state.

2 of 3

Fraction of New Orleanians who believe that high schools are preparing students for college at a level they describe as either “Fair” (43%) or “Poor” (23%).

What happened?

New Orleans progressed through four phases as it transformed into a predominately charter district. In each stage, charter school organizations evolved to meet the city's needs at that moment.

Below, we outline four “phases” in the development of the New Orleans system. Over the past 10 years, changing local conditions sparked several strategic shifts. It is admittedly an oversimplified history, but one that clarifies the overall trajectory of New Orleans public schools since 2005.⁴⁸

Phase 0: Conversion of existing district schools to charters

Today, about 40 percent of New Orleans' public school students either attend charter schools that opened prior to Hurricane Katrina or attend schools that reopened in the immediate aftermath of the storm as charters.⁴⁹ By itself, this level of enrollment would put New Orleans near the top of the nation in the share of students attending a public charter school. We call this Phase 0 — setting it apart from Phase 1, which starts with the launch of the first new schools in the recovery.

After the storm, city leaders, school board members, and state education officials questioned the feasibility and safety of getting the district up and running to serve returning students.⁵⁰ Charter conversions enabled individual schools to serve students before the district as a whole was ready to open its doors. This wave of charter school creation took a variety of forms:

- Former NOPS schools, particularly those with selective admissions criteria, were eager to take advantage of the autonomy and flexibility of going charter. These include Benjamin Franklin High School, Lusher, Lake Forest, and Audubon.⁵¹
- Schools that were deeply rooted in a specific area of New Orleans opened as charter schools to serve the kids of their neighborhood. These include Dr. M.L.K. Charter School for Science and Technology in Lower 9th Ward, Algiers Charter

School Association on the West Bank, and Edward Hynes in Lakeview.

- Pre-Katrina RSD charter schools began serving students again as soon as facilities and teachers were available. These include Sophie B. Wright, James M. Singleton, Samuel J. Green, among others.⁵²

By October 2006, a total of 50 schools had reopened in New Orleans.⁵³ OPSB directly operated four and oversaw 12 charters. In RSD, 17 schools of each type served students, totaling 34 under state authority. These early charter conversions have formed a core part of the system over the past decade.

DISTRICT-OPERATED SCHOOLS IN NEW ORLEANS

The transition to a system of predominately charter schools did not happen overnight.

Families and students returned to the city erratically and at a surprisingly fast rate. Fledgling nonprofits were not equipped to lead the city in designing programming, setting budgets, and hiring teachers for an unknown number of students. And although BESE's first charter application round following the storm attracted many educators hoping to launch new schools, fewer than 1 in 5 applications made it through the state board's stringent authorization process.⁵⁴

RSD operated schools because no other entity—including OPSB and the set of emerging charter organizations—could muster the resources to open enough schools to serve returning families. At its peak in 2008–09, RSD ran more than 30 schools and served more than 12,000 students. Few were strong academically. By the fall of 2014, RSD had fully withdrawn from directly running schools.

OPSB now operates six schools as a small traditional district. Shortly after becoming OPSB superintendent, Dr. Henderson Lewis Jr. gave a presentation titled “Establishing New Orleans Parish Schools as the Premier Portfolio School District in the Nation” in which he rebranded these six as Network Schools.⁵⁵ With a total enrollment of 3,300 students, this cluster is smaller than three local charter management organizations.⁵⁶ One of Superintendent Lewis' first initiatives focused on shrinking the central office to push more dollars and operational control to these school sites.⁵⁷

Phase 1: Incubation of new open-enrollment charter schools (2007–10)

Even though system leaders — including RSD Superintendent Paul Vallas and State Superintendent Paul Pastorek — endorsed a charter strategy for New Orleans, putting theory into practice proved challenging. In 2006, the city had few quality open-enrollment schools. Fewer still were high-performing networks with the capacity to train new leaders and launch additional schools.⁵⁸ The city needed more educators and organizations with the expertise and thoughtful planning to meet a high bar for charter authorization.

Phase 1 consisted primarily of various initiatives to incubate new schools. New Schools for New Orleans, Building Excellent Schools (BES), and others attracted a diverse mix of local and national educators to plan and open new charter schools. New Leaders for New Schools placed principals in other schools in the city. These schools filled an essential citywide need: additional school options without academic requirements or neighborhood-based admissions.

Several new start-ups from this phase, including Sci Academy, the flagship school of the Collegiate Academies network, performed well, expanded, and have become strong academic options for New Orleans families.⁵⁹

On the whole, though, incubation efforts produced mixed results. Between 2007 and 2009 NSNO incubated nine stand-alone charter schools in RSD. Academic performance varied considerably — including four that no longer operate due to low academic quality.⁶⁰

Start-up organizations that met the demanding standards — such as offering strong academic programs with no admissions criteria, providing well-developed special education services, soundly managing public funds — were positioned for future success. Their early performance indicated that they would be able to provide a quality education to more students. Beginning in fall 2009, New Orleans' strategy moved to support their expansion.

Phase 2: Charter school restarts and growth of charter networks (2010–14)

The growth of multi-school organizations, known as charter management organizations (CMOs), defined the second phase of the evolution of the New Orleans system. Using 2009–10 as a baseline, the percentage of New Orleans students attending schools in a CMO increased from 21 percent to 57 percent by 2014–15. CMOs grew rapidly as they reinvigorated underperforming schools — primarily schools operated directly by RSD but also low-performing charters.

Existing charter school organizations that were already operating one or more promising schools in New Orleans led most of the “restarts” — New Orleans' strategy maximized the impact of these organizations by turning over the reins of low-performing schools to them.⁶¹

It was also intended to be straightforward for families: Rather than close a failing school, “restart” kept students in the building with a high-performing charter network in charge. In the fall of 2010, NSNO and RSD were awarded a \$28 million Investing in Innovation (i3) grant from the U.S. Department of Education, accelerating the growth of CMOs by funding these charter restarts and building the structures to annually replace low-performing schools with more effective options (see “Replication as Innovation” on page 28). An emerging body of academic research indicates that the strategy improved academic outcomes for students.⁶²

Each spring from 2010–14, RSD intervened in about eight low-quality schools, including its own direct-run schools and underperforming charters up for renewal. In most instances, RSD assigned a local, high-performing charter operator to restart the school. If an effective principal with strong community support led a direct-run RSD school, RSD empowered the school to form a nonprofit and continue running as a charter school (see “Self-Charter Strategy”, page 27). In other cases, RSD decided that outright closure would allow students to move into higher-performing schools more quickly. By the start of the 2014–15 school year, RSD no longer operated any direct-run schools.

“SELF-CHARTER” STRATEGY

*Reflections by Kelly S. Batiste, Principal,
Fannie C. Williams Charter School*

Are you from New Orleans? Where did you go to school?

I was born and raised in New Orleans. I attended public schools and graduated from McDonogh #35 Senior High School. I received a Bachelor of Arts degree from Spelman College and a Master’s from the University of New Orleans.

How long have you been in education?

This is my 19th year in education. Both of my parents were educators and several family members are educators in the city. I also worked as a teacher, staff developer, and assistant principal before becoming a principal.

How long have you been at Fannie C. Williams?

The 2015–2016 school year will be my ninth year at Fannie C. Williams.

Why did you decide to pursue a charter?

Having worked in public education my entire career, I experienced the advantages and disadvantages of working in a traditional public school. As the post-Katrina education landscape began to take shape, I believed it was necessary to engage in what would ultimately be the best for the students in my community. I wanted the opportunity to continue the work I had started, with autonomy to make decisions in a more timely manner—decisions about curriculum, staff, professional development, teacher/student ratio, budgets, salaries, TRSL, union, etc. It was not an easy decision to reach. However, after much thought and consideration, I understood it was necessary.

Who provided support to facilitate the process?

I received support from various sources. My family was very instrumental in assisting and supporting me through the process. I also had the support of the community, staff, students, and parents at Fannie C.

Williams. NSNO was a tremendous resource in guiding me through the process as well as RSD staff.

How has running Fannie C. Williams changed since you became a charter?

The commitment, hard work, and collaboration remain the same. I’ve found that running a charter requires that I expand my scope of work to stay on top of all aspects of operating a school—finances, facilities, etc. The responsibility is greater, but the rewards are worth it.

What’s been the reaction from your school community (parents, teachers, and so on) to the school being a charter as opposed to “direct-run”?

The school community has had very little reaction because we worked to ensure that our stakeholders received the same level of excellence and service that they expected from the “direct-run” FCW. Many parents just expect the school to provide the best for their children and so they don’t really feel the transition. The system of schools in the city can be confusing to some parents and community members. We try to provide them with a sense of normalcy as it relates to what a school should provide. Parents, staff, and community leaders were involved in the decision to apply for a charter. They were all in favor.

Overall, what are you most proud of at Fannie C. Williams? What are you still working on?

I am most proud that the transition to a charter school has been a smooth one. We have created a safe, positive environment conducive to learning and growing for both the students and staff. I’ve heard often that single-site charters are difficult to maintain. I’m proud that we’ve been able to sustain the school thus far. We are still working to ensure that all students are achieving academic success at a rate that aligns to the state’s rising standards and measures of success.

REPLICATION AS INNOVATION: FEDERAL i3 SUPPORT FOR CHARTER RESTARTS IN NEW ORLEANS AND TENNESSEE

For those working to improve public schools, this statement is a Rorschach test: “In public education, some degree of failure is inevitable. Not all organizations that exist to provide students with instruction and support will do a great job—or even an adequate job. We should take this fact of life into account when determining the structure of the public school system in our city.

Some find the approach cynical; others see cautious, strategic thinking.

Through the U.S. Department of Education’s Investing in Innovation (i3) program, NSNO had the opportunity to support the development of two public school systems: RSD and Tennessee’s Achievement School District (ASD).⁶³ Both are organized around the difficult reality that running excellent open-enrollment public schools in urban areas is extremely hard work. They anticipate that some organizations will plan, hire, or execute poorly. The districts take the need for full-school turnaround as a given.

Federal i3 resources — alongside matched funding from private philanthropy — allowed RSD and ASD to build a lasting infrastructure to support necessary school turnaround work. Funding supported personnel to build out district portfolio management processes. i3 also provided substantial grants to top-performing charter schools to take on the challenge of turnaround when needed, as well as rigorous quantitative evaluation from Stanford’s Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO).

In fall 2015, the final i3-supported school will open in New Orleans: InspireNOLA’s restart of Andrew H. Wilson Charter School in the Broadmoor neighborhood. In total, i3 funding and the philanthropic match will have supported the launch of 13 charter schools in the city — as well as 12 in Memphis and Nashville.

CREDO will release a full evaluation of the project in late 2017.

Turnaround schools faced a variety of challenges — particularly in the initial year. Not all school models proved ready to scale up. Hiring and developing staff for an entire school in the first year proved more difficult than building a school one grade at a time. When a unique and dynamic leader drove the success of the original school, the model did not replicate effectively without strong systems and organizational supports. Several organizations anticipated developing economies of scale in providing academic and operational support. But these efficiencies were elusive. CREDO’s 2013 report on New Orleans’ restart initiative summed up the frustration of many, observing that the “pipeline of qualified operators and CMOs ready and willing

to conduct turnarounds was leaner than initially envisioned.”⁶⁴

The restart process improved over time, but initial efforts suffered a range of implementation problems. Transitions from outgoing to incoming management were often inefficient and compromised school performance and community support. Student records were not adequately maintained and shared, communication with school staff and families was insufficient, and the student enrollment system before EnrollNOLA did not facilitate efficient and informed school choice. While the intent of restarts was for most students to remain at the restart school even as the adults transitioned, many students left. A high transfer

rate out of some restart schools had a ripple effect across the district.

Despite these challenges, the charter restart strategy has been a nearly unqualified success. Of the 19 charter restarts in New Orleans since 2010, 17 schools outperform the schools they replaced.⁶⁵ And research shows that these schools are producing better results for their students.⁶⁶ The restart strategy ultimately led to a dramatic reduction in the number of failing schools in New Orleans. The restart method will remain an important lever to address under-performing schools.

Phase 3: Innovation and further diversification

The direction of charter school growth has continued to evolve. The New Orleans' charter restart strategy has surely crested, though some low-performing schools in both RSD and OPSB will likely be replaced as the state accountability system demands ever-stronger academic growth.⁶⁷

As the portfolio of schools stabilizes, both existing CMOs and new organizations are poised to try out new approaches to push academic performance higher. For example, FirstLine Schools and KIPP offer the city's most advanced, innovative blended learning programs, using their scale to create space to rethink how to best support student learning.

Much-celebrated Bricolage Academy is an archetype among new organizations.⁶⁸ The founder is a former teacher at a KIPP school; the academic head worked at selective-admissions Lusher Charter School for over a decade. The student body is socio-economically and racially diverse. The instructional approach is grounded in innovation, creative problem solving, and design thinking.⁶⁹

Bricolage opened in fall 2013 under OPSB oversight — one of the local district's first new charters after it regained the authority to authorize new charter schools. OPSB has set forth clear priorities each year when accepting charter applications, with a specific focus on increasing programmatic diversity from which parents can choose.

A growing student population in New Orleans benefits from this work — including an increasing number of middle-class families who are explor-

ing public school options for the first time in generations.⁷⁰ Bringing different approaches to the challenge of creating an excellent, autonomous public school remains a key goal of the New Orleans system.

Why is it important?

Our city's academic turnaround calls into question the country's default way of delivering public education. Centrally controlled school districts may not be the *best* — and certainly now are not the *only* — possible approach. In urban communities, national data demonstrate that, on average, charter schools generate more student academic growth than traditional district schools.⁷¹ New Orleans provides early evidence that this strategy can scale up across an entire city. Autonomous, nonprofit charter school organizations are at the heart of New Orleans' success over the past decade.

In any public school system, the values and priorities of the school operators reverberate across each component of the system. This is true in a traditional district and in a decentralized system. In New Orleans, each of the nearly 50 nonprofits running schools offers a vision for how talented educators should be recruited and developed. They envision how the system should pursue excellence and equitable access for students. They propose how families and communities should be given meaningful ways to be involved in their schools. None of the individual visions aligns perfectly to the vision of all New Orleans families — and none needs to. This diversity makes the system more resilient and better able to respond to family demand.

What the system lacks in centralized coordination of services and supports, it makes up for in autonomy and structural incentives to improve academic performance and respond to students' diverse instructional needs. New Orleans' decentralized system of charter schools has faltered on occasion, but on the whole has nimbly responded to an evolving student population, while innovating around instructional approaches and filling portfolio needs.

What were the successes?

Across-the-board increases in academic performance remain New Orleans' crowning achievement. The city's strategy to allow autonomous nonprofits to run quality public schools laid the foundation for that success. Several bright spots warrant mention:

Diversity of school models and programming gives families real school choice

For families to have real choice, public schools need to offer diverse academic models and extracurricular programming. New Orleans has made tremendous progress on this front.⁷²

Research by the Tulane-affiliated Education Research Alliance indicates that no school model dominates in New Orleans.⁷³ We especially see this in high schools, where the diversity of school models exceeds that of most other cities.⁷⁴

By the broadest possible definition, at most, 35 percent of students in New Orleans attend what could possibly be called “No Excuses” charter schools.⁷⁵ Within that category lies a tremendous variety of instructional programs and approaches to school culture.⁷⁶ A KIPP school looks and feels different than a New Orleans College Prep school, which looks and feels different than a Crescent City Schools campus. One of the schools labeled as “No Excuses” for the purpose of this exercise is ReNEW Cultural Arts Academy (RCAA). RCAA was named one of eight “Turnaround Arts” schools nationwide, and received support from the Obama administration and private partners to make arts instruction a pillar of academic turnaround work.⁷⁷ Also included is FirstLine Schools, a CMO best known nationally for its Edible Schoolyards (school gardens) and sophisticated teaching kitchens.⁷⁸

Beyond this group, the list goes on: Morris Jeff has Louisiana's only K–8 International Baccalaureate (IB) Program.⁷⁹ Landry-Walker and Edna Karr high schools boast championship-winning sports teams and marching bands.⁸⁰ Blended-learning programs are on the rise in New Orleans — with a

NSNO'S ROLE IN THE SYSTEM

In spring 2006, a group of local education advocates gathered in a classroom at Samuel L. Green Charter School, pledging to rebuild New Orleans' public schools stronger than they had ever been. Founder Sarah Usdin took the lead on launching New Schools for New Orleans (NSNO), to ensure that all students had an excellent public school to attend.

The ever-changing environment required NSNO to stay flexible from the outset. Early on, NSNO took risks on promising entrepreneurs to incubate new charter schools, and funded nonprofits to recruit and support great educators. As the system grew more stable, NSNO increased the direct technical support it offered to partner schools—including highly regarded school quality reviews that convened principals from across the city to observe and give targeted feedback to the leadership of a single school.

