ppi radically pragmatic

20 Years of Reinvention:
Education Reform in New Orleans

EMILY LANGHORNE
RACHEL CANTER

PROGRESSIVE POLICY INSTITUTE

SEPTEMBER 2025

Executive Summary

On August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans, accelerating the collapse of an already disintegrating city public school system. Prior to the storm, almost two-thirds of New Orleans public school students attended failing schools, half dropped out, and fewer than one in five enrolled in college.[1] The school system suffered severe financial mismanagement, corruption, and crumbling school infrastructures.[2]

Yet in the midst of a national tragedy came an unprecedented opportunity for education reform. Louisiana transferred 80% of the city's public schools to the state-run Recovery School District (RSD), which, over the next decade, converted them all into charter schools.[3] The elected Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB) turned most of its 17 remaining schools into charters as well.[4] In 2018, the state "reunified" the RSD schools with the local school board.[5] By 2020, the OPSB had converted its last two schools to charters, making New Orleans the first large U.S. school district composed entirely of charter schools.[6]

This sweeping education reform led to remarkable academic gains. Over the last 20 years, student outcomes have grown substantially. Despite harder assessments, students have jumped ten percentage points in reading and math at fourth and eighth grade, and graduation and college enrollments have rocketed by more than twenty percentage points.[7] In 2024, not a single New Orleans school was rated as "failing" by the state accountability system.[8]

The New Orleans model will not translate perfectly to all American districts, given the unique circumstances of post-Katrina recovery. Nonetheless, elements of its approach provide a compelling blueprint for large bureaucratic districts. These include

- Significant school autonomy, so school leaders have the freedom they need to craft schools that meet their students' needs.
- Accountability for student performance, including the opportunity for schools to expand and/or replicate if successful, and to face replacement or closure if not.
- Full choice between a diverse array of educational models.
- Competition for students and dollars among schools.
- A board and superintendent largely freed of responsibility for operating schools, enabling them to concentrate on system-wide needs and issues.

The reinvention of New Orleans' public schools represents both stunning success and critical lessons. If every major American public school system could achieve similar improvements, the effect on children across the nation would be profound.

20 Years of Reinvention: Education Reform in New Orleans

EMILY LANGHORNE
RACHEL CANTER

SEPTEMBER 2025

INTRODUCTION

Twenty years ago, on August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina, to date one of the top five deadliest storms in U.S. history,[9] struck Louisiana and the Mississippi Gulf Coast. New Orleans' federally constructed levee system began to falter before the storm even fully made landfall, ultimately leading to total failure within hours.[10] The resulting floods submerged 80% of the city, destroyed tens of thousands of homes, displaced hundreds of thousands of residents, and accounted for a significant portion of the storm's approximately 1,800 deaths.[11]

Hurricane Katrina was an economic and human catastrophe. Yet, for years before the storm made landfall, New Orleans had already been grappling with another devastating crisis: a public education system that trapped children in failing schools, condemning many to ongoing cycles of poverty. In 2004, 61% of the city's public school students attended failing schools.[12] Only half of these students graduated, and fewer than one in five enrolled in college.[13]

The academic problems were the end result of a district in ongoing operational and financial chaos: before the start of the school year in 2005, New Orleans Public Schools was bankrupt as the result of years of financial mismanagement.[14] Financial receivers discovered in summer 2005 that district bank accounts would run dry by September and began immediate emergency measures to try to open school as normal by mid-August.[15] Katrina, coming just two weeks later, became a knock-out blow to a system already on the brink of collapse. On September 15, the Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB) put all its employees on unpaid disaster leave, and the district was uncertain as to when it could reopen schools or if it would even be possible in most of the city.[16]

This dire situation became the unlikely starting point for the reinvention of New Orleans's public schools. Since Katrina, New Orleans has spent

two decades spearheading the most significant transformation in American education since the Progressive Era. The results of this reinvention have been no less than startling — unprecedented academic gains and a new 21st century model for public education.[17]

THE CHAOS BEFORE THE STORM

As David Osborne chronicled in his 2017 book, *Reinventing America's Schools*, it's difficult to exaggerate how abysmal New Orleans's public schools were before August 29, 2005: Students roamed the halls at will; fights were common; teachers sometimes napped during class; principals who failed were often moved into positions in the central office.[18] School facilities, too, were in shambles far before floodwaters ever breached their doors.[19]