Over the past nine years, NSNO has learned alongside its partners in the city. Some schools that incubated and received start-up funding from NSNO have closed or been absorbed into strong CMOs. Partnership with RSD on issues of equity came into focus after RSD reduced its role in school operations and empowered charter school organizations to be “the system.”

Today the organization focuses on two key strategies: investing in the launch of new effective schools for New Orleans families and supporting high-potential schools to get better quickly. It often plays the role of communicating the New Orleans education story to a broader audience as well. Nearly a decade into its work, NSNO remains deeply committed to working for excellent schools for all students in New Orleans.

rapidly increasing number of charter schools embedding technology into daily instruction.⁸¹

All RSD schools — and most OPSB schools — provide free transportation and enroll all students through EnrollNOLA, the city’s unified student enrollment system. These are powerful mechanisms for providing parents and students with options. New Orleans must continue to make progress on both growing a diverse portfolio of schools and increasing access to all schools in the city.

Homegrown, nonprofit charters make up the vast majority of schools in New Orleans

What organizations run public schools in New Orleans? Who is fueling the city’s academic turnaround?

The school system in New Orleans is almost completely operated by nonprofit organizations. The percentage of New Orleans charter boards choosing to contract with for-profit firms to manage day-to-day school operations never topped 10 percent, and has virtually disappeared in recent years. Crescent Leadership Academy, a small alternative school serving fewer than 200 students, is the only remaining example of for-profit management.⁸²

Misperceptions linger about national groups hijacking New Orleans’ schools. But it was experienced, high-performing public school educators who led the initial wave of charter conversions that currently serve 40 percent of all public school students. A later wave of conversions from district-run school to charter school followed — with a series of strong principals in RSD developing charter applications, building up their boards, and launching their own nonprofits. KIPP is the only CMO serving students in the city that has any affiliation with schools outside of New Orleans. The leadership and board of KIPP New Orleans have been serving families in New Orleans since 2005. The network consistently ranks among the highest-performing charter school operators.



Restart strategy helped New Orleans nearly eliminate failing schools

The use of charter schools to restart low-performing schools achieved the overriding objective of eliminating failing schools in New Orleans. The vast majority of school districts nationwide adopt incremental changes to address persistently failing schools. New Orleans’ restart strategy proved to be a swift and largely successful remedy.

Just over one in 10 students in New Orleans attends a school ranked in the lowest decile statewide — a figure down from six in 10 in 2004.⁸³

The scale and pace of this effort undoubtedly frustrated families who value stability and their established personal connections to teachers and administrators. They also jarred community members who had affiliations with schools for decades prior to Katrina. Restarts disrupt these relationships, and families were not always provided a formal mechanism to participate in the selection of a new school operator.

However, opinion polls demonstrate broad public support for restarts as an effective strategy for improving student performance. A 2015 poll by the Cowen Institute and *The New Orleans Advocate* found New Orleanians favor by a 3-to-1 margin RSD’s

current policy of restarting schools that are persistently rated “D” in the state letter-grade system.⁸⁴

After mostly eliminating the presence of failing schools in New Orleans, the next challenge will be to tackle schools that cannot break out of the bottom third in statewide performance — roughly what a “D” letter grade signifies. These schools can often be warm and orderly, but their academic achievement lags. Notwithstanding the challenges brought on by frequent use of a charter restart strategy, the demand for continued improvement appears to exist among both system leaders and the wider public in New Orleans.

Charter schools and authorizers collaborate constructively

New Orleans’ governance structure demands deeper collaboration between policymakers and school operators. Authorizing districts must be deliberate about outreach and engagement on questions of policy. Charter leaders must carefully monitor how proposed policies will affect their school. Principals must balance the dual imperatives of maintaining their autonomy and participating in the creation of systemwide structures that make public schools fair and transparent for all families.

The need to develop a wide array of policies put authorizer-operator collaboration to the test over the past decade. In particular, the equity-focused reforms discussed in Chapter 4 required sustained coordination between OPSB, RSD, and school operators.

The system responded well. With considerable input from schools, RSD took the lead on establishing systems for unified enrollment, centralized student expulsion, and differentiated funding for special education. Not every charter operator supports EnrollNOLA or the other changes. But government leaders get credit from operators for offering them meaningful say in the development of key citywide systems.

OPSB demonstrated its capacity to collaborate in 2014 when it revised its framework for evaluating charter school performance. Multiple rounds of input from charter school organizations generated buy-in across the district’s wide range of charters.

In summer 2015, as OPSB Superintendent Henderson Lewis Jr. began to articulate his vision for New Orleans, RSD charters stepped up again. They provided detailed insight into RSD policies that support their success as open-enrollment public schools — and in conversations with the new superintendent, encouraged him to lead OPSB in this direction as well.

Traditional districts offer a useful counterpoint. The district’s desire to implement system-wide priorities often interferes with educators focused on day-to-day school operations and student and staff needs. This pattern can alienate great educators and reduce their personal and professional investment in the system. New Orleans has turned this pattern on its head.

What are the persistent challenges and remaining work?

The strategies that have propelled New Orleans over the past decade may not be optimal in the next decade. Restarting low-quality schools with high-performing charter operators helped to move the city from an “F” grade to a “C” in terms of academic quality. But if “C” charter networks continue to replicate and expand, New Orleans’ public school system will never become excellent. Incremental improvements may not always justify the disruption associated with a restart. And the existing strategies have created only a few excellent open-enrollment high schools — a persistent nationwide gap that New Orleans’ portfolio strategy has not fully solved. With regard to charter schools, three persistent challenges remain:

New Orleans needs more exceptional charter operators to emerge out of the current school portfolio

District leaders, school operators, and local stakeholders must determine what resources and supports will help both new and established charter operators

to consistently produce the “A” and “B” schools New Orleans expects. Other sections of this report address components of this work, but the challenge bears repeating. The New Orleans system has only produced pockets of truly exceptional academic performance thus far — not citywide excellence. For example, no RSD school earned an “A” on the state’s grading system in the first decade of reform.

In many ways the onus is now on individual charter networks to innovate and continually improve their schools. Others have roles: Government can spur improvements by setting a high bar for school accountability and ensuring equitable operating conditions for schools. Local and national nonprofits can provide resources, coaching, and clear feedback on performance. Parents and community organizations can contribute in myriad ways, including many that remained untapped so far.

But school operators have to stitch these pieces together to build schools that recruit, develop, and retain great educators to support student learning. This remains a pressing challenge that will be best met by local educators who continuously improve and innovate within the existing framework of autonomous schools.

New Orleans needs to cultivate great organizations to restart remaining low-performing schools

Successful execution of the charter restart strategy requires a bench of proven, high-quality charter school organizations with the capacity and will to implement school turnarounds. New Orleans simply did not have enough to meet demand in the initial years. Even experienced, high-performing CMOs found it very difficult to effectively plan and execute restarts — especially when the new operator took over all grades simultaneously.

In order for restarts to remain a viable mechanism for replacing underperforming schools in an environment of rising accountability standards, New Orleans needs a deeper bench of capable operators that can deliver an exceptional school leader *and* a replication model that includes explicit systems for curriculum, staffing, school culture, and academic interventions.⁸⁵

New Orleans needs to balance replication with innovation

The replication strategy helps to build networks with sufficient scale to be financially and operationally sustainable. While networks have become engines of innovation in New Orleans, the city must ensure that the growth of CMOs is not achieved at the expense of new school models that better meet the educational needs of the city’s students.

Room to innovate means room to try new instructional strategies and create excellent choices for specific student populations — for example, cultivating great programs to serve pre-K students, incarcerated youth, and adults.

As successful charter networks increase their stature with parents, community groups, and civic leaders, they may try to assert themselves and push to replicate their proven school models across the city.⁸⁶ This would ultimately constrain the innovation needed to push the system toward excellence.

New Orleans has several CMOs that likely each need an additional two or three schools to reach long-term financial sustainability. Financial pressures will increase as New Orleans exhausts federal facilities funds and new schools have less access to free facilities.

Striking the right balance between innovation and replication is hard, and New Orleans will wrestle with the question over the next decade.

SUPPORTING SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

New Orleans has created a strong nonprofit community that provides talent development services to schools to help them improve. (See Chapter 3, Talent)

In addition, NSNO also offers a wide range of direct supports and coaching to charter schools. (See Chapter 6, Funders)

3

Talent

Educators in New Orleans practice their craft in a unique environment.

Most notably, teachers and principals are empowered to choose the school that aligns to their own vision for public education. New Orleans operates free from the constraints of system-wide collective bargaining. Rather than assignment through the central office, educators select a school based on the mission, values, instructional approach, and professional environment that offers the best fit for them.

Government holds these autonomous schools accountable for their academic results. In doing so, the system creates incentives for principals to recruit teachers from university or alternative programs that deliver strong educators. Schools must provide compelling professional growth opportunities and retain the most effective, aligned educators—or academic performance will decline. This structure has allowed New Orleans educators to lead an academic transformation in the city.

No single source of teachers has had a monopoly over the past decade—and growing citywide enrollment suggests that demand for teachers among New Orleans public schools will continue to increase. As efforts to grow residency programs embedded in charter school organizations build momentum, New Orleans has the opportunity to transform how teachers are prepared in this country, while tapping more novice educators with local roots to come into the profession.

Numbers to celebrate

35%

Percentage of New Orleans teachers who generated student academic growth that placed them in the top 20% of teachers statewide, per state Compass data for 2013 and 2014.⁸⁷

50

Approximate number of public school employers in New Orleans, allowing teachers to find a professional environment that works for them.

>40%

Percentage of incoming Teach For America and teachNOLA educators in 2014 who identify as people of color, making the programs the largest pipelines of teachers of color in New Orleans.

Numbers to motivate

50%

Percentage of New Orleans public school teachers identifying as black. This is down from 72% in 2004, and compares to 85% of public school students in the city.

900

NSNO's estimate for number of annual teacher vacancies citywide by 2020. As more families enroll in public schools in New Orleans, schools must have access to pipelines of effective, diverse teachers.

36%

Of the 350 first-year teachers that began their career in New Orleans public schools in fall 2009, just 127, or 36%, were still teaching at the end of the 2013–14 academic year.⁸⁸

What happened?

New Orleans schools are fixated on talent. Structural reform provides incentives to think constantly about the satisfaction and performance of educators — exactly where attention must lie in order to improve academic performance.

Traditional urban districts rarely deliver on their promise to create professional environments that allow teachers and principals to thrive. Responsibility for doing so is too diffuse, accountability too rare, and collective bargaining agreements too cumbersome. The system ties the hands of principals and teachers in ways that don't support student achievement. Student learning suffers as a result.

Before Katrina, NOPS faced all these challenges and more. New Orleans has since forged a new strategy around educator talent.

The new paradigm goes hand-in-hand with putting responsibility on autonomous schools to perform academically. In a system that consistently holds schools accountable for performance, charter school organizations feel a pressing need to attract and retain the best talent. And since public funding flows directly to the school site, principals have resources at their disposal to build exceptional professional environments (see “Services and Support in RSD and OPSB,” page 20).

Because nearly all New Orleans educators are at-will employees, schools have autonomy to act decisively. When teachers do not generate strong academic results despite coaching and support — or are not a good fit with the school's culture — the school can let them go.

On the flip side, schools are constrained by a competitive labor market. All educators can choose between nearly 50 employers that manage schools. In New Orleans' dynamic new labor market, teachers and schools court each other, seeking compatible missions, values, and instructional approaches. Operators risk losing out on top educators if they do not create work environments focused on the success and well-being of teachers.⁸⁹ In the long run, schools that develop their teachers' skills and offer

compelling career progressions will thrive. Those that don't meet this challenge will struggle, as great teachers are at the heart of any effective school.

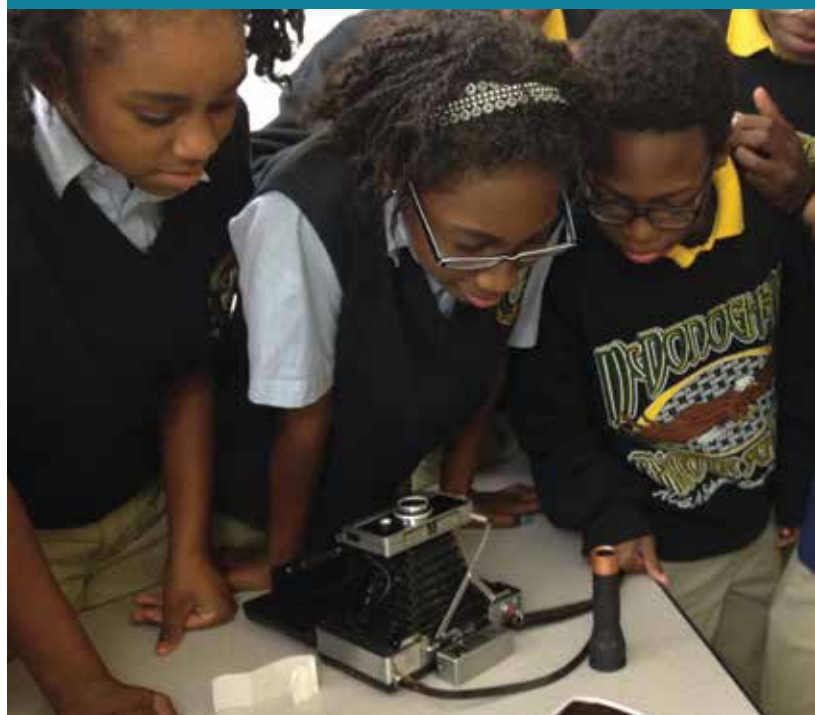
This structure creates a cycle of continuous improvement among New Orleans educators. As we discuss below, it also builds demand for professional development opportunities that actually improve practice and increase expertise — as well as those that reduce the workload for educators stretched thin by the challenges of working in a high-needs public school.

For many educators, New Orleans' new approach opened exciting options for employment and advancement. It balanced meaningful work, job security, and the potential for growth. For others, the system forced them out of their comfort zone, or even seemed antithetical to how public schools should function.

What's undeniable is that these strategies are paying dividends in terms of student performance.

We've entered a new era for the teaching profession in New Orleans.

See “Student Performance in New Orleans” (page 10) for an overview of the impact of New Orleans educators over the past decade.



THE NEW ORLEANS TALENT PARADOX

There is no obvious correlation between a New Orleans school's use of teachers from alternative pipelines and its success. Veteran staffs have led some of the top-performing schools in the city—and some of the first charter school closures. Alternative pipelines like Teach For America and teachNOLA have a similar track record, as have schools that intentionally sought to blend “old” and “new.”

In New Orleans, what matters are not the decisions made at the outset about school design and strategy. What matters is execution. The school accountability process looks only to results, not to fidelity at implementing a predetermined school model.

This prioritization can confound outside observers. Where are the pitched battles about hiring preference, tenure, and the role of test scores in educator evaluation? Why aren't New Orleans reformers in a full-blown panic about an uptick in unionization in the city's schools?

As long as RSD continues to rigorously evaluate schools and act decisively when low performance persists—and as long as OPSB follows suit in the coming years—schools are encouraged to approach their challenge in a variety of ways. In districts across the country, we've seen a central body decide from the outset the “one best way” to do school. It has not served kids and communities well.

Pluralism is an asset of New Orleans' decentralized system. The system is agnostic on school design and talent strategy—and intensely focused on the student learning that public schools generate.



A decade of this work has changed how New Orleans teachers are identified, hired, and given support to improve

New Orleans gave schools autonomy and began to hold them accountable for performance. The incentives and responsibilities seemed to be aligned. In theory, the decentralized system was poised to generate conditions where talented educators could build cohesive schools and grow professionally.

In practice, a glaring problem remained: most educators living within the boundaries of the parish lost their homes to flooding and were scattered across the country. OPSB laid off its entire educator workforce. No one knew how many students would return to the system or when.⁹⁰

In 2006 and 2007, teachers who had previously worked in the Orleans Parish system constituted more than 75 percent of the educator workforce—including nearly 90 percent of teachers in schools operated by RSD.⁹¹ But as student enrollment rebounded faster than expected, there were not enough teachers to staff schools.⁹² RSD and OPSB, as well as charter networks and nonprofits such as New Leaders for New Schools, advertised in Houston, Atlanta, and other cities to encourage veteran educators to return to New Orleans classrooms.



“I want to urge teachers from across our country to consider building [their] careers here.”

— First Lady Laura Bush, April 2007⁹⁵

“Many heroic, high-quality teachers have returned to New Orleans — but we need more. That is why I have called for \$250 million to bring quality teachers back to the Gulf region. Any teacher or principal who commits to come here for three years should receive an annual bonus.”

— Senator Barack Obama, February 2008⁹⁶

Despite uncertain conditions and skyrocketing housing costs, these efforts succeeded to some degree. Of the 1,319 public school teachers in New Orleans in spring 2007, nearly 1,000 had taught in OPSB schools before the storm. Over the next year the number increased to 1,469, as hundreds of veteran teachers were hired to serve a rapidly growing student population.⁹³

Democrats and Republicans also called on educators nationwide to consider moving to New Orleans to teach. Federal funds supported a media campaign to attract more teachers to the city by running ads and offering relocation incentives and housing subsidies.⁹⁴

To supplement veteran educators who had already returned to New Orleans, alternative teacher pipelines stepped up to answer the urgent call for more teachers. Groups including teachNOLA and Teach For America could scale up quickly to fill an immediate need — certainly faster than federal aid could flow to rebuild colleges with physical campuses, sizable faculties, and programs that spanned four or five years. TeachNOLA also tapped national networks of experienced educators to move to New Orleans and teach in public schools. In bringing

large cohorts of mission-driven teachers to fill the gap in New Orleans, these teacher pipelines played an integral role in stabilizing the schools.

By the 2008–09 school year, the shortage had become a surplus. RSD received far more applications than it had open positions.⁹⁷ TeachNOLA had nearly 2,500 prospects for about 100 slots. Teach For America brought in almost 250 new educators that fall — nearly one corps member for every 150 public school students enrolled at the time.⁹⁸

TFA’s numbers have dropped considerably from that peak: The organization’s latest cohort was around 100 new teachers, or one for every 450 students. But there has been a steady inflow of teachers through teachNOLA and TFA since 2008.⁹⁹

Until 2013, the Board of Regents conducted value-added analysis of all of Louisiana’s teacher preparation programs. TFA and teachNOLA educators ranked among the top-performing novice teachers in the state — with particular strength in math and English language arts.¹⁰⁰ Even as university-based programs ramped back up to size, New Orleans principals chose to maintain alternative certification programs as a key hiring pipeline to meet the ongoing need for effective teachers.

UNTOLD STORY: VETERAN NOPS TEACHERS CONTINUING THEIR SERVICE

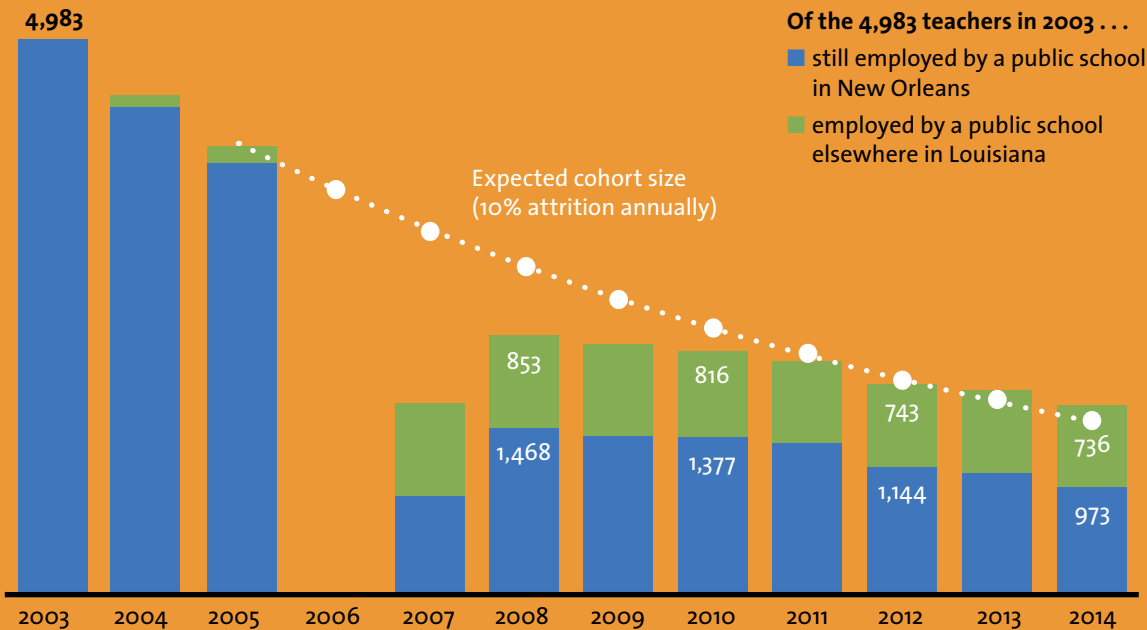
The Education Research Alliance for New Orleans analyzed state personnel files to determine the career path of educators who made up the NOPS teaching force in 2002–03.

Though not all of the city’s educators found a place in New Orleans’ decentralized system of schools, many did. And nearly 1,000 others returned to the classroom or took an administrative role in parishes elsewhere in Louisiana.

Since educators leave the classroom each year for a variety of personal and professional reasons, it’s useful to compare the actual number of veteran teachers continuing their service to the expected cohort size after normal attrition. Approximately 10 percent of

the teaching workforce left in both 2004 and 2005; the dashed white line in the chart extrapolates that rate into future years. By 2011, Louisiana public school employment among the 2003 NOPS teaching force had basically returned to the scale one would expect.

Veteran educators felt disrespected when OPSB, handcuffed by financial constraints in a near-empty city, released its entire teaching workforce. Fortunately, as the system recovered, schools across Louisiana began to put these educators’ expertise to use once again. No longer left stranded in the classroom by an unsupportive system, these individuals are in a position to help shape the future of education in New Orleans and elsewhere.



On the professional development side, the basic outline of the story is the same: Schools have full autonomy to partner with talent development organizations that meet the needs of their educators. Sustained philanthropic and federal support has helped New Orleans build a strong nonprofit ecosys-

tem that identifies and trains talented educators. This ecosystem gives more options to schools and teachers, and the organizations that have emerged vary greatly. For example, Relay Graduate School of Education was born out of several large charter networks in New York City.¹⁰¹ The School Leadership

Center of Greater New Orleans, founded in 1997, is staffed by NOPS veterans and traditionally trained educators.¹⁰² Others fall somewhere in between.¹⁰³

The opt-in nature of these partnerships is essential. Unlike traditional districts, New Orleans has no monopoly “buyer” of talent sourcing and development services. When the district office selects and manages these outside partnerships, the end users (schools and teachers) have little meaningful say into what support would help their school. In New Orleans, organizations must demonstrate their value to schools and frontline educators or risk becoming obsolete.¹⁰⁴ There is a competitive market for providing talent services.

New Orleans’ teacher workforce has experienced a demographic shift with more white teachers and novice teachers entering the classroom

The demographic makeup of the New Orleans teaching force is among the most contentious topics of the past decade. We want to be clear about why it’s important to face this question squarely — and why some argue that the discussion is distracting to the real work.

The evidence that links such teacher characteristics as demographics to student achievement is mixed, and overall there seems to be only a weak relationship between the two in research studies.¹⁰⁵ In a results-focused system, why dwell on a factor that appears peripheral to student learning?

In short, history and context matter. It was a difficult emotional and financial blow for 7,500 NOPS employees when the local district placed them on “disaster leave without pay” and then terminated their contracts in November 2005. A decade has passed, the state and federal judicial processes have ruled that the decision was legal, and OPSB has stabilized. But the wounds that educators felt in losing their jobs in the midst of a disaster are still fresh.

Today’s educator profile in New Orleans has moved closer to other urban districts and to Louisiana as a whole. The city continues to benefit from those with experience in the system, but a larger percentage of teachers are in their early years in the profession. The percentage of black teachers

TABLE 3. Teachers in New Orleans¹⁰⁶

	2004	2009	2014
Number of teachers	5,039	2,819	3,232
Percentage who are black	72%	56%	50%
Percentage with 5 years or fewer of teaching experience	33%	48%	55%
Percentage who earned a bachelor’s degree from a university outside Louisiana	20%	35%	45%

In 2003, Brenda Mitchell, head of United Teachers of New Orleans (UTNO), lamented the district’s inability to attract talented novice educators.

“[NOPS employs] only 10 teachers that are 22 years old. Ten. We’re not getting them in here.”¹⁰⁷



has fallen from 71 percent in 2004 to 50 percent in 2013.

Some blame alternative pipelines for the decline in teachers of color in New Orleans. It’s useful to consider other key sources of new educators — namely, university-based schools of education.

UNSTOPPABLE FORCE, IMMOVABLE OBJECT

It has been a fact of life for the past 10 years: The teachers whom New Orleans students encounter today bring to the classroom a wider range of backgrounds than before 2005. As one measure of this diversity, the percentage of classroom teachers that earned their bachelor's degree outside of Louisiana has more than doubled since 2004 (20 percent versus 45 percent, according to the Education Research Alliance for New Orleans).¹⁰⁸

Other parts of New Orleans experienced a comparable shift. A surge in talented, eager professionals entered many fields — government, health, criminal justice, and across the private sector. The number of applications to Tulane University doubled between 2004 and 2010.¹⁰⁹ New Orleans was ranked #1 on Forbes' "America's New Brainpower Cities," and the #2 "Most Aspirational City."¹¹⁰

And perhaps most important: Any change is more noticeable here. Census data indicate that in 2005, 80 percent of New Orleans residents were born in Louisiana. New Orleans had one of the most indigenous populations in the country: The country's largest 500 cities averaged just 54 percent on this "homegrown rate."¹¹¹

By 2013, the homegrown rate dropped from 80 percent to 72 percent — still very high but down noticeably over a decade. The rapid pace of change bewildered longtime New Orleans residents, many of whom felt the loss of something unique that they treasured about the city.

TEACHER DIVERSITY

Louisiana has developed a major teacher diversity problem over the past 30 years.

SMALL DISPARITY IN 1982 RATIOS

23 black students: 1 black teacher

17 white students: 1 white teacher

BY 2012, MAJOR GAPS

32 black students: 1 black teacher

9 white students: 1 white teacher

Note: Analysis shows demographic data across entire Louisiana public school population.

Source: Louisiana Annual Financial and Statistical Reports

What is the demographic makeup of traditional teacher preparation programs in Louisiana?

Across all public and private universities statewide in 2012–13, 83 percent of those enrolled in teacher preparation programs were white and 13 percent were black.¹¹² Over time, this pattern has hurt the diversity of the teaching force in the state. As the "Teacher Diversity" box shows, traditional pipelines have failed to produce an educator workforce that reflects Louisiana's public school population.

Looking at those university-based programs located within New Orleans, the story is only marginally better: In 2013, 68 percent of teacher candidates were white, and 23 percent were black.

This figure closely mirrors the incoming teachNOLA and TFA corps members: 26 percent were black and 67 percent white in fall 2012.¹¹³ For the past several years, over 40 percent of incoming teachNOLA and TFA teachers have self-identified as people of color, including black.

There is no easy path to sustaining a great educator workforce that is representative of New Orleans as a whole. In a hypothetical scenario in which New Orleans principals hired novice teachers exclusively from university-based pipelines, the demographics of the teaching force would have shifted between 2005 and 2015 — perhaps even more dramatically than they did. In reality, traditional preparation programs were limited in the years

THE TRSL QUESTION

Charter schools can participate in the state's Teachers' Retirement System of Louisiana (TRSL) or offer 403(b) retirement savings plans. In New Orleans, most choose 403(b), as the cost of TRSL can be prohibitive. Employers pay into TRSL the equivalent of nearly 30 percent of each employee's salary.¹⁵ This contribution helps the state system chip away at long-neglected unfunded accrued liabilities that total nearly \$20 billion.¹⁶

Although a school's choice about TRSL might seem arcane, it played an outsized role in how teachers sorted themselves into schools. It's fair to say that TRSL divided the labor market: TRSL schools attracted

more veteran teachers, recruited educators from other Louisiana districts, and even lured retired teachers back into the workforce. Schools offering 403(b) plans faced an uphill climb in hiring these teachers. They were forced to focus instead on teachers far from retirement age and those who were not vested in the state pension system.

School autonomy over personnel decisions—including how to compensate and provide benefits to employees—reshaped demand for educator talent in the city. Retirement plans play a surprisingly prominent role in the distribution of teachers over the past decade.

after Katrina.¹⁴ Demand for their teachers had weakened among New Orleans public schools, and the recovery had forced some teacher preparation programs to consolidate.

Why is it important?

Lasting improvements in American public education will not happen without improved instructional quality.

New Orleans will be a bellwether in this regard: Can a system of autonomous schools provide better work environments, stronger professional supports, and more compelling pathways for advancement than a traditional district structure? Can decentralization elevate the teaching profession by properly valuing the immense contribution educators make to society?

In the best-case scenario? Yes.

A decentralized system allows leaders to design talent strategies aligned with their mission and school values. Leaders have room to innovate on professional development — and can let go of those educators who are not serving students well.

In contrast, one-size-fits-all district solutions tend to steamroll facets of the school context that have a major impact on student success. Rather than disrupting instruction system-wide with battles over politically contentious issues — tenure,

evaluation, compensation — each New Orleans school can take these questions on in a way that fits the vision of their school community.

At the same time, principals in New Orleans are charged with more responsibility than their counterparts in traditional public schools. They must identify talent needs, manage a range of partnerships, and create new systems and processes. When other major reforms are put in place simultaneously — for example, the higher academic expectations outlined in the Common Core standards — talent strategy must be adjusted to account for the new environment. This iterative process is crucial to the success of each school, but difficult to manage and communicate.

Some stakeholders question why each of the nearly 50 nonprofit organizations that manage schools in New Orleans should take on this work individually. Isn't it duplicative and confusing for educators?

Perhaps. But the rightful peers of teachers — doctors, lawyers, engineers — all operate in a professional context that mirrors the New Orleans system. Applying this model in a school system might be groundbreaking, but it is taken for granted in other parts of the economy.

If the country wants to elevate the teaching profession, an essential step is to give educators the agency to choose the school environment that best suits them. That is happening in New Orleans.

What were the successes?

New Orleans educators are generating better student outcomes

Teachers in New Orleans are significantly outpacing their peers elsewhere in the state on value-added measures. Among public school teachers who received a value-added score from the Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE), 63 percent of New Orleans teachers generated above-average student academic growth.¹¹⁷

Some CMOs in the city are doing even better. At homegrown charter network FirstLine Schools, 85 percent of teachers performed in the top half of teachers statewide. Likewise, ReNEW Schools, which runs four turnaround K–8 schools and two alternative high schools, had 76 percent of its teachers in the top half of the distribution statewide.

Consistent academic growth continues to boost proficiency rates and other absolute measures of student performance. Despite serving a student population with enormous challenges, talented and well-supported educators in New Orleans are getting results.

School autonomy now supports a diversity of talent strategies

The term “autonomy” is tossed around so much that sometimes it’s difficult to grasp what it means. Autonomy creates space to innovate as schools grapple with seemingly intractable problems. They have leeway to experiment and come up with breakthrough solutions. Concrete examples of what schools are doing shed light on the impact of autonomy.

- Schools are taking teacher preparation into their own hands. In 2015, at least five CMOs will have residency programs to provide novice educators with hands-on training for an entire academic year before putting them in charge of their own classroom. Many are working with Relay GSE or Match Teacher Coaching to support aspects of this new talent pipeline. Though New Orleans serves only about 5 percent of Louisiana’s total public student population, the city’s schools have

received more than 30 percent of the LDOE’s Believe & Prepare grant dollars to support innovative teacher-training efforts. CMOs believe that their approach to training novice educators will yield effective teachers who also remain in the classroom for years to come.

- Charter schools and networks have invested heavily in developing so-called “middle leaders” (grade-level chairs, deans, assistant principals, and so on). Schools consider middle leaders critical for developing their early-career teachers. The middle-leader pathway also helps retain high performers and expand their impact. The philanthropic community, including NSNO, responded to school-level demands for these opportunities and invested considerable resources after 2010 in building a range of supports for these professionals.¹¹⁸ Leading Educators, a homegrown nonprofit, is one example.
- For a profile of Collegiate Academies’ innovative approach to hiring, see “Autonomy in Action”, page 43.

New Orleans has unmatched “per capita” density of great nonprofits that identify and train educators

Remember that New Orleans public schools serve fewer than 50,000 students today. The city does not rank among the top 100 largest school districts in the United States.¹¹⁹

Yet New Orleans’ nonprofit community could go toe-to-toe with much larger districts. Sustained philanthropy and major federal support have helped New Orleans build a strong nonprofit ecosystem that identifies and trains talented educators. These groups appear throughout this chapter: Relay, Match, TFA, teachNOLA, Leading Educators, and others. Their support has been integral to the ongoing improvement of academic performance in New Orleans.

Schools and teachers have options, creating a competitive market for providing services. And unlike traditional districts, New Orleans has no monopoly “buyer” of talent sourcing and development services — it has nearly 50 organizations that operate schools. Nonprofits that support these schools must constantly demonstrate their value.