The school-level disarray reflected the deep rot in the district's central office.[20] The year immediately before the storm, 24 people were indicted for financial crimes against the district as the result of a wide-ranging federal investigation that uncovered multiple, distinct schemes, including bribery, kickbacks, embezzlement, bank larceny, check fraud, and extortion.[21] A few years later, the school board chairwoman from this time period would serve a federal prison sentence after pleading guilty to accepting $140,000 in bribes from the brother of a then-sitting congressman.[22] In early 2005, *Education Week* reported the federal government threatened then-state superintendent Cecil Picard that if New Orleans did not get their financial affairs in order after failing to properly account for $70 million in funds, the U.S. Department of Education would withhold future Title I money, a move that EdWeek described as "apparently unprecedented."[23]

The steps to resolving financial scandals, no matter how severe, are well known if often politically difficult: place the organization in financial receivership, root out corruption and incompetence, and reset systems. Alvarez and Marsal, the firm selected by the state and hired by OPSB under pressure from the U.S. Department of Education,[24] had just this experience with St. Louis Public Schools as well as a host of corporate and military turnarounds.[25] Before Katrina, the firm had already begun to take steps to right-size the district, including emergency measures to stave off the impending bankruptcy they uncovered in July 2005 as they sorted out the district's books.

The playbook for improving academic achievement was much less clear in the early 2000s, but former OPSB member and then-Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) member Leslie Jacobs had already taken a page from the financial receivership model by the time Alvarez and Marsal began their work. Frustrated by years of inaction, Jacobs led a campaign in 2003 to create the Recovery School District (RSD).[26] The new RSD empowered the state to take over individual schools that received failing performance scores for four consecutive years, nearly 74% of which were in New Orleans as of 2004.[27] Between 2003 and 2005, the RSD selected five city schools for takeover, which they turned into charter schools.[28]

Though no one could have known before the storm, the presence of a financial receiver and the RSD in New Orleans laid the groundwork for how the state and city would respond in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

FINDING A WAY FORWARD

In the days following Katrina's August 29th landfall, few were thinking about getting the schools back up and running. Due to the failure of the levees, flood waters deluged 80% of the city within 48 hours and remained in many areas for over a week.[29] Residents unable to evacuate found themselves stranded without access to clean water and enough food.[30] Areas of the city devolved into lawlessness while the city's

fragile infrastructure completely disintegrated.[31] The Superdome, which had become a shelter of last resort, flooded, leading to a cascading humanitarian crisis as people bounced between the Superdome, the Convention Center, and an interstate bridge seeking water, food, medical assistance, and evacuation help.[32] In the two weeks following the storm, over 45,000 National Guard troops and nearly 20,000 active duty military personnel were deployed to Louisiana and the Gulf Coast, with the overwhelming majority sent to New Orleans to try to bring order to the city and assist with evacuations, search and rescue, and recovery of the bodies of storm victims.[33]

With severe damage throughout the city, many residents were unable to return quickly or at all. Population estimates show that Hurricane Katrina displaced approximately 250,000 New Orleanians — nearly half of the city's population.[34] When the OPSB held its first school board meeting on September 15, two and half weeks after the storm, it confronted an even deeper crisis than the summer's bad news of its looming bankruptcy — destroyed schools and educational materials, displaced families and employees, far fewer than expected financial resources, and deepening political battle lines over how to move forward.[35] A divided OPSB was unsure whether it would be able to reopen any of the city's East Bank schools before the end of the school year, even if it could manage to reopen schools in the Algiers neighborhood on the West Bank, which had been mostly spared of flooding and other damage.[36]

Between September and the end of October, the OPSB made plans to reopen 20 schools, 13 in Algiers and seven on the East Bank,[37] by converting them to charter schools after the U.S. Department of Education made $20.9 million in federal Charter Schools Program money available for use.[38] Not all board members supported the plan,[39] but the district's financial situation remained grim, leaving them with few viable alternatives.[40]