AUTONOMY IN ACTION: COLLEGIATE ACADEMIES' HIRING PROCESS

Collegiate Academies (CA) operates three successful open-enrollment high schools in New Orleans. On average, the network hires about 40 teachers each year. School autonomy created the conditions for CA to craft a unique hiring process and tinker with it repeatedly since 2007. Not every New Orleans public school takes such an exhaustive approach to hiring teachers, but for CA the process is central to its school culture and to reaching its goal of preparing students for college success beginning in ninth grade. The process ensures that every new team member is excited to join the organization's unique culture.

Once candidates pass an initial application screen, the process has six steps:

1. **The Sell and Anti-Sell:** At the outset, aspiring teachers hear directly what they might find motivating about CA: frequent direct feedback; high levels of accountability; expectations around joy and enthusiasm; how staff engages in difficult conversations to build trust and address misunderstandings. This is the “sell” — but not every educator will find the distinctive CA culture attractive. With a straightforward understanding of what to expect, many candidates remove themselves from consideration. This is the “Anti-sell.”
2. **Interview 1 (Principal):** Principal assesses core teacher skills, such as planning, use of data, and building relationships with students. Principal begins to hone in on what motivates the candidate (e.g., affiliating with a team, accomplishing ambitious goals, developing professionally) to prepare for how to best lead them if they receive an offer and join the team.
3. **Sample Teach, Feedback, Re-teach:** Candidate receives feedback following a sample teach to CA students. Principal assesses candidate's ability to rapidly incorporate feedback and show measurable improvement in “re-teach” (usually scheduled for same day).
4. **Interview 2 (Team):** Three to five teachers join the candidate and principal for an informal off-site meal. Candidate's peers discuss real-life scenarios and probe for solutions and mindsets that the candidate brings to tough challenges.
5. **Reference Checks:** Past behavior is biggest predictor of future behavior. Principal calls three to five references to learn how candidate has responded to adversity and contributed to dynamic teams in the past.
6. **Final Buy-In and Job Offer:** Principal identifies the candidate's biggest area for development and commits to investing in his/her professional growth. Once the principal feels confident the candidate is aware and excited about potential growth in this role, the principal will offer a job.



What are the persistent challenges and remaining work?

Growing enrollment requires multiple coordinated strategies to address need for teachers

Building talent pipelines that meet the demand for effective teachers and principals is arguably New Orleans' most pressing citywide challenge in the coming years.

The number of teachers hired each year will increase as overall student enrollment grows. NSNO's best working estimate is that New Orleans schools will need to hire more than 900 teachers annually by 2020 — an increase of nearly 40 percent from 2010. We believe three coordinated efforts need to gain momentum to head off a critical shortage of teachers.

- **Develop new pipelines that give strong K–12 school operators a larger role in preparing their teachers.** In the traditional model of teacher preparation and placement, colleges and universities prepare their students to enter the profession. Central district offices work to recruit and select the best candidates from the talent pool.

But little coordination exists to match the demands of schools with the supply from university-based teacher preparation programs.

An increasing number of CMOs in New Orleans are developing teacher residency programs with nonprofit partners. Such programs provide novice educators with hands-on training and experience in New Orleans, while CMOs gain the ability to improve the quality of their prospective teachers and develop skills and loyalty that help increase teacher retention.

- **Continually improve core existing pipelines.** Given projections of enrollment growth, current teacher pipelines need to maintain scale.

Traditional, university-based programs

must refocus their efforts on building practical teaching skills. Extended student-teaching experiences can prepare graduates for successful teaching careers. Charters should continue to evaluate the quality of these programs and remain open to closer partnership. While state policy changes seem likely to increase the selectivity of certification programs, universities need to find ways to expand the number of candidates they train as well.

National and statewide teacher recruitment is likely to become more competitive with the growth of high-quality charter networks in other cities. And in a decentralized system, no single charter school or network has the capacity to pursue a national recruitment strategy. Charter operators could explore joint recruiting ventures to educate candidates about the unique career opportunities in New Orleans' decentralized school system.

- **Improve teacher retention rates.** New Orleans' teachers have fewer years of experience than their peers nationally. Teacher attrition is a major challenge, and worries about the sustainability of a teaching career in New Orleans crop up frequently. The city loses hard-earned expertise with each teacher who leaves the classroom for another district, state, or profession.

Focusing on teacher residency programs and locally sourced teachers can improve retention rates across the system. Since that system is decentralized, autonomous schools are ultimately responsible for building professional environments that encourage retention.

Teacher pipeline innovations must increase the diversity of the educator workforce

As discussed earlier, dramatic shifts in the educator marketplace have decreased the percentage of black teachers and increased the number of teachers from outside New Orleans.

Momentum is building among New Orleans principals, charter school board members, parents, and local citizens for concerted efforts to increase the number of teachers of color in New Orleans classrooms.

Just 13 percent of Louisiana’s 5,000 novice educators currently enrolled in a traditional teacher certification program are black¹²⁰ — despite many school districts naming diversity as an explicit objective of their talent recruitment strategies. Traditional teacher pipelines in Louisiana struggle to recruit and train diverse cohorts of educators.

The challenge in New Orleans stems in part from decentralization: With no single human resources department tracking data and coordinating initiatives, efforts can falter. The city needs to ensure that the multiple pipelines built and expanded to supply *effective educators* also cultivate a *diverse workforce*. New Orleans is poised to respond creatively to this challenge.

Provide support for educators who play a variety of roles in their schools

- **Equip teachers to meet rising academic standards.** Under the new PARCC assessment system, achieving grade-level “proficiency” will require roughly the same performance level as “mastery” on current tests. In order to increase the number of A-rated and B-rated schools, New Orleans must significantly increase its percent-

age of students reaching this level of academic performance. Teachers will need better preparation and ongoing support to help students meet higher expectations.

- **Fill talent gaps in specific subjects, grades, and educator roles.** In line with national trends, New Orleans struggles with teacher shortages in special education, English language learners, career and technical education, and STEM — science, technology, engineering, and math. While there is no quick fix to such shortages, tighter partnerships between K–12 schools and teacher preparation programs will help bridge the supply-and-demand gap for these hard-to-staff positions.
- **Build leadership capacity.** New Orleans schools also face an ongoing need for strong teacher-leaders, instructional coaches, and school leaders. CMOs need to hone systems for building leadership capacity, and increase the scale and effectiveness of leadership development programs to meet demand. Examples include Relay’s National Principals Academy Fellowship, which has trained nearly 50 New Orleans leaders since 2013.¹²¹



4

Equity

New Orleans has become a leader in meeting the needs of our country's most vulnerable students and families.

No longer bogged down with school operation, RSD officials concentrate on equity in the school system—partnering with OPSB when possible. Charter schools collaborate with RSD to create fair policies and systems, ceding some autonomy to ensure a level playing field across the city.

Innovative solutions to equity challenges have become a hallmark of the New Orleans system—from transparent school enrollment through the centralized EnrollNOLA system, to distribution of funds based on the unique needs of students with disabilities, to a unified discipline process that administers fair hearings and recommends expulsions based on a common standard, to free city-wide transportation provided by all RSD charters and many OPSB charters.

New Orleans' progress on equity complements the city's headline gains in student achievement: 80 percent of families received one of their top three school choices through EnrollNOLA, and all participating schools "backfill" empty spots in upper grades. The city's graduation rate for students with disabilities is 60 percent—far exceeding the statewide average of 43 percent. The suspension rate is lower than the pre-2005 figure, and the expulsion rate has been below the statewide average for three consecutive academic years.

New Orleans' decentralized system has demonstrated the capacity to identify and decisively correct a range of equity challenges. Public education is about more than median achievement levels—it also must ensure that every child, no matter their circumstance or challenge, has the supports he or she needs to complete school and flourish as an adult. New Orleans is rapidly becoming a system that delivers on that promise.

Numbers to celebrate

84%

Percent of school seats in 2014–15 filled via EnrollNOLA, the city's centralized school enrollment office.¹²²

60%

Class of 2014 graduation rate for students with disabilities across all New Orleans public schools. This is 17 points better than the state.¹²³

3
YEARS

Consecutive years in which expulsion rate for public schools in New Orleans has been lower than state average.

Numbers to motivate

8

Number of OPSB charter schools still conducting enrollment outside of EnrollNOLA.

39%

Percentage of students with disabilities on grade level based on state assessments across all grades.

26k

The approximate number of 16- to 24-year-olds who were neither working nor in school in 2013. At 18% of the 16- to 24-year-old population, New Orleans has the third-highest percentage of such young people among U.S. cities.¹²⁴

What happened?

Nationally, “equity” in public schools can mean many things. In New Orleans, the term refers to policy and programming that ensure the school system meets the needs of all families, especially the most vulnerable and marginalized. Questions of student enrollment into public schools, services for students with disabilities, and approaches to student discipline fall under “equity.”

From chaos to consistency: RSD leads the way on enrollment improvements

One of New Orleans’ many charms is its ability to manufacture controlled chaos — think raucous Saints games, Jazz Fest, second lines, Mardi Gras. Public school enrollment in the early years of recovery could be described as chaos with little control.

The steady, year-round influx of returning students, elimination of zoned enrollment, and the annual cycle of school openings, closings, relocations,

and conversions bewildered many families. Each school had its own application, its own timeline, and its own documentation requirements. Parents applied to multiple schools for each child, uncertain whether they would get a seat. Some got several. Others got none. Midyear registration required dozens of phone calls. School enrollment in New Orleans was mass confusion and a mountain of paperwork.

Before 2011, confusion at the systems level masked inequitable practices. Some schools violated charter agreements by selectively admitting students based on academic performance, disability status, or family connections.¹²⁵ Analysis of student mobility indicates that a disproportionate number of students who left high-performing OPSB schools landed in low-performing schools operated directly by RSD.¹²⁶ Faced with ad hoc facilities arrangements in the wake of widespread flooding, some school operators discouraged students with disabilities from applying.¹²⁷ Outright “bad actors” were rare — and were outnumbered by schools such

NONPROFIT SUPPORTS FOR NEW ORLEANS PARENTS

“Right now, choice is more like a land run than an open house. It’s each man for himself, desperately trying to get the best you can get your hands on.” — 2009 observation from Aesha Rasheed, founder of New Orleans Parents’ Guide to Public Schools¹²⁸

New Orleans’ decentralized system requires parents to be savvy participants in public education. EnrollNOLA, the centralized enrollment system, dramatically improved the enrollment process, and nonprofits have complemented the changes by providing useful resources to assist parents in navigating it. In 2007, the first annual parent resource guide was published.¹²⁹ Over time, the guide provided increasingly comprehensive information about school programs and performance. The Urban League sponsors an annual Schools Expo, bringing representatives from nearly all the

city’s schools to one place for families to learn about their options. In 2014, NSNO contracted with four local community groups to expand their parent education work. With additional funds, the Urban League, Stand for Children, Vietnamese American Young Leaders (VAYLA), and Orleans Public Education Network (OPEN) will run larger parent leadership, advocacy, and community organizing programs to serve more families. More parents will receive training about charter school governance, school performance data, Common Core standards, and navigating the OneApp process.¹³⁰

as Lafayette Academy, Arthur Ashe Charter School, and KIPP McDonogh 15 School for the Creative Arts that proudly served all students. But the lack of transparent enrollment processes did not protect all families, and confusion undermined the benefits of parental choice. Trust in the system eroded.

The Urban League and other citywide groups banged the drum on these issues for years: publishing reports and meeting with government officials. Several RSD charter operators worked with these advocates and district leadership to develop a standard, one-page application form and timeline to rationalize enrollment.¹³¹ Voluntary participation limited the initiative's impact. Though many schools — charter and district-operated alike — were dedicated to serving all students, the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) filed a lawsuit in 2010 on behalf of 10 students with disabilities, alleging discrimination in the system. The complaint accelerated a series of essential reforms that benefited both families and school operators.

RSD moved decisively toward a unified enrollment system, building off the common application that had begun to simplify the process for families. In September 2010, State Superintendent Paul Pastorek formally proposed a centralized enrollment system to address disparities raised by the SPLC lawsuit.¹³² Months later, then-RSD Superintendent John White endorsed the reform as one of 12 “Commitments to Excellence.” OneApp was born.

Most school operators in RSD and their partners embraced the step — even though it required relinquishing some of their autonomy. The existing arrangement felt untenable. Schools doing the right thing were painted with the same brush as bad actors. It also made it difficult to plan: schools struggled to finalize their rosters and teaching staff even after the school year started, as students continued to transfer throughout the year.

In 2012–13, all RSD schools used OneApp for enrollment, covering 59 percent of New Orleans students.¹³⁴ The following year, 74 percent of the city's public school students enrolled through it — though OPSB network schools (those operated directly by the district) participated halfheartedly and enrolled about a quarter of their freshman outside the system.¹³⁵ By the 2014–15 school year, 10 new schools

ENROLLNOLA'S “ONEAPP”

EnrollNOLA is the citywide centralized enrollment system, facilitating enrollment for nearly 40,000 New Orleans students through OneApp. EnrollNOLA manages admissions, readmissions, and transfers for 89 percent of New Orleans public schools.¹³³ EnrollNOLA is guided by three principles:

FAIRNESS. Every student should have fair access to every school, so EnrollNOLA policies apply to all students in the same way, regardless of socioeconomic status, prior academic performance, disability, and so on.

TRANSPARENCY. EnrollNOLA procedures are clearly detailed and publicly available to all schools and families.

EFFICIENCY. Families fill out a single application with all of their school preferences. They receive a single offer to one of their preferred schools, eliminating the problem of some families receiving multiple offers while others had none.

See “EnrollNOLA Evolution,” page 53, for examples of parent and school feedback that have improved the enrollment system.

joined, including five OPSB charters, and 84 percent of students enrolled through OneApp.¹³⁶

In 2015, New Orleans Charter Math and Science High School (“Sci High”), an OPSB charter, voted to move into the system ahead of schedule.¹³⁷ Other OPSB charters will continue to come online as part of their renewal process until the system reaches 100 percent citywide participation — though they vary widely in their enthusiasm for this change.

EnrollNOLA is the New Orleans “equity story” in miniature: enrollment transformed from a shortcoming to one of the system's most important and equitable assets in just a few years. Committed school operators, nimble government, and community advocates drove this change. Parents and students are better off for it — and the cycle of continuous improvement will continue to push EnrollNOLA to improve further.



New Orleans builds capacity to serve all students with disabilities

Students with disabilities in New Orleans public schools rarely had access to effective academic programs before 2005. Numerous federal and state monitoring reports from that period confirm the widespread perception on the ground: Massive problems plagued the city's services for students with disabilities. And the outcomes spoke for themselves. Only a little more than 10 percent of students with disabilities graduated on time from high school in 2004.¹³⁸

In the years immediately following Katrina, the decentralized system reproduced many of these deficiencies, as schools struggled to serve the city's most vulnerable students. Without central office supports, most RSD charters lacked the expertise to navigate complex legal requirements and the resources to serve the full range of student needs. Outcomes among students with disabilities improved in the early years of reform — but only slightly.¹³⁹

Despite the enormity of the task, the city has made remarkable progress, much of it concentrated in RSD charter schools (see “Who Serves Students with Disabilities,” page 50). SPLC shined a spotlight in 2010 on systemic gaps that had marginalized students with disabilities. Promising efforts were underway at the time. RSD charter schools had nearly doubled their special education enrollment, growing from less than 5 percent of the student body in 2006 to 9 percent in 2010.¹⁴⁰ School operators turned to nonprofits such as the Serving the Unique Needs of Students Center (SUNS) to bolster services.¹⁴¹

Charters under RSD also benefitted from an innovative funding formula that spurred improvement. Since 2007, the formula based the allocation of pub-

lic dollars for each student on his or her specific disability (rather than determining schoolwide funding based on the total number of students with any disability). In 2013, the formula was tweaked to give schools more resources to serve their students — up to \$20,000 in additional unrestricted funding for the students with the most intensive needs. Differentiating funding based on the type of services and the number of “service minutes” that each student needs is intuitive but extremely rare nationwide.¹⁴² RSD's funding strategy helps create an equitable system for students with disabilities by ensuring that schools receive resources reflective of the student population they serve.

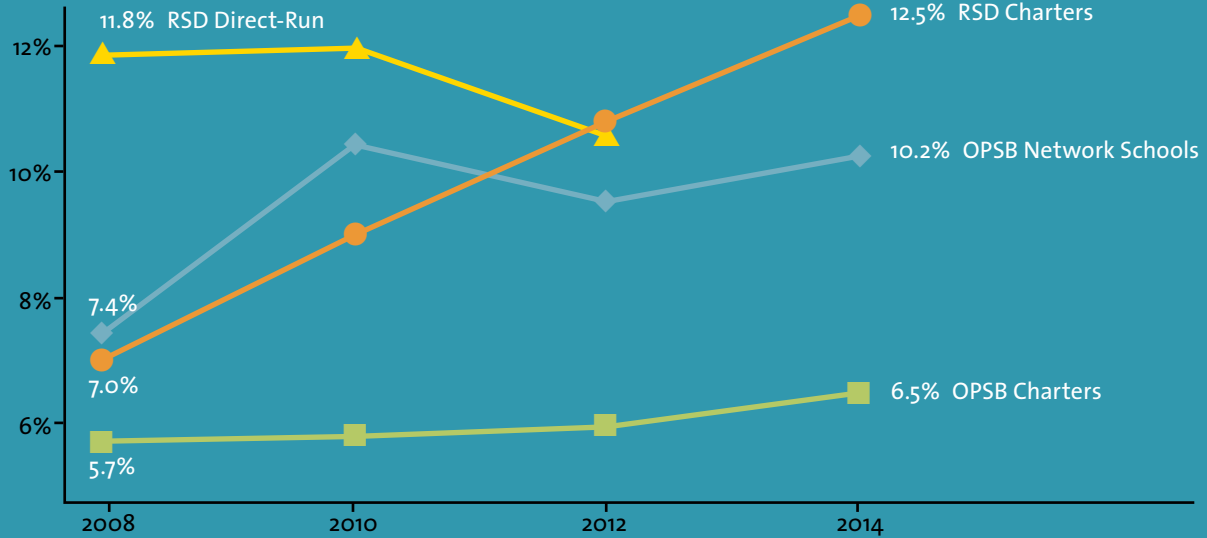
New Orleans' coordinated set of equity reforms had a dramatic impact. Between 2004 and 2014, graduation rates among students with disabilities in New Orleans jumped from 10 percent to 60 percent. New Orleans now outperforms the statewide graduation rate for students with disabilities by an astonishing 17 percentage points (60 percent versus 43 percent).

Major efforts are underway to further improve outcomes: A \$2.4 million federal grant secured by NSNO to recruit, train, and develop great educators to serve students with disabilities in New Orleans;¹⁴³ a promising initiative launched out of FirstLine Schools to offer special education coordinators a two-year fellowship to improve their practice alongside a cohort of their peers;¹⁴⁴ a therapeutic day program created through a partnership between Tulane Medical Center and the Recovery School District to fill a critical citywide hole that emerged in 2011 when the state closed New Orleans' only hospital equipped to serve youth experiencing psychiatric crises;¹⁴⁵ charter schools started or expanded specialized programs to serve students with low-incidence disabilities such as autism or an emotional disturbance, with over \$3 million in grants pledged by NSNO to support.¹⁴⁶ Financial resources make up only the first step, however. New Orleans must continue to grow and sustain efforts to build the country's most effective educator workforce serving students with disabilities. Multiple threads of equity-focused reform must work in concert to spark improvements in practice and outcomes for all students.

WHO SERVES STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

The chart below highlights how special education enrollment has changed since 2008.¹⁴⁷

Students with disabilities as a percent of total student enrollment, 2008–14



- ▲ RSD direct-run schools (in the years they operated) had a special education (SPED) enrollment rate between 10 and 12 percent of students.
- RSD charters have dramatically increased their SPED enrollment, moving from 7 percent of students with disabilities to 12.5 percent.
- ◆ The 6 OPSB network schools also serve a higher percentage of students with disabilities today.
- OPSB charters continue to serve a small share of students with disabilities. In 2014–15, OPSB charters included 10 open-enrollment and 4 selective-admissions programs. On average, students with disabilities accounted for only 6.5 percent of the students enrolled at these schools—far below the city and state averages of 11 percent.

What produced this lopsided distribution? Likely a combination of factors, including:

- OPSB charters enrolled fewer students with disabilities from the start. In 2004–05, the subset of higher-performing schools that remained with OPSB served a student population that included only 5 percent students with disabilities. Future RSD schools served 12 percent students with disabilities in 2004–05.¹⁴⁸
- With the exception of newly-transferred Dr. M.L.K. Charter School, all OPSB charter and network schools fall under a single local education agency (LEA). Each RSD charter is its own LEA. The different bureaucratic structures have implications for federal mandates, funding, and autonomy.
- Unlike RSD, OPSB does not currently differentiate per-pupil funding to account for the higher cost to serve students with disabilities. Recent state legislation will require all charter schools in New Orleans to do so in the coming years.
- EnrollNOLA ensures equal access for all students, regardless of disability. In 2014, only 25 percent of the seats in OPSB charters were allocated via OneApp. For the remaining seats, individual charter schools ran their own enrollment processes designed in accordance with local, state, and federal regulations.

School discipline: City makes progress on a long-standing challenge

School discipline practices — particularly high suspension and expulsion rates among students of color — frustrated the New Orleans community long before they became talking points nationally.

This is a challenge with deep roots. National data from leading school discipline scholar Russell Skiba indicate that Louisiana had the highest expulsion rate in the country in 2003 (0.8 percent) and the nation’s second-highest suspension rate (10.9 percent).¹⁴⁹ The 2003–04 suspension rate was more than 18 percent in Orleans Parish — significantly higher than the state average and surely placing it among the highest citywide rates in the country.¹⁵⁰ It’s a challenge that also still affects traditional urban districts in Louisiana: In May 2015, the SPLC submitted additional examples to bolster their complaint of racial discrimination in discipline in neighboring Jefferson Parish, the largest school district in Louisiana.¹⁵¹

Until 2012, New Orleans schools were given considerable autonomy in establishing and enforcing

school discipline policies. Schools approached the task in a range of ways. This variety led to the widespread perception that student expulsions and suspensions were arbitrary and that inequitable practices plagued both RSD and OPSB schools. This perception went hand in hand with citywide dissatisfaction over the enrollment process for public schools.

Beginning in 2012–13, RSD and charter school organizations led a unified citywide process to evaluate and manage expulsions.¹⁵² A central hearing office ensures that students are removed from their school only for serious infractions. Today, all schools in New Orleans participate but one.¹⁵³ Consistent standards and a third-party administrator have brought the expulsion rate in New Orleans below the state average.

During the spring of 2014, RSD and charter operators worked with local nonprofits focused on juvenile justice issues to refine the process and reduce expulsions even further. Data from 2014–15 indicate that the citywide rate dropped again, though an uptick among OPSB network schools was worrisome.¹⁵⁴

CHARTER SCHOOLS IN RSD DRAMATICALLY REDUCE SUSPENSIONS

Several charter high schools in RSD have developed innovative programs to dramatically reduce suspensions in their schools. Community organizations such as the Micah Project — a local affiliate of the PICO National Network — played an important role by calling for change and partnering with Collegiate Academies in designing restorative programming across the network’s three high schools.

SCHOOL	SUSPENSION RATE Percentage of students receiving out-of-school suspension at least once during academic year	
	2012–13 ¹⁵⁵	2014–15 Self-reported data ¹⁵⁶
Cohen College Prep HS	46%	30%
KIPP Renaissance HS	37%	28%
Sci Academy	58%	<5%
G.W. Carver Collegiate	69%	24%
G.W. Carver Preparatory	61%	11%

Why is it important?

Government regulators, school operators, and community partners in New Orleans have collaborated to ensure that our decentralized system of schools has common standards and a shared commitment to equitably serving all students. Academic gains that New Orleans has experienced should be considered in the context of a system of truly open-enrollment schools. In New Orleans, the definition of “excellence” fully includes success in solving equity challenges.

New Orleans’ victory on the equity front is not complete. But, as a case study for how a decentralized system can coordinate and innovate, New Orleans stands out as a hopeful example of how other cities could address public education’s greatest challenges.

What were the successes?

Since 2009, New Orleans dramatically improved how it enrolled students, served students with disabilities, and approached student discipline. But the larger success story centers on the capacity of a decentralized system to swiftly identify a range of equity challenges and correct itself. The examples in this report illustrate this feature of the New Orleans system.

Each example of continuous improvement shares similar features:

- Parents, advocates, and educators voiced calls for meaningful system changes.
- Charter operators responded, productively collaborating with RSD (and at times OPSB) to determine how to regulate the system to create a level playing field and better meet student needs.
- Districts, particularly RSD, acted swiftly on needed changes. With a reduced role in actually operating schools, government proved it could be more nimble in addressing equity issues than a traditional district structure would typically allow.
- Nongovernmental organizations stepped up to play leadership roles and support change.



These contributions led to rapid, measureable improvements for New Orleans’ students across three core equity issues.

Enrollment

Zoned school enrollment reinforces patterns of segregation and wealth inequality in communities across the country. A student’s home address should not sentence her to 13 years at underperforming schools. As school choice expands in cities nationwide, New Orleans leads the way in demonstrating the promise of systems of choice. The city has grappled with ensuring that a decentralized system of schools is fair for all families.

Public opinion data point to strong support for school choice over zoned enrollment. A Cowen Institute 2015 poll reported that 72 percent of New Orleanians preferred open-enrollment policies, while just 23 percent preferred assignment by geography alone.¹⁵⁷ EnrollNOLA has provided a practical mechanism to put that sentiment into practice.

ENROLLNOLA EVOLUTION: HOW SCHOOL, COMMUNITY FEEDBACK CHANGES PRACTICE

EnrollNOLA's evolution showcases how input from families and school operators can contribute to ongoing improvements in a decentralized school system.

FEEDBACK FROM FAMILIES prompted most schools to give priority to siblings of current students. The shift simplified logistics for families and built continuity in the school community. In 2015, 97 percent of students who applied to join their sibling at a school were matched to that school. Likewise, the introduction of Family Link in 2013–14—which prioritized the assignment of siblings to the same school when they apply concurrently—has helped families. 2015 data show that about 80 percent of families succeed in placing all siblings at a single campus.¹⁵⁸

FEEDBACK FROM SCHOOLS led to changes in processes and timelines that enabled a wider range of schools to participate. For example, selective programs lobbied for an earlier application deadline to match their school calendar. Though only a handful of these programs participate—the vast majority of New Orleans schools are open-enrollment, including all RSD schools—the EnrollNOLA team shifted the calendar to accommodate the request.

FEEDBACK FROM FAMILIES AND ADVOCATES drove major changes to the Late Enrollment process, which serves families in the summer months. After a poorly planned process in 2014, EnrollNOLA and RSD redesigned the Late Enrollment. In summer 2015, Dillard University hosted dozens of staffers that guided families through the steps to select a school for their child. Parents reported that the event was user-friendly and welcoming.¹⁵⁹

Vulnerable populations

RSD charters are serving a growing number of students with disabilities. Changes to enrollment procedures, discipline policies, and funding formulas help those schools build capacity and develop better programs for vulnerable student populations.

RSD's move to distribute special education funds based on disability category and weekly service minutes, along with the launch of a citywide "Exceptional Needs Fund," ensured that schools had resources to serve their students. By eliminating these financial barriers, more schools are able to create specialized programs for students with a range of needs.

In 2014, the Center on Reinventing Public Education (CRPE) conducted a parent survey about school choice in eight "high-choice" cities, and responses in New Orleans were promising. Of all the survey sites, New Orleans had the smallest satisfaction gap between parents looking for a good school fit for students with and without special education needs.

With the signing of the cooperative endeavor agreement in 2014 between RSD and OPSB, New Orleans charged into new territory to help at-risk students.¹⁶⁰ The agreement outlines shared priorities of the districts, including funding a Youth Opportunity Center to proactively connect students who are chronically truant to social services. The city is building better supports for adjudicated youth. Work is underway at RSD to open a therapeutic day option for students with the most severe special needs in partnership with Tulane University and financial support from NSNO and other private funders.¹⁶¹

Discipline dashboard

SAFETY

Most important, data indicate that New Orleans parents and students believe that public schools are safe.

In the Cowen Institute's 2015 poll, 81 percent of public school parents believe their child's school provides a safe place to learn. Just 12 percent disagreed—nearly a 7:1 margin.¹⁶²

Surveys of middle and high school students statewide suggest that students in New Orleans public schools report feeling dramatically safer than they

did in 2004. The rate of positive responses now tops the statewide average.¹⁶³

- In 2004, 75 percent of students statewide reported feeling safe in their schools but just 54 percent of New Orleans students agreed.
- In 2012, 76 percent of students statewide felt safe. The figure for New Orleans jumped to 78 percent.

In real terms, these results suggest that thousands more students think that they have a calm, orderly environment in which to learn than in 2005.

SUSPENSIONS

Suspension rates have dropped compared with 2005 and continue to fall. Education Research Alliance for New Orleans data peg the reduction at about a third — from 20 percent in 2005 to 13.5 percent in 2013.¹⁶⁴

ERA's analysis stops in 2013 and so does not take into account notable improvements at several RSD high schools (see "Charter Schools in RSD Dramatically Reduce Suspensions," page 51). The suspension rate is likely to fall further in coming years.

More resources are available to support restorative approaches, including from the City of New Orleans.¹⁶⁵ Mayor Mitch Landrieu's NOLA for Life campaign has directed federal funds to develop deeper school partnerships with the Center for Restorative Approaches (CRA), a nonprofit organization that facilitates conflict resolution through positive cooperation and collective action. CRA has grown from supporting a single school to partnering with a wide array of charters across New Orleans.¹⁶⁶

EXPULSIONS

The education and advocacy community showed their ability to collaborate by coming together on a common policy and process for expulsions. This work represented an important step toward building a more fair and equitable system. While the city has room to grow, it is important not to lose sight of where New Orleans sits in relation to the rest of Louisiana:

*New Orleans' expulsion rate has been below the state average for three consecutive years.*¹⁶⁷

The system's commitment to continuous improvement led RSD, charter operators, and juvenile justice advocates to further refine the process over a short time period in spring 2014. In the 2014–15 school year, the number of expulsions dropped even further.¹⁶⁸

The use of disciplinary conferences with RSD's highly regarded hearing officer has leapt up as schools look to support students and use alternative forms of intervention.

What are the persistent challenges and remaining work?

Over the past five years, New Orleans schools have responded to the challenges of decentralization, establishing a compelling track record for identifying and implementing breakthrough solutions. Much work remains to promote equity in student enrollment, student discipline, and services to vulnerable student populations.

Beyond improvements in specific equity challenges, though, New Orleans needs to create space where trust and collaboration are the primary mechanisms to move forward. Until now — and perhaps for good reason — many advocates felt that the courts were their only recourse. Civil rights lawsuits have a venerable history of effecting change in obstinate public school systems. But partnership, not litigation, will enable the New Orleans system to address remaining challenges and create excellent schools for all students.

Above all, New Orleans' most pressing equity challenge is no different than the overarching challenge that runs throughout this report: Our system will not reach the level of equity that New Orleans families deserve until there are enough high-quality schools to serve every child. Better enrollment systems or student discipline processes can take us only so far. They are milestones, but should not be mistaken for the end goal.

As New Orleans works toward excellence, these remaining equity challenges demand attention:

School enrollment

Today's enrollment system will not be optimal for New Orleans in 10 or even five years from now. The system must continuously evolve to reflect the values and priorities of families. Specific improvements include:

- **Complete the build-out of EnrollNOLA.** Nearly 80 percent of New Orleans voters polled by the Cowen Institute in 2014 agreed that “all public schools should use a common application process.” Forward New Orleans, a coalition of two dozen education, civic, and business groups, argued the same in a May 2015 report.¹⁶⁹

Parents in New Orleans will continue to struggle until all schools participate in a single application system. More than a third of parents reported that their school choice process was made difficult by “confusion over which school [their] child was eligible to attend” in a recent survey by CRPE.¹⁷⁰ The percentage tipped over 40 percent for parents with a high school education or less.

Eight OPSB schools remain outside the system. Sci High's March 2015 vote to join OneApp a year early was a step in the right direction. Others need to make the transition as soon as possible.

All schools must share a single enrollment process. Every school should be in OneApp. Full stop.

- **Empower families with resources:** Resources that help families choose schools are essential to a transparent enrollment system. A decentralized system of schools cannot function properly without this information. Many such resources exist in the form of organizations and publications such as the New Orleans Parents' Guide to Public Schools, the Urban League of Greater New Orleans, and others. More are needed. As part of NSNO's i3 grant, NSNO and RSD provided grant funding to four nonprofits to expand their parent education work. These funds will help the Urban League, OPEN, Stand for Children and VAYLA expand their reach and develop programming attuned to the biggest challenges parents face

in navigating the decentralized system. Parent-oriented resources also serve to collect and broadcast the concerns and preferences that will drive continued improvements to EnrollNOLA.