The circumstances facing the OPSB opened the door for the state to take charge, a move at least one board member welcomed, telling EdWeek, "They should have taken us over a long time ago…I'd be more than happy to give up my power to get kids educated."[41] Leslie Jacobs was hoping for exactly that. In an interview with David Osborne for his 2017 book, she recounts meeting with State Superintendent Cecil Picard to propose that the RSD take control of most of New Orleans' schools.[42] In November 2005, she got her wish: the Louisiana legislature passed Act 35, requiring the RSD to absorb any New Orleans school performing below the state average.[43] Under this new law, the RSD assumed control over 102 of the city's 126 pre-Katrina public schools, with intentions to convert them all to charter schools.[44]

Of the schools remaining, the OPSB retained direct control of only five,[45] including the city's selective-admission magnet schools, since they had already chosen to charter the Algiers schools and the other schools were permanently closed as the result of damage.[46] By this point, the district had too few schools to justify the number of adults it employed and no money to pay them.[47] The district formally made its September disaster leave policy permanent, releasing more than 7,000 pre-Katrina employees in early December.[48] The die had been cast for the new public education system to emerge.

A RADICAL TRANSFORMATION

The new model for public education that New Orleans developed over the next 13 years was unlike any the nation had seen before. By the 2018-2019 school year, when the New Orleans RSD schools officially reunified with OPSB, over 98% of students attended public charter schools.[49] In December 2018, OPSB voted to convert its last district-operated school into a charter as of the 2019-2020 school year, marking the first time a locally elected school board oversaw a large school district composed entirely of charter schools.[50]

Today, all but one of the schools in New Orleans are charters.[51]

New Orleans' model represents multiple shifts in how a large school district operates. These shifts are important to understanding how the new system works.

Redefining the Role of the District

The first, and perhaps most important, shift is in how New Orleans redefined the role of a school district by separating the jobs of "steering" and "rowing," as David Osborne has written.[52] In the newly constituted New Orleans Public Schools, district leaders no longer operate the majority of schools, meaning the district does not hire and fire teachers, choose curriculum, or set schedules.[53] Instead, the district focuses solely on authorizing great schools and closing bad ones; setting and ensuring compliance with policies for accountability, nondiscrimination, and access; and providing facilities and back office support, including funneling state, local, and federal financial resources to the schools.[54]

Decentralization, Citywide Choice, and a Diversity of Schools

With this clarity around what the district focuses on — and what it does not — schools in New Orleans gained authority over their own operations, including all those tasks around staffing, curriculum, schedules, and other key decisions the district is no longer making. This allows school leaders to design schools with distinct pedagogies, cultures, and educational philosophies. Along with decentralizing operational control, the city also moved to a system of citywide public school choice for families. Unlike traditional schools, which enroll students based on their home address, charter schools typically do not use geographic zones to gatekeep who is eligible to attend. In addition to being a hallmark of the charter school movement, opening enrollment citywide was also an immediate necessity after Katrina, when so few schools restarted before fall 2006. Eliminating attendance zones had a transformative effect on New Orleans's education landscape, allowing families to select a school that they believe best fits their child's needs and interests. To make choice possible, the district requires all charters to provide transportation to any student living more than a mile from their school.

Because families can choose from any school in the city and the schools compete for students (and hence public funding), and because school leaders have the autonomy to differentiate their models as they desire, New Orleans now boasts numerous school models: STEM-focused, college prep, International Baccalaureate, dual-language immersion, project-based learning, Montessori, dual enrollment, diverse-by-design, a Military and Maritime Academy, and more.[55] The district authorized four alternative schools specifically designed to serve students who are significantly behind grade level, have dropped out or aged out, or were expelled elsewhere.[56] Before reunification, the RSD, OPSB, and nonprofit leaders created a new Career Center that students from any high school can use to pursue training in health care, digital media, engineering, culinary arts, hospitality management, or the building trades.[57] Opportunities Academy offers a transition program for special-needs students aged 18 to 22, where they focus on developing personal independence and get training through internships in fields such as cafe management and cleaning services — all designed to prepare them for life after high school.[58] Having this variety of public school models would not be possible without public school choice.

In the early years of reform, critics argued that the open-enrollment model would increase student mobility, anticipating that families might frequently switch schools, causing disruption for students and classrooms. They also worried that

replacing failing schools would lead to a school system where all schools looked alike. Neither of these concerns materialized. Student mobility has decreased, and New Orleans schools have continued expanding their diverse educational offerings.