- **Fine-tune EnrollNOLA to address equity and access concerns.** In response to user feedback, the functionality and placement policies of OneApp evolved significantly since its 2012 launch. The system must continuously evolve to reflect families' values and priorities. Family Link, for example, improved OneApp by making it easier to enroll multiple siblings at the same time. More will be needed in the future, including:
 - *Build a seamless link between early childhood and K-12 enrollment.* Legislation passed in 2012 requires early childhood leaders across Louisiana to establish unified enrollment systems for their communities by 2015-16. The motivation mirrors that of EnrollNOLA: To improve services for all New Orleans families, access must be simple and transparent. Building off the momentum and user base of EnrollNOLA will be important to the success of this effort in New Orleans.
 - *Integrate academic quality into school enrollment targets.* Improved sources of information and hands-on coaching for parents will help shape demand for quality schools. On the supply side, however, questions remain. Schools participating in OneApp set their own enrollment targets, regardless of academic track record. Should school performance be a factor in a school's authority to set its own enrollment targets? Authorizers could cap enrollment in struggling schools to force those schools to focus on current students. New Orleans needs to wrestle with such questions and consider alternatives that best serve the city's students.
- **Establish Sustainable Funding for EnrollNOLA.** EnrollNOLA lacks stable funding, despite its integral role in New Orleans' system. Dedicated resources would ensure that it runs smoothly, continues to make needed improvements, and provides parents the support they

need to participate. Continuous improvement is a hallmark of the New Orleans system, but resource constraints could undermine this dynamic in the case of EnrollNOLA.

Vulnerable populations

The New Orleans school system must maintain its focus on students with disabilities and other vulnerable populations.

- **Forge joint ownership across RSD and OPSB for serving students with disabilities.** OPSB and RSD must provide consistent, detailed reporting about which schools are serving the highest-needs students and how funds are distributed to support them. RSD serves a disproportionate share of students with disabilities today.¹⁷¹ Both RSD and OPSB must step up to meet acute needs as a system of schools. Recent developments, including the launch of a therapeutic day program and the citywide exceptional needs fund are early steps in this direction. The districts must work more closely with city and state governments to address the massive unmet mental health needs among New Orleans students.¹⁷²
- **Elevate special education professionals in New Orleans.** Louisiana has cited shortages in special education teachers every year since 1990.¹⁷³ It is difficult to hire and retain great special education teachers in schools across the state, and New Orleans is no exception. Our city needs to evaluate promising efforts underway to get traction on this problem: federal funding to recruit, train, and develop educators, a two-year fellowship to improve the practice of special education coordinators alongside a cohort of their peers, and philanthropic funding to launch or expand specialized programs to serve the most vulnerable students. The entrepreneurial nonprofit community should identify remaining gaps and launch new initiatives to continue moving the city forward.
- **Establish discipline policies that integrate rather than marginalize vulnerable populations.** New Orleans' ongoing work to create fair and transparent student discipline systems goes



hand in hand with other efforts to support vulnerable populations. Across public schools generally — and urban charter schools specifically — high expectations have not always been paired with intensive support programs for students who struggle with disruptive behavior. They need to be, particularly in a city where public school students report unusually high rates of depression and post-traumatic stress.¹⁷⁴ Discipline policies must support a safe and supportive learning environment, while not interrupting academic progress that keeps students on a path toward a promising future. All New Orleans schools should continue to provide detailed reports on expulsion data to promote school accountability and system-level planning.

NEW ORLEANS' LONG-TROUBLED JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM

Education services for adjudicated youth have been an embarrassment in New Orleans for decades. To sketch a brief history:

- In 1993, OPSB, the City of New Orleans, and the criminal sheriff were ordered by federal court to dramatically improve conditions for youth at Orleans Parish Prison after a class-action lawsuit revealed youth were receiving approximately 5 hours of instruction each week.¹⁷⁵
- In 1997, the system was profiled extensively by *The New York Times* and listed alongside Baltimore as the country's "most troubled" juvenile justice system.¹⁷⁶
- In 2006, Juvenile Justice Project of Louisiana (now Louisiana Center for Children's Rights) blasted the city for treating the youth in its charge "like trash" before, during, and after Hurricane Katrina. The group filed a lawsuit in federal court in 2007.¹⁷⁷
- In 2010, the City of New Orleans, OPSB, and the Youth Study Center (the city's detention center

for youth) were the subject of a federal consent decree after civil rights advocates detailed horrific physical conditions, lack of consistent instruction, and grossly inadequate special education services.¹⁷⁸

Since 2010, a new YSC facility has been built. Conditions have improved, and prominent advocates have called for authorities to move all young people from Orleans Parish Prison (OPP) to the Youth Study Center. These advocates describe YSC as "light years ahead of OPP" and argue that the YSC "is the only facility in New Orleans that can house youth constitutionally and in accordance with best practices for education, safety, and positive youth development."

Autonomous school operators should be given the opportunity to serve these students and be held accountable for their academic outcomes. Additional public funding and a commitment to ongoing, transparent reporting of outcomes must be part of the equation as well.

5

Community

Our community engages in unprecedented ways in public education in New Orleans. Families choose schools for their children in the absence of default neighborhood options. Nearly 400 citizens representing every corner of the city serve as volunteer charter board members. Community organizations provide resources and supports to institutions that have served students for decades and new public schools that have emerged in recent years. And polling data indicate strong support for key policy reforms — charters, school choice, and accountability for low performance.

Yet after a decade of unprecedented growth and irrefutable evidence that schools are getting better, many in our community remain frustrated with how reform in New Orleans happened, how decisions are made, and who makes those decisions. There is a pervasive feeling, especially within many black communities, that reform has happened “to” and not “with” the students and families served by New Orleans schools. This leads some to ask the question, “Was it worth it?”

Our answer is definitive: Yes. Student outcomes must be the lens through which we judge reforms. Our students are, without question, better off than a decade ago. But the frustration many feel is real and must be heard and acknowledged. If New Orleans does not reconcile our city’s perennial issues — particularly those steeped in race and class — we will remain mired in the same arguments for another decade. These disputes will continue to drain energy from our shared focus: ensuring that every child in New Orleans is set up for a great life.

Our system has repeatedly demonstrated that it can identify and fix seemingly intractable problems. It’s time we recognize our issues on community voice, and address them.

Numbers to celebrate

11:1

Ratio of parents who are satisfied with the “quality and responsiveness of schools” (versus those who are not), based on 500 parent interviews conducted by CRPE in 2014.¹⁷⁹

91%

Percentage of New Orleans precincts that supported a December 2014 millage vote, which was framed by prominent critics as a referendum on RSD and reform efforts.¹⁸⁰

50

Rank of New Orleans population among U.S. cities in 2014, returning the city to the list of America’s 50 most-populous cities for the first time since Hurricane Katrina.¹⁸¹

Numbers to motivate

81

Miles from downtown New Orleans to the Claiborne Building in Baton Rouge, where the Louisiana State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education conducts most state board meetings. (BESE’s “Committee of the Whole” also meets in New Orleans several times each year to discuss RSD action items.)

9 YRS

Number of years that passed before RSD formalized community participation in its “matching” process to select operators for school facilities. Efforts were inconsistent before 2014.

7,000

Approximate number of students whose school will move into a different facility in summer 2015. Instability throughout the massive FEMA-funded rebuilding program has made sustained engagement between schools, neighborhoods, and families difficult.

What happened?

Evaluating the state of community ownership over public education in New Orleans requires balancing two seemingly contradictory ideas. First, polls indicate high levels of public support for such central reforms as charters, open school enrollment, and transformation of low-performing schools. Second, the changes since 2005 have created a very real sense of loss among some in the New Orleans community.

The displacement of hundreds of thousands of New Orleanians radically disrupted the city's means for social and political engagement. Every pillar of the city's shared life had to be rebuilt, including government, housing, education, health care, public safety, the economy, and culture. Our poorest, most vulnerable residents suffered the most, and the civic fabric of many neighborhoods has mended slowly — though not because residents lacked will or desire.

Within that context, the way education reform moved forward added to a very real sense of loss for some New Orleans residents. There is no single “community” in New Orleans—rather, a patchwork of educators, parents, citizens, and civic leaders who hold a common objective for quality education but a diverse set of perspectives on how to achieve success. From our perspective, the frustration seems concentrated in four areas.

The educator workforce changed

OPSB's firing of 7,500 teachers and administrators was poorly communicated and painful for families that had homes and lives to rebuild. Absent a massive and immediate infusion of cash, OPSB could not possibly have maintained its educator workforce in a near-empty city. Even a fiscally sound district would have been hard-pressed to do so; one already struggling with deep, structural financial problems did not have a chance.

Even though financial necessity drove the decision, the layoffs were painful. NOPS was not just a school system. However dysfunctional, it was still a cornerstone of the New Orleans community — one that is difficult to disentangle from the social and economic fabric of the city. Over 70 percent of the district's employees were black.¹⁸² District jobs gave rise to a substantial component of New Orleans' black middle class, and the layoffs tore through that group.

That wound will take a long time to heal.

Meanwhile, an influx of new faces arrived in the city to offer support. Some relocated sight unseen. Others decided to return after decades away — in part drawn by unprecedented reforms that they thought could meet the educational and social needs of New Orleans students that were laid bare in the weeks following Katrina. Parents, veteran teachers, and community leaders have encountered successive cadres of new educators since 2005 that, on the whole, were younger, whiter, and less rooted in New Orleans' traditions and culture. Many of these educators have made the city their home — working astonishingly hard to support students and families. Many others later moved on to other professions, cities, or both.

State intervention has been experienced by many black New Orleanians as paternalistic. Continued references to failure and dysfunction before 2005 too often cast aside everyone involved in the system before the storm. The contribution of these educators is glossed over, despite their sustained commitment to students in an environment marked by crumbling facilities, low pay, and few effective professional supports.

In short, the bridges that had to be built between educators and the communities they serve were longer and less assured than before the storm.

Active portfolio management created confusion

RSD and OPSB tried to increase academic performance by working and reworking the New Orleans school portfolio. This approach has led to dramatic improvements in student outcomes — improvements that are perhaps unprecedented in American

urban education.¹⁸³ But the intense cycle of school openings, closings, relocations, and conversions left many wondering, “What schools are open this year? Who runs them? And where are they?” The school portfolio was largely stable for decades before 2005 — now it changed every year, and changed a lot. That churn confused and frustrated many parents and made sustained engagement and partnerships difficult.

Within “portfolio management,” several worries emerged again and again:

- The government entity leading the most aggressive portfolio management effort, RSD, was unfamiliar to many New Orleanians and independent from the locally elected board.
- The process for “matching” operators — both to start new schools in vacant facilities and to turn around low-quality schools — felt opaque to many parents and other community members. In 2011, NSNO attempted to bring structure and clarity to it, in partnership with RSD and several community-based organizations. Poor communication and follow-through, as well as conflicting priorities for RSD, led to minimal buy-in from parents, neighborhood groups, and alumni. RSD scrapped the effort after some personnel changes. A formal process began again in 2014–15 and shows real promise (see “Important Changes to the School Siting Process,” page 63). But a void of nearly a decade drew consistent complaints from many corners of the city.
- Outright school closures, while rare, left some families and community members feeling abandoned at a time when continuity and cohesion mattered greatly.¹⁸⁴
- Alumni groups of multiple high schools — including Walter L. Cohen, L.B. Landry, Sarah T. Reed, G.W. Carver, and John McDonogh — fought to rebuild and reopen their alma maters, even though lower enrollment couldn’t support all the high schools that operated before Katrina. Several submitted charter applications, but BESE voted them down based on its third-party evaluator’s recommendations.¹⁸⁵ New Orleans is a city where high school ties resonate deeply, and the rejected

groups said they felt betrayed by broken promises and excluded from participating in their schools’ revitalization.

Open enrollment expanded school choice, but loosened the ties between schools and neighborhoods

Polls indicate that New Orleanians support open enrollment over geographic assignment by nearly 3 to 1. But the mechanics mystify many parents. “How do I enroll my child?” is the starting point for conversations between schools and their communities. For some, the transformed system provided an unsatisfactory, insensitive answer to that question — particularly in the years before OneApp.

Open-enrollment policies make it difficult for some charters to establish deep connections with their surrounding neighborhoods. Katrina left many New Orleans residents in fractured communities feeling displaced. The dissolution of neighborhood schools only heightened those feelings.

Churches, neighborhood groups, and other civic organizations struggle to make inroads with nearby schools — particularly since the students enrolled often have no ties to their membership.¹⁸⁶ Partnerships can bring valuable resources and services to students and families, strengthening relationships that promote neighborhood vitality. Has reform severed those connections outright? No — examples abound of strong partnerships.¹⁸⁷ But in the system’s current structure, does the value of parental choice trump the value of neighborhood cohesion? Yes. Reform leaders have rarely articulated that values tension.

School discipline practices intensified a sense of disempowerment

Suspensions and expulsions — particularly among students of color — are among the most hotly contested aspects of American public education today.

New Orleans is no exception, and the discipline systems used by some schools worried parents and some community leaders. At a handful of RSD schools, students and community groups publicly

pushed for changes.¹⁸⁸ Families and stakeholders such as The MICAH Project feared that at-risk students would be pushed into the criminal justice system.¹⁸⁹

As noted in Chapter 4, the leadership of the Micah Project, the Juvenile Justice Project of Louisiana, Louisiana Center for Children’s Rights, and other advocacy groups has accelerated the citywide trend toward lower suspension and expulsion rates since 2012.¹⁹⁰ Both figures are lower today than in 2005.¹⁹¹ Engagement with the social justice community was integral to securing changes at both the system and school level.

Why is it important?

Perhaps the only point of consensus for the entire education community in New Orleans is that the school system is not yet excellent. No one thinks the transformation is complete. To succeed, better alignment across communities will be essential. The rationale for nurturing collective ownership of the school system rests on three arguments:

- **It’s practical:** Maintaining the community engagement status quo — uneven and only moderately successful — will limit the system’s academic potential. Educators who feel disconnected from the local community leave teaching at higher rates, robbing the workforce of the stability and experience needed to accelerate academic growth. If families feel excluded, the system misses out on their unique insights and ability to support students outside of school. Churches and neighborhood groups bring important — and largely untapped — assets to the collective effort, such as supporting mentors and enrichment programs.
- **It’s sustaining:** No city aspires to have public schools that generate visceral opposition to core tenets of the system — particularly not New Orleans, which is on a more hopeful, positive academic trajectory than the city has seen in decades. To sustain reforms that led to academic progress, New Orleans must establish broad and



vocal support for the public education system. For that reason alone, system leaders must diagnose missteps in communication and engagement, then start again to build trusting, collaborative relationships. Public discourse must focus on what is best for students now, rather than debate past shortcomings in engaging communities in system reform.

- **It’s historic:** New Orleans has the chance to redefine “local control of public schools.” Too often in America the phrase rings hollow: Traditional school systems with elected boards rarely respond to community values, public school choice just means magnet schools for high-performing students, local board elections devolve into interest-group politics, and opaque budgeting prevents the public from understanding spending patterns. Decentralization can provide new opportunities for shared ownership, and new structures can empower a range of community members to lead the system.

In general, though, New Orleans reform leaders — and we fully include NSNO here — have been most comfortable discussing lofty academic aspirations for the system. Getting to the heart of why many in New Orleans feel disconnected from public education is difficult terrain. Too often the response has been to turn away rather than lean into the challenge.

“What should community ownership of our decentralized system look like? How should we cultivate and support it?” Uncertain of the response, New Orleans has tabled the discussion for years. As the city embarks on the second decade of reform, it’s time for more definitive answers.

What were the successes?

Despite persistent difficulties in building trust and shared ownership in school system reforms, successes continue to build momentum in New Orleans.

New Orleans has enduring public support for reform initiatives

Data from public polls and local elections point to strong overall levels of public support for New Orleans' education reforms.

Residents seem to favor core reforms. According to the poll conducted by Tulane's Cowen Institute and *The New Orleans Advocate*, residents support:

- **Charter schools:** 59 percent agreed that charters have improved public education; 18 percent disagreed.
- **Citywide choice:** 72 percent supported open enrollment; 23 percent favored a return to geographic assignment.
- **Accountability:** 59 percent think that schools earning a "D" or "F" letter grade should be turned over to a different school operator; 20 percent disagreed.¹⁹²

Surveys of parents also reveal high levels of satisfaction. In a 2014 report by the Center for Reinventing Public Education, 92 percent of parents reported being satisfied with their school, putting New Orleans alongside Washington, D.C., at the top of eight "high-choice" cities included in the study.¹⁹³

Beyond that, 59 percent of voters supported a December 2014 millage vote that was widely seen as a referendum on the public's trust in the new system. The "yes" vote carried 91 percent of precincts citywide.¹⁹⁴

Community participation is producing real change in the system

In New Orleans, community advocates have brought important issues to the fore and spurred system improvements for students and families. For example:

- **Enrollment practices** (see Chapter 4). A range of community groups, including the Urban League of Greater New Orleans and the New Orleans Parents Organizing Network (now New Orleans Parents' Guide to Public Schools) pushed for a centralized, family-friendly enrollment system for years. OneApp dramatically simplified the

WHAT DRIVES PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR THE SCHOOL SYSTEM?

It's worth asking why a substantial portion of the city appears to favor the reforms that have transformed the public school system. Plausible reasons include:

- ACADEMIC GAINS** (see "Student Performance in New Orleans," page 10). Public schools, while not yet excellent, are much improved. By and large, parents send their children to more effective schools than they attended themselves.
- GENERAL OPTIMISM ABOUT NEW ORLEANS' RECOVERY.** 54 percent of respondents in Cowen's poll believe that New Orleans as a whole is headed in the right direction.
- MORE WAYS TO GET INVOLVED.** The decentralization of governance has provided more channels for productive engagement. Nearly 400 New Orleanians serve on charter boards, establishing more direct contacts between the community and system leaders than ever before.
- PARENTS EMPOWERED TO CHOOSE AMONG A VARIETY OF OPTIONS.** Citywide school choice gives parents greater say in their children's education.

IMPORTANT CHANGES TO THE SCHOOL SITING PROCESS—REASONS FOR OPTIMISM

In school siting decisions, the depth and effectiveness of community engagement continue to improve. In the early years of reform, opportunities to engage in constructive dialogue were rare, and in some instances, community leaders participated only by protest.¹⁹⁵ In other cases, restarts of existing charter schools sparked contention and contributed to a rough start for new operators. In the case of high schools mentioned above, alumni groups whose charter applications were rejected found few other ways to have an influence.

During the 2014–15 school year, RSD formalized participation by community groups to select operators for the Wilson, Livingston, Reed, and John McDonogh buildings. Based on earlier successful efforts to site operators at Joseph S. Clark in 2011 and Phyllis Wheatley in 2013, the community organizations evaluated written proposals, conducted site visits and interviews, then provided final scores and feedback to RSD Superintendent Patrick Dobard. Participants varied by site: at Sarah T. Reed in New Orleans East, the Vietnamese American Young Leaders (VAYLA) and Vietnamese Initiatives in Economic Training (VIET) provided input. At Andrew Wilson, community groups as well as parents at the existing school sat on the committee and supported the new operator, InspireNOLA.

Erika McConduit, executive director of the Urban League of Greater New Orleans, who was involved in the selection process, said she developed a better appreciation for the complexity and suggested future process improvements, such as the need for an extended review period and more detailed information on program designs and operators' financial sustainability.¹⁹⁶



enrollment process for families and helped to ensure that autonomous schools serve all students equitably.

- **Discipline policies** (see Chapter 4). Sustained collaboration with juvenile justice advocates produced changes in process and placement options for students committing expellable offenses. Expulsion rates, already below the state average, decreased even further in 2014-15. Multiple charter operators worked with concerned community groups to sharply reduce the number of out-of-school suspensions as well.
- **Matching procedures** (see “Important Changes to the School Siting Process,” page 63). Responding to the persistent need for sustainable, practical ways of engaging community leaders, RSD improved the process for matching charter operators to publicly funded school facilities. RSD published the rubrics for assessing applicants and expanded community groups' participation on the selection committee, and most site assignments were made with strong community support.

In each of these cases, community input led to significant shifts, proving the potential of constructive engagement to solve system-wide challenges.

What are the persistent challenges and remaining work?

The reforms in New Orleans redefined major pillars of the city’s school system, including the governance structure, the portfolio of school operators, and the educator labor market. These reforms fundamentally changed the relationship between public schools and the wider community — but the modes of community engagement that would operate in concert with the new system have not taken root.

Education leaders bemoan the fact that the city lacks a “shared vision.” As RSD Deputy Superintendent of External Affairs Dana Peterson pointed out, “People need an opportunity to collectively envision what should be at the end of the path. What problem are we solving, what do we value, and how do we accomplish it?” On these questions, education leaders must offer a vision, while establishing mechanisms for citizens to help inform that vision. But to do that, New Orleans needs to nurture forms of community engagement that reflect today’s decentralized system of schools.

Deepen engagement in system-wide reforms

Compared with many traditional districts, New Orleans’ decentralized system provides school community members with greater access and voice in important *school-level* decisions. Principals have the autonomy to adjust their approach to meet the needs of particular families and students. Many have done so successfully — though New Orleans schools have much room to grow in engaging their parents and communities.¹⁹⁷

But when it comes to empowering *system-level* engagement, the New Orleans environment presents unique challenges. In traditional school districts, community members exert influence through board member elections, contact with central office staff, and participation in public board meetings. These forums have not yet generated a large traditional urban public school system that outperforms

COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP IN A DECENTRALIZED SYSTEM: NOLA’S PAROCHIAL SCHOOLS

As New Orleans’ newly decentralized public school system grapples with how to engage the community, the city’s well-established parochial system offers interesting parallels to consider. Many Catholic schools have built intense loyalty and engagement among parents, alumni, and community members of all races and socioeconomic backgrounds, divorced from neighborhood zones.

Yet few would be able to trace a “shared vision” of Catholic schooling in the New Orleans metro area. Rather, dozens of independent Catholic schools set their own vision, build their own staff of educators, develop their own academic program, cultivate their own culture, and thrive or struggle based largely on their ability to implement those plans. This, at least, is how most Catholic school parents experience the system.¹⁹⁹

Public schools do — and should — play a different role in civic life compared to Catholic schools. At the same time, the parochial system may provide useful insights into challenges and opportunities of engaging with parents and wider communities within the context of a decentralized system of schools.

its state academically, but they are well-established and familiar. BESE meetings typically include discussion and formal approval of RSD decisions by the state board — but most of those meetings take place in Baton Rouge. The physical distance alone makes community engagement in system-level decisions difficult to accomplish.

In order to broaden community engagement in its decentralized system of schools, OPSB and RSD need to formalize roles for input on system-level strategies and decisions. In particular:

- **School siting decisions:** transparent processes for selecting school operators that include meaningful community input.

MULTIPLE MEASURES OF EXCELLENCE

State-issued letter grades measure core outcomes that communities typically expect from their public schools: steady academic growth in each grade, earning a diploma, preparation for life after high school. Letter grades reflect the system's central values.

Interviewees repeatedly noted that New Orleans needs a definition of excellence that moves beyond letter grades to incorporate other important aspects of school.

Opinions vary about which components to include, such as college and career outcomes, teacher characteristics, physical space, social-emotional development, student and family perceptions of the school, or classroom observations by trained evaluators.

The *Parents' Guide to New Orleans Public Schools* provides information on still more metrics: class size, student stability between academic years, range of in-school and extracurricular programs, and discipline outcomes. In many cases, the group reports the data for all students as well as separating them out for special needs students.

Public school systems nationally seem caught between generating reductive indicators of quality and creating a complex synthesis of dozens of data points. It's a difficult dilemma and one that New Orleans will continue to wrestle with.

- **Enrollment policies and systems:** input on refinement of EnrollNOLA resources to facilitate informed and equitable school choice.
- **Service to vulnerable populations:** continued feedback on adjustments to citywide expulsion hearing process, special education differentiated funding, and additional services for incarcerated youth, high school dropouts, and other vulnerable populations.
- **New school creation:** communicating priorities to OPSB as it becomes the primary authorizer of new schools to ensure quality schools with a variety of programmatic offerings.
- **Standards for school excellence:** public discussion of meaningful measures of school quality beyond the state letter-grade system, and how measures guide important decisions about new school creation, replication, and accountability (see "Multiple Measures of Excellence," page 65).

Additionally, New Orleans citizens need a straightforward, reliable way to express their ideas for the system and provide input on what's working and what's not. Talk of an "ombudsman" has bubbled up since at least 2007 with little progress to note on a clear need in such a decentralized system.¹⁹⁸

Strengthen school-community relationships in a system of non-neighborhood schools

Public schools typically have a geographic anchor. The enrollment zone provides a straightforward connection to the surrounding neighborhood. It is easy to understand and generally stable over time.

In New Orleans, a decade of open-enrollment policies has built up a strong constituency in favor of school choice. But choice severs the direct geographic connection between schools and families. Choice systems prioritize empowering parents — giving families options and agency.

When the system moved away from neighborhood schools, it made it more difficult for schools to tap into community assets in close geographic proximity. In the midst of all their other work, schools became responsible for rekindling partnerships with nearby churches and civic organizations.

Part of the work ahead is deepening these relationships. Most schools now serve student populations from a dozen or more neighborhoods. As more schools move into their permanent facilities and the system begins to stabilize, schools will need to find ways to persuade neighborhood groups and churches to work alongside them to serve all

students. These groups have resources and insight that can help schools improve academic and social outcomes.

Schools with more stable physical locations, such as KIPP Central City Academy (KCCA), have begun building these meaningful partnerships to support their students. KCCA works with nearby churches and has revitalized the adjacent public park, operated by the New Orleans Recreation Development Commission (NORDC), to support the school's thriving athletics and band programs. KCCA demonstrates the opportunity available to many public schools in New Orleans, but more progress is needed.

Move toward representative leadership

Citizens judge the effectiveness of public institutions in part on their fairness and transparency. These qualities help effective institutions nurture a sense of shared ownership and responsibility.

It helps to have leaders who represent the demographic and cultural roots of their constituents. In New Orleans, leadership needs to be reflective of and responsive to the city's black population. Both OPSB and RSD superintendents are black men with south Louisiana roots who graduated from a local historically black university.²⁰⁰

New Orleans' decentralized system offers dozens of avenues for leadership — arguably far more than a hierarchical traditional district where decisions are made centrally. The other chapters in this report highlight leadership in action across New Orleans: in the districts, CMOs, schools, and classrooms; on charter and philanthropic boards; in community groups; and within talent support services and advocacy groups. Across the board, New Orleans needs more black people with local ties to be driving these efforts.²⁰¹

There is no stable definition of “representative leadership.” (For example, local, state, or national leadership would not be representative in the future without an expanded Latino voice compared to decades past.) Many see a future where far more New Orleans public schools are racially and socioeconomically integrated — driven by parents from all corners of the city demanding that

**“I know what you’re against,
but what do you stand for?”**

— RSD Superintendent

Patrick Dobard²⁰²

our schools reflect its diversity. In all likelihood, a higher-performing school system will lure private school students — black and white — back to public schools, and the next generation of New Orleans students will look different than the last. Leadership must bridge the transition toward greater diversity in the city's schools. The school system of the future needs to serve New Orleans families of all races and socioeconomic backgrounds. Only representative leadership will be able to steer this shift toward an excellent system of schools that holds high expectations for all schools and students in the city.

Engage critics and advocates

Transformative change generates vocal and passionate criticism. Constructively channeling this dissent can lead to improvements in how the system serves students and families. Many of the equity initiatives discussed in Chapter 4 were brought to the fore via pointed criticism by public activists.

Putting responsibility in the hands of autonomous schools has led to clear academic improvements, and a majority of New Orleanians support the government's new role as a regulator of quality and equity. Reversion to the old district-led structure will not help the system become excellent. Within the framework of decentralization, substantive critique needs to find receptive ears among leaders in RSD and OPSB, and the nonprofit community. Wholesale opposition to the entire package of New Orleans public education reform, on the other hand, is not constructive.

In the passionate debate over what is best for students, the loudest voices do not necessarily reflect the prevailing sentiments of the community

as a whole. Education system leaders must respond to critics while considering valid and reliable measures of larger community sentiment as they guide ongoing reforms.

Create meaningful and actionable measures of community support

Public schools are held accountable for accepted measures of academic performance, and education leaders set policies and implement new practices based on data. New Orleans should look to adopt comprehensive measures of community support as well.

This report relies on multiple measures to draw inferences about the level of participation and

support for system reforms. These data points are valid evidence — particularly longitudinal polling data from the Cowen Institute and *The New Orleans Advocate* — but they could be even more powerful if structured to systematically track public sentiment. More formal and reliable measures could help guide community engagement efforts and facilitate renewed and sustained attention on community engagement in public schools.

Although student outcomes such as test scores and graduation rates will remain the primary measures of school system success, measures of community support and engagement can play an important role in moving toward shared ownership of reforms in New Orleans.



6 Funders

Unlike most traditional school systems, New Orleans allocates the vast majority of public education dollars directly to schools. This structure helps to ensure that schools have autonomy and flexibility to meet their students' academic needs.

Private philanthropy and several major federal grants have supplemented core public funding for the past decade. New Orleans benefited greatly from these additional resources. Our decentralized system relies on nonprofits to run schools, develop educators, and support parents in the school choice process. Supplementary funding helped to spark the innovation and entrepreneurial energy that fuels these efforts and characterizes public education in New Orleans today.

In other words, governance reform created the conditions for school success. Nonprofits then worked within the new decentralized framework, using supplementary funding, to create a vibrant system focused on providing all New Orleans families with excellent schools.

If our system depends so heavily on entrepreneurial nonprofits and regular infusions of talented leaders and educators, is it wise to rely on philanthropy and unpredictable grant funding to support them? In the long run, no. Core public funding for education must evolve to meet new priorities in decentralized systems, particularly school start-up and ongoing talent development work. Until public funds adequately support this work, New Orleans must continue to turn to its funding partners to fuel the city's academic transformation.

Numbers to celebrate

\$250
MILLION

Estimated total support from philanthropy and competitive federal grants since 2005—about 6 percent of total spending on public education in New Orleans.

21st

Rank of Louisiana among all U.S. states in per-pupil school funding.²⁰³

\$1.8 BILLION

Total settlement amount provided for the rebuilding of New Orleans school facilities by the Federal Emergency Management Agency.²⁰⁴

Numbers to motivate

90%

Percent increase in number of charter schools in operation across the U.S. between 2005 and 2014 — many of whom look to the same philanthropic sources and federal grants to support their work.²⁰⁵

\$2
MILLION

Total funding allocated by LDOE since 2014 through *Believe & Prepare*. For a statewide initiative, the amount is low. New Orleans school operators benefit from these start-up resources to develop innovative teacher pipeline programs with higher education partners.

\$1.6 BILLION

Total Louisiana budget deficit that had to be addressed in 2015 legislative session.²⁰⁶ With state finances in disarray, New Orleans is unlikely to benefit from additional spending on entrepreneurship, talent development, and other key system priorities.



What happened?

Over the past decade, New Orleans public schools received substantial supplementary funding. Making a precise account of all philanthropic resources and all competitive federal grants is nearly impossible. NSNO's best working estimate of total citywide support from these two sources is \$250 million.²⁰⁷

Federal grants often came in big doses. NSNO led a successful application in partnership with RSD in 2010 for a \$13.2 million Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF) grant to provide performance incentives and professional development opportunities to more than 25 schools. That same year, NSNO and RSD received a \$28 million federal Investing in Innovation (i3) grant that was matched by \$5.6 million in private funds. Other major channels of federal support include School Improvement Grants (SIG) and various grants through the Charter Schools Program (CSP). In 2015, NSNO received a \$2.4 million federal CSP National Leadership Activities grant.

Grant funds generally supported two interrelated types of work: charter school expansion and the development of talent supports. New Orleans' rapid enrollment growth required a steady supply of talented educators to lead schools, and support organizations adapted to help meet the demand. Local and national grant funds grew and sustained sources of teachers, including Teach For America and teachNOLA. Supplementary funds also helped attract national talent development organizations to New Orleans, including Relay Graduate School of Education, Match Teacher Coaching, and the Achievement Network. Finally, philanthropy fueled start-up organizations such as Leading Educators,

which works to build the leadership capacity of early- to mid-career teachers and is based in New Orleans. Start-up work continues today: SELF (Special Education Leadership Fellows) will begin offering two-year development programs beginning in summer 2015 to cohorts of special education coordinators to build their expertise and leadership skills.

The past decade in New Orleans' decentralized system has affirmed what many believed would prove true: Compared with traditional districts, nonprofit organizations have played an outsized role in running schools and providing supports to educators. Strong academic gains show this model has promise. But one consideration that is often overlooked is the integral role that supplementary funding played in getting this nonprofit community off the ground. Without sustained philanthropic support and key federal grants, New Orleans would have struggled to create such a vibrant ecosystem.

Finally, one major outside funding commitment often goes unmentioned: FEMA's \$1.8 billion settlement that allowed OPSB and RSD to be strategic about rebuilding the right number of schools to serve students across the city. The School Facilities Master Plan churns along in the background, while the programmatic and policy work outlined on these pages continues on in full force. It has been largely successful, though not without tensions and disagreements about what to prioritize in the rebuilding. As the construction comes to a close over the next two to three years, it is worth remembering how deplorable the buildings were for students and teachers for decades before 2005. The national investment in physical spaces for New Orleans public schools will prove to be an invaluable contribution to the system.