School Closures

Another linchpin for New Orleans' new model is the promise that poorly performing schools would no longer survive in perpetuity as they had before the storm. Traditional school districts often allow failing schools to persist for decades, partly because closure creates significant disruption within communities. In many cities, schools are major local employers, providing stable jobs to teachers and staff protected by tenure and collective bargaining agreements. The combination can make it almost impossible to remove ineffective educators. For elected school board members, closing schools carries the risk of backlash from teachers' unions, families, and voters who often have strong emotional ties to neighborhood schools, even when those schools fail academically.

In New Orleans's new system, the RSD made the tough decisions traditional districts usually avoid — closing low-performing charters and replacing them with stronger alternatives. New Orleans currently has about 90 public schools.[59] In the decade following Katrina, the RSD closed 26 underperforming schools, replacing the majority with stronger operators.[60]

In a 2025 analysis, the Education Research Alliance of New Orleans (ERA-NO) reported that the primary factor driving New Orleans's academic improvement was this gradual process of replacing low-performing schools with higher-performing operators.[61] At the elementary and middle school levels, ERA-NO found that despite the initial disruption caused by school closures or takeovers, students whose schools were closed or replaced performed equal to or better than a comparison group within one year.[62] After two years, these students consistently showed better outcomes.[63] At the high school level, ERA-NO noted that disruptions were more likely to interfere with a student's path toward on-time graduation, since older students have fewer years to adjust to a new school before graduating.[64] However, ERA-NO concluded that a school takeover or closure still likely benefited younger cohorts starting high school in subsequent years.[65] Researcher Jon Valant also found that the district's policy of giving support and priority in the New Orleans Common Application Process (NCAP, formerly OneApp) to students in closed schools increased their chances of ending up in a better school the next year.[66]

AN ECOSYSTEM OF COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Over the past two decades, the decentralized nature of New Orleans's all-charter system has fostered a competitive market for educational services and spurred the creation of numerous support organizations. These organizations provide services to the district as well as schools and families, filling in gaps many did not anticipate in the early years of the new system. One key partner to the district is New Schools for New Orleans (NSNO), which has played an outsized role in the New Orleans charter story.[67] NSNO was the brainchild of Sarah Usdin, a former Teach For America and The New Teacher Project staffer who sought to support the incubation and successful operations of the new charter schools the RSD hoped to authorize.[68] Over time, NSNO would become a strong partner to the RSD by providing teachers and leaders for schools and raising philanthropic funds to incubate and launch new schools.[69] It also served a critical strategic role and thought partner as the RSD confronted each new challenge.[70]

Early on, Usdin convinced Teach For America and The New Teacher Project to double down on their support for New Orleans at a time when they were

thinking of leaving the city.[71] She also recruited New Leaders for New Schools to help the city find the right people to open its charters.[72] All three of these organizations were national players in the education human capital space, but New Orleans would also need new, homegrown organizations to solve the problems the new system would confront.

One such new organization is EdNavigator, which works to help families navigate the common enrollment system and find a best-fit school for students.[73] Founded in 2015, EdNavigator is a nonprofit organization that initially partnered with employers to provide educational guidance as a workplace benefit, helping families navigate school choices, enrollment, and other school-related issues.[74] However, recognizing the benefits of integrating healthcare and education, EdNavigator changed its model to partnership with healthcare providers in 2018.[75] Pediatricians are trusted by families to provide parenting advice, but they are often too constrained by short appointments to discuss school challenges. By referring them to EdNavigator, they place parents in contact with education experts who can support with school selection, understanding academic outcomes, developing home learning strategies, navigating special education processes, and child advocacy.

Research partners, too, formed upon the realization that the city needed robust and independent evaluations of the effectiveness of reforms. The Cowen Institute, housed at Tulane University, launched in 2007 "to monitor, chronicle, and analyze the dramatic changes occurring in New Orleans' public education system after Hurricane Katrina."[76] Today, the Cowen Institute has a broader lens, working to "contextual[e] data and provid[e] thought leadership, and build[] practitioners' capacity."[77] Education Research Alliance for New Orleans, another initiative of Tulane University, formed in 2013 "to produce objective, rigorous, and useful research to inform the community's understanding of how to improve students' experiences in schools and beyond."[78] Together, the two organizations produce critically important research, which provides the best information available about how the New Orleans reforms have affected students and teachers.

Other youth-serving nonprofits focused on unmet needs created by New Orleans' unique system. Post-Katrina, many charter schools focused on college readiness, but the city had no explicitly career-focused options for students who preferred a career pathway.[79] Labor market projections highlight the growing demand for well-paid jobs that require post-secondary training but not a four-year degree, like nursing assistants, medical technicians, HVAC engineers, and carpenters.[80] Nonprofits are filling this void, connecting high schools and their students to career pathways. YouthForce NOLA is an example. Launched in 2015 as an initiative among civic, education, and business leaders, it helps provide students with workforce development skills.[81] YouthForce NOLA addresses this skills gap by providing paid summer internships for students and giving grants to high schools to develop career-tech programs.[82] In 2024, YouthForce NOLA helped more than 3,000 students gain access to "career-connected" learning opportunities, which led to YouthForce students earning a total of 975 credentials.[83] The New Orleans Career Center (NOCC), launched in 2018, has a similar mission, training students for careers in diverse fields like healthcare, culinary arts, and building trades.[84] In 2023-2024, NOCC partnered with 25 of the 29 NOLA-PS high schools and trained more than 600 students.[85]

LESSONS LEARNED ON THE ROCKY ROAD TO RECOVERY

New Orleans's post-Katrina reforms radically transformed its public education system. As with any significant overhaul, though, the road to the new system was rocky, requiring leaders to stop and reassess whether to persist or change course.

The willingness of leaders to confront challenges head-on helped the system survive and grow.

Finding the Right Operators

The first major obstacle to success was simply finding enough qualified charter school operators to reopen schools. Successful charter sectors rely on carefully vetting potential school operators and their applications to ensure quality and increase the likelihood of success. When RSD leaders asked the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) to review the first round of 44 charter applications, NACSA identified only six groups as qualified.[86]

Accepting this reality, the RSD leadership made the tough decision to charter 10 schools to be operated by the six recommended applicants.[87] That decision meant the RSD had to directly operate 18 schools in the 2006-2007 school year, restarting them from scratch and reopening them as quickly as possible.[88] That process proved to be yet another mess. As David Osborne notes in his book, Paul Pastorek, then a BESE board member, was terrified the expanded RSD would fail before it even really got off the ground. Pastorek recalled saying to Leslie Jacobs, "'I think this experiment is going to fail because we don't have the infrastructure to be able to do the job.'"[89] He told Osborne, "We didn't have space, we didn't have money, we didn't have people, we were in an environment post-Katrina that was still very tenuous — real chaos in the city, still real danger from crime."[90]

Pastorek believed the city needed a proven leader like Paul Vallas, who had successful stints in both Chicago and Philadelphia, to bring order to the chaos and tried to convince Governor Kathleen Blanco to appoint Vallas the new state superintendent after Cecil B. Picard died in February 2007.[91] Blanco had other ideas: she named Pastorek state superintendent and let him appoint Vallas to run the RSD.[92] By the time Paul Vallas took the reins of the RSD in mid-2007, he found the RSD-run schools in dire need of better leadership.[93] Attendance rates at the "direct-run" schools were dreadful, with a nearly 30% truancy rate on the first day of school.[94] More than 90% of the direct-run schools' students lived in poverty, and many of these students had experienced significant emotional and psychological trauma from the storm.[95] Students needed high-quality schools, but the RSD was not yet prepared to offer them.

By 2010, the RSD charters were clearly outperforming the RSD's direct-run schools, especially at the high school level.[96] Determined to prevent New Orleans from developing yet another tier in its historically unequal educational system, RSD leaders doubled down on their efforts to convert all their schools into charters, while still carefully vetting new applications.[97] It partnered with NSNO to secure a $28 million federal Investing in Innovation grant to replace failing schools with high-performing charters.[98] By 2014, the RSD had transitioned all of its schools over to charter operators, and academic progress surged.[99]

Developing a System-Wide Focus

Another major challenge with the new governance model was that the two districts functioned less like cohesive systems of charter schools and more like loose collections of independent charters. Schools generally concentrated on their own students and internal challenges, paying little attention to addressing broader, system-wide issues.