IS \$250 MILLION A MASSIVE SUM OR A DROP IN THE BUCKET?

On one hand, \$250 million is a staggering amount of support for public schools in a medium-size city. On the other, operational spending by New Orleans schools—from local, state, and federal funding—approached \$5 billion over the past decade.²⁰⁸ Public school systems require large outlays of public dollars.

If our estimate of \$250 million is roughly correct, that would translate into approximately \$715 in additional annual support for each New Orleans public school student, or less than 6 percent of total annual spending.²⁰⁹ Annual expenditures approached \$12,000 per pupil in New Orleans 2013–14.²¹⁰

New Orleans has certainly benefited from sustained support from philanthropy and federal grants—but core public dollars constitute the vast majority of K–12 spending in the city. We shouldn't overlook that fact.

FUNDING PARTNERS' SUSTAINED SUPPORT FOR NEW ORLEANS

A national outpouring of charitable giving and federal support assisted New Orleanians in the months following Hurricane Katrina and the failure of the city's levees.

A decade later, what has sustained the level of supplementary resources available to New Orleans schools and educators? What explains the additional 6 percent in per-pupil funding that augments core public dollars? Four factors contributed:

UNIQUE APPROACH TO IMPROVING PUBLIC SCHOOLS: Decades of philanthropic support for traditional urban districts governed by school boards had yielded only meager academic gains. Mayoral control of public schools, thought to be a breakthrough solution, proved challenging. The Recovery School District intervention—and the dramatic decentralization that followed in both districts—offered a promising third way that made the city attractive for philanthropic partners. Government's reduced role in school operation created space for dozens of nonprofits to contribute. With philanthropic support to launch and sustain their operations, these organizations fundamentally reshaped the New Orleans system.

CLEAR, CONSISTENT STRATEGY: Neither RSD nor OPSB have bucked the national trend of frequent turnover among top district leadership.²¹¹ Yet the citywide strategy has remained remarkably stable: Identify persistently low-performing schools each year and either close them or allow stronger school operators to restart them under new leadership. Such strategic clarity is rare among large urban districts.

IMPRESSIVE GAINS IN STUDENT ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT: Our review of student academic growth (see "Student Performance in New Orleans," page 10) gives a sense of the dramatic improvement in learning outcomes, a conclusion reinforced by the Education Research Alliance for New Orleans in its June 2015 research conference.²¹² Year after year of strong data helped build momentum behind the idea that New Orleans could become a proof point showing that public schools can serve urban communities with excellence and equity.

RELATIVE POLITICAL CALM: Democratic Gov. Kathleen Blanco and Republican Gov. Bobby Jindal largely aligned their education platforms to the principles of the New Orleans system.²¹³ Strong appointments to BESE have ensured that the state board remains focused on academic quality among New Orleans charter schools. In the legislature, a broad base of support for school choice and charter schools compensates for the absence of a single leading champion. The Louisiana Association of Public Charter Schools has cultivated a group of leaders committed to the work in New Orleans. In short, New Orleans benefited from political and system leadership that gave the reform movement a rare measure of continuity. This stability helped to secure investment in the system by both the federal government and philanthropic groups.

See "Reflections on NSNO's Role in the System" on page 73 for thoughts from Macke Raymond, director of the Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO), on NSNO's role in securing major commitments via federal grants and philanthropic foundations.

Why is it important?

Despite representing just above six percent of total expenditures related to public education in New Orleans, supplemental resources from local and national funding partners played an outsized role in fueling the system's positive transformation.

Nonprofit organizations and new charter schools used these resources for start-up funding to begin working in the city's decentralized system. Philanthropy and federal grants also provided essential support for the ongoing work of talent organizations, particularly pipelines of new teachers for a rapidly growing system of schools.

These functions remain essential to New Orleans' success in the second decade of reform — but the city's reliance on non-recurring funds creates uncertainty about their future. New Orleans' dependence on supplemental resources means the system is vulnerable to evolving priorities by funders, including the federal government.

This approach cuts against the widely shared goal of sustaining progress in New Orleans. For New Orleans to become a city of excellent public schools, it needs a steady inflow of talented educators and the capacity to support talented entrepreneurs as they launch the next wave of education-focused nonprofits. System leaders must continue to raise the resources to drive these functions forward.

What were the successes?

Funding enabled a reform strategy driven by innovative nonprofits

In sharp contrast to static traditional urban districts, decentralization has produced a dynamic environment in New Orleans. The city attracts catalytic investments from a variety of sources and nurtures new nonprofits to fill system gaps and expand educational options for families. Funding partners were drawn to New Orleans in part because it offered the greatest capacity for change.

Collectively, these organizations deliver public education in a fundamentally different way — one that

generates strong academic gains by continually innovating to best serve a high-needs population. The New Orleans system would not have emerged as quickly in the absence of coordinated, strategic use of the supplemental resources that came into the system since 2005.

Decision-making was data-driven

The use of student performance data to guide grant-making has permeated the New Orleans system. For example, NSNO's i3 grant included ambitious student achievement thresholds, ensuring that only the highest-performing charter operators would be eligible for federal support to start a school. Rigorous analysis from CREDO spotlighted the schools generating significant academic growth — even in cases where overall performance remained low.

Nonprofits that support talent initiatives (e.g., identifying and training new teachers or coaching principals) lie a step removed from concrete student achievement data, making it more difficult to quantify their impact.²¹⁴ The degree of partnership between autonomous schools and nonprofit talent organizations provided a proxy for the support organization's value. Schools, given the autonomy to select among a range of nonprofits working to support educators, were able to partner with those that contributed the most to improved student performance. Third-party providers that could not secure school partners were less attractive to funders.

Several promising examples exist of state funding to support key New Orleans priorities

State funding broke new ground in the past two years, filling roles assumed by philanthropy and the federal government for much of the past decade. For example, the LDOE has funded “Believe & Prepare” efforts in traditional districts and charter schools as they launch innovative partnerships to prepare novice educators to step into the classroom. This promising funding program suggests alignment between the state's priorities around educator preparation and the needs of New Orleans schools. While the investment is relatively small for a statewide program — approximately \$2 million over the past two years — the initiative is a step in the right direction. Given Louisiana's current fiscal crisis, additional investment will be unlikely in coming years.²¹⁵

REFLECTIONS ON NSNO'S ROLE IN THE SYSTEM

By Macke Raymond, director of the Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO) and lead evaluator of NSNO's i3 program award.

Most people know New Schools for New Orleans (NSNO) in the local context as a funder of new charter schools, including efforts to restart persistently low-performing schools.

But NSNO's real innovation lies beyond grant-making.

NSNO has combined advocacy, philanthropy, consultancy, and program design to create a unique form of leverage in the community, the state, and the national debate around public schools. Fusing these disparate activities together has led to a new role in the landscape—closer to the action than most funders, more wide-angle in perspective than most school operators, more independent than most advocates, and more strategic than most program designers. NSNO stands at the intersection of these strengths to push, pull, plead, and prod the education community toward better school choices for New Orleans students.

To be clear, NSNO has grown into this role via a long and sometimes painful evolution. In each facet of their work, they have been challenged. Their initial responses have not always been optimal. At times, the approach has been downright clunky. More often than not, however, a mid-course correction back to prime tenets and back to fundamental values followed shortly after missteps.

The organization has had success in securing resources through partnerships with national philanthropies and the federal government. Their accomplishment couldn't happen without compelling vision about the type of education system that New Orleans needs and deserves. NSNO's vision has been clear and consistent—a rarity in urban education policy. It may not be all things to all people, but NSNO has been on target about its focus on academic achievement of students since its inception, and in doing so has attracted the enduring support it needs to carry out its bold ideas.

While the desire for “great schools” is universal, agreements about how to realize them are harder to

achieve—they require hard choices about strategies and a sustained focus on implementation. NSNO's national network of contacts has been instrumental in forging programs and long-term strategies focused on talent and systems development. The decision to support strong school models to move underperforming schools ahead in New Orleans has been the centerpiece of their most recent efforts. NSNO has kept itself grounded in the local context to understand needs and constraints, while reaching beyond the city limits to bring the best thinking and solutions forward.

Even with these strengths, striking the balance has been and continues to be challenging. At various times, NSNO has lost focus on the target and drifted away from its own strategies. As a result, some choices about new school operators were made under a keen sense of urgency to “do something” as opposed to “do the right thing.” It did not take long to recognize the impact of suboptimal choices, and NSNO reacted quickly to reset.

NSNO maintains closer relationships with its grantees than many grant-makers. NSNO provides thought partnership, review, and feedback to schools they support with funding. This counsel takes the form of a “critical friend”—a valuable role, but difficult territory to navigate. Indeed the complexity of the relationship has at times caused confusion—are they friend or funder? Opponent or advocate? Regardless, the deeper understanding that NSNO has developed about the schools, staffs, students, and communities makes it a more grounded organization.

In the final analysis, NSNO retains a bottom-line stance about the funding it provides. The organization constantly asks: Are schools helping their students with full preparation for post-secondary options, including academic and life skills? The commitment that NSNO has made to the community—and others—carries a transparent accountability about results. Other organizations look selectively for the upside; NSNO has taken the less popular route to lay open the performance of schools. Despite the short-run struggles, its approach leads more directly to better choices in the future and swifter improvement for the children of New Orleans.



What are the persistent challenges and remaining work?

Support key system priorities with recurring public dollars

Changes to governance ought to be accompanied by changes in public finance.²¹⁶ In other words, resource allocation should reflect how education is delivered in the new system — by autonomous nonprofits rather than a central district office.²¹⁷

More recurring public dollars should support key system priorities. Entrepreneurship and talent drive progress in a decentralized system. But funding structures have not kept pace with dramatic changes in the city's approach to recruiting and developing talent and launching new nonprofit ventures.

Today, these initiatives lack reliable public funding.²¹⁸ Philanthropy, in concert with one-time federal grants, stepped up and made important catalytic investments to build the first iteration of New Orleans' decentralized system. Student performance has improved dramatically in this system.

Outside resources got the ball rolling, but they can't go it alone indefinitely if New Orleans aspires to excellence. State and federal governments need

to regularly allocate resources to fund start-up organizations and support the ongoing work of identifying talented educators and developing their skills and expertise.²¹⁹ These two funding priorities have been critical to the city's success and need ongoing investment.

Maintain strong philanthropic partnerships to support New Orleans public schools

Philanthropic funders have helped galvanize a diverse set of nonprofits behind a common mission in New Orleans. This investment has contributed to sustained improvement in academic results and promising evidence that a decentralized system of public schools can create an innovative, equitable experience for all families.

These philanthropic partnerships must remain strong if New Orleans hopes to continue its academic transformation. While NSNO and others look forward to sustained federal and state investment of public dollars into the system's start-up and talent priorities, the short-term likelihood of government delivering on those calls for smarter public spending appears low.

In the interim, NSNO and others must clearly outline for philanthropic partners how we believe New Orleans can move toward an excellent, equitable public school system. Building on momentum from the city's successful decade, New Orleans is well-positioned to become the country's first excellent urban public school system.

Conclusion

This report began by raising pointed questions about how New Orleans sees its young people. We asked which students New Orleanians have treated as “our kids.” Which students have the opportunity to enroll in excellent schools? What have we been willing to do to deliver on this promise to all New Orleans students?

We followed six threads of the New Orleans story, describing the work of the past decade, highlighting successes, and exploring necessary improvements.

Collectively, these chapters show that something remarkable is happening in New Orleans. An innovative system has generated substantial gains on state tests. ACT results in our public schools are closing stubborn gaps with students elsewhere in the country. New Orleans educators are helping more kids over the finish line in high school and onto college campuses. This is real progress.

Improvements like these do not happen without citywide investment in the success of its young people. New Orleans is starting to treat all kids as “our kids.” We are building a system to serve every child.

But much work remains. Test scores and high school diplomas are signposts along the way — critical signposts, but signposts nonetheless. The destination is a just community, led by graduates of New Orleans public schools who are prepared to uplift neighborhoods and solve inequities across New Orleans: in housing, healthcare, economic development, and criminal justice.

In 2025, we hope to celebrate a public school system that has kept the positive momentum over a second decade of reform:

- **In Governance:** As New Orleans navigates toward a unified governance system, public officials remain focused on two core activities: evaluating schools’ academic quality, and creating an equitable, fair system for all families. If officials commit to these principles, more parents will have the opportunity to find an excellent school for their children.
- **In Schools:** Government should leave the rest to New Orleans’ autonomous schools: hiring and developing educators, shaping curriculum, and establishing vibrant school environments. Parents will look to existing school operators and new organizations to personalize instruction for their children and to create school environments that are racially and socioeconomically diverse. After high school, students will experience seamless transitions to post-secondary options — including four-year college, two-year college, or right into the workplace.
- **In Talent:** As more families enroll in public schools in New Orleans, schools need access to many sources of teachers who help students learn. Today’s New Orleans public school graduates become tomorrow’s New Orleans public school teachers. Higher education, K–12 schools, and the nonprofit community are positioned to reinvent teacher preparation if they have the resources and relationships to form promising new partnerships.
- **In Equity:** For every health, social, and economic challenge faced by students and their families, public schools are well-equipped to connect New Orleanians to the services they need. Students who have disconnected from the system — or seem to be heading in that direction — get the hands-on support that they need to thrive.
- **In Community:** Leaders in the education system, community groups, advocacy organizations, government, and citizens approach the task of solving problems with a sense of unity and shared purpose on behalf of the students of New Orleans.
- **In Funders:** Lawmakers and taxpayers express their deep belief in the promise of New Orleans students by funding initiatives that are integral to the success of autonomous schools in high-needs communities — namely, launching effective new nonprofits and fueling ongoing talent

priorities such as teacher pipelines and educator development.

Our educators are getting to the heart of the challenges faced by young people in New Orleans. Their innovation and commitment will make New Orleans a more just community in the future. We have to keep pushing.

The students of New Orleans deserve nothing less than the country's first great urban public school system. That is our goal.

2025 will be here before we know it.



Notes

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207. ERA data on philanthropic donations each year, tabulated from required school-level financial reports. These totaled \$180 million since 2006. Teacher pipelines and talent development organizations make up the remainder of our estimate.
208. Per ERA, annual per-pupil operating expenditures (i.e., excluding equipment costs, construction services, and debt service) were highest in 2008 (approximately \$20,000) and hovered around \$12,500 over the past five years as the system stabilized. To calculate \$5 billion, we multiply annual per-pupil operating expenditures by total citywide enrollment.
209. We derive this figure by calculating total citywide K-12 enrollment combined from fall 2006 through fall 2014. We then divided our best estimate of total supplemental funding (\$250 million) by the combined enrollment figure (about 350,000 student-years). Per pupil expenditures from 2013-14 from: Sims, P., & Rossmeier, V. (2015). *State of Public Education in New Orleans 2015*. Cowen Institute. Retrieved from <http://www.speno2015.com/>

210. Sims & Rossmeier, V. (2015). *State of Public Education*. Many urban school districts spend far more per-pupil annually (such as Washington, D.C., Newark, Boston).

211. RSD has had four superintendents in a decade. OPSB has had four as well. In 2013–14, the average urban superintendent had 3.18 years of tenure, according to a survey by the Council of Great City Schools. Council of Great City Schools. (2014, Fall). *Urban school superintendents: Characteristics, tenure, and salary*. Retrieved from http://www.cgcs.org/cms/lib/DC00001581/Centricity/Domain/87/Urban%20Indicator_Superintendent%20Summary%20111514.pdf

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213. Jindal's disruptive, politically motivated quest to back down from Common Core State Standards is a notable exception.

214. Federal TIF funding is a notable exception, relying on teacher observation and state-generated teacher value-added data to determine performance-based compensation for educators each year.

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217. In many respects, New Orleans is far ahead of the curve. RSD charters receive funds based on differentiated funding formulas that award extra dollars for students with disabilities, over-age students, students who are English language learners, and other student characteristics. OPSB charters directly receive most—but not all—of the funding that flows into the district. Recent legislation will create a citywide differentiated funding formula in the coming years.

218. For example, LDOE's federal Charter Schools Program grant exhausted funds more quickly than the state anticipated. Philanthropic grants and low-cost loans made the path to financial sustainability rocky for start-up charters.

219. In 2014, the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools offered a specific proposal for using School Improvement Grant (SIG) funds to open new charters and expand existing high-quality CMOs. Wolfe, C. (2014, September 4). Using school improvement grant funds to increase access to high-quality public schools. National Alliance for Public Charter Schools. Retrieved from <http://www.publiccharters.org/publications/sig/>