After Vallas left in 2011, John White became the RSD's superintendent for several months before being nominated to serve as state superintendent upon Paul Pastorek's resignation.[100] White appointed Patrick Dobard, who had been at the Louisiana Department of Education under Pastorek, as his successor to the RSD role.[101] Under Dobard and White's leadership, the RSD

shifted its attention to collaborating closely with the OPSB to address system-wide challenges and ensure the new model effectively served all students.[102]

The district's universal public school choice policy allowed parents to select from various school models, regardless of a school's location in the city. However, schools initially managed their own lotteries and enrollment procedures. By law, charter schools cannot select their students, yet critics alleged that some schools created barriers to enrollment, such as by asking for children's Social Security numbers or a parent's driver's license or state ID.[103] Many schools also refused mid-year enrollees, further limiting access for families.[104] Effective oversight at the system level is essential to prevent this type of problem.[105]

In 2011-2012, the RSD launched OneApp, a computerized enrollment system that the OPSB joined in 2013-14.[106] OneApp (now called the New Orleans Common Application Process, NCAP) simplified the application process, allowing families to rank their top eight school choices instead of applying to each school individually.[107] Schools gave preference to returning students and their siblings, and in K-8 schools, students living within a certain distance of the school received priority.[108] After that, an algorithm matched students with the remaining available seats.[109] To support families in the selection process, the RSD set up four centers throughout the city to help parents decide which schools to select, and by the 2015-16 school year, 75% of students received a placement at one of their top three choices.[110]

Because the common enrollment system required schools to accept students regardless of their needs, abilities, or circumstances, it helped address another pressing issue: discrimination against special education students.[111] Before the system was implemented, many schools discouraged children with severe disabilities from enrolling, telling interested parents that they lacked the resources, staff, or training to educate their children.[112] Often, parents would receive similar responses from multiple schools, effectively preventing their children from accessing a quality public education.[113]

While the common enrollment system helped address this discrimination, the charter schools had raised a valid concern: they weren't receiving sufficient funding to adequately support students with severe disabilities.[114] In response, the RSD and OPSB created a differentiated funding formula to ensure that every school had the resources required to serve students with severe challenges.[115] The formula allocated additional funding for students whose education required specific accommodations. The districts also established a citywide exceptional-needs fund to assist schools serving the costliest students with the most intensive needs.[116]

School discipline was another sore point for some families. Before Katrina, New Orleans public schools struggled with disruptive student behavior, and police were frequently called to campuses. To change student behavior and expectations, many charter schools initially adopted strict disciplinary codes that imposed severe consequences, including suspension, even for minor infractions.[117] Parents accused some schools of using suspension and expulsion to get rid of disruptive students or those with disabilities.[118] To prevent such behavior, the RSD and OPSB created a centralized hearing office to manage expulsion proceedings for all of the city's schools.[119]

With new system-wide focus — universal enrollment, differentiated funding, and centralized expulsion hearings — the RSD and OPSB put important checks on their charter schools. They also learned a valuable lesson about autonomy: while school-level decisions were best left in the

hands of educators, system-level problems needed centralized solutions.

Changes in the Teacher Workforce

When the school district laid off its 7,000 employees — 4,000 of them teachers, nearly three-quarters of whom were Black — it triggered widespread anger as well as multiple lawsuits.[120] Prior to Katrina, New Orleans was somewhat unique in that 71% of teachers were Black, a whopping 56 percentage points higher than the rate for other urban districts.[121] Available data suggest that only about half of the former OPSB employees landed jobs with the OPSB, RSD direct-run or charters, or other Louisiana Parishes within two years of the storm.[122]

Although the initial charter schools in both the RSD and OPSB opened with veteran principals and teachers, the RSD increasingly relied on Teach for America (TFA) and The New Teacher Project (TNTP) — alternative certification programs — as it opened more schools.[123] Both TFA and TNTP (operating under the brand of "TeachNOLA") primarily recruited high-performing college graduates, many of them White.[124] They didn't share their students' culture, and some faced suspicion from students and families, who questioned whether they were truly invested in the community or would remain long-term.[125] Targeted recruitment efforts — such as Teach for America's emphasis on hiring locally and from historically black colleges and universities —boosted the percentage of Black teachers in New Orleans public schools to 56%, though still below the district's proportion of black students.[126]

Building Trust with the Community

Hurricane Katrina forced the majority of residents of New Orleans to leave their homes for months. While they were gone, state officials made critical decisions about the city's public education system without a lot of local input, including the crucial decision to take over most of the city's schools via the RSD. Regardless of these leaders' good intentions, the lack of normal civic participation was disenfranchising to New Orleans' predominantly Black population.[127] Even as late as 2019, after the RSD schools returned to OPSB, Black residents viewed reform efforts more negatively than White residents.[128]

Many reformers initially failed to grasp the pride that communities took in their local schools, many of which were neighborhood institutions that had educated generations of families.[129] Despite poor academic outcomes, these schools had strong cultural ties with the community, fostered a sense of connection among residents, and promoted a neighborhood identity.[130] Parents and alumni wanted to participate in turning schools around, collaborating on decisions about uniforms, discipline policies, and extracurricular activities.[131] They wanted to be involved in shaping the vision of what a successful school should look like.[132]

Over time, charter school leaders realized that they could draw on the strengths of the community and the alumni. Many created alumni advisory councils, held community town halls, and recruited alumni to work at their schools.[133] They also expanded their focus beyond academics alone. In the early years of the reforms, many leaders had prioritized academic performance so heavily that they dismissed events like prom and extracurricular activities — marching bands, sports, and performing arts — as unnecessary, failing to realize that these traditions were a source of community pride.[134]

RSD leadership also improved its communication with the community about school closures. The term "school closure" sparked anger and confusion, since many residents assumed the building would permanently shut and students would be relocated to other schools.[135] Instead, a new operator usually replaced the failing one, inheriting both the building and its student body.[136] When the RSD began to let

parents help choose the type of school model they preferred as a replacement, they were more likely to embrace the new school and its culture.[137]

REUNIFICATION

Just before the tenth anniversary of Katrina, the state began preparing to end its takeover of New Orleans public schools through a process known as "reunification."[138] In March 2014, the RSD and OPSB signed a "Cooperative Endeavor Agreement," designed to align operations and policies across the two districts.[139] The agreement formalized ongoing efforts, such as the inclusion of OPSB schools in the RSD's centralized enrollment system and the adoption of a citywide weighted student funding formula, ensuring a smoother transition back to local governance.s[140]

Reunification made a leap forward in 2016 when the Louisiana legislature passed Act 91, a bill requiring the RSD schools to return to the OPSB and setting guardrails about the process.[141] It codified into law the charter-based structure established during the post-Katrina reforms.[142] While reunification shifted authorizing and oversight of most charters from the state to the local district, daily operations remained in the control of individual schools or charter management organizations.[143] For example, Act 91 prohibited the district from interfering with

> **"operational autonomy… in the areas of school programming, instruction, curriculum, materials and texts, yearly school calendars and daily schedules, hiring and firing of personnel, employee performance management and evaluation, terms and conditions of employment, teacher or administrator certification, salaries and benefits, retirement, collective bargaining, budgeting, purchasing, procurement, and contracting services other than capital repairs and facilities construction"**

— unless mutually agreed upon by the school's governing authority and OPSB.[144] Act 91 also charged the school board with ensuring "a diverse system of schools led by multiple high-quality operators exists."[145]

Instead of returning its former role as a traditional bureaucracy, Act 91 placed OPSB in an oversight function, focused on steering the school system, addressing district-wide challenges, and ensuring equitable opportunities for all families. Despite having reduced operational control, the OPSB assumed a critical oversight role in ensuring that the district's all-charter model succeeded. The school board and superintendent became responsible for monitoring school quality, approving new schools, holding existing schools accountable for performance, replicating successful schools, and replacing failing ones with stronger operators.[146] The district took control of key citywide functions such as the centralized enrollment system, student disciplinary hearings, and student funding.[147] Additionally, the board can raise local funds through local tax taxes for operational expenses as well as needed capital repairs, renovations, and new construction of the city's school facilities, which it once again controls.[148]

One Year Later: COVID-19

NOLA-PS, as the district is now called, had only completed one full academic year — 2018–2019 — following reunification when the COVID-19 pandemic forced a sudden pivot to remote learning in March 2020.[149] Mardi Gras celebrations during the last week of February accelerated the disease's spread dramatically.[150] By late March, the city faced acute shortages, with projections indicating ventilators would run out by early April.[151] At that point, New Orleans had a COVID-19 death rate double that of New York City and four times that of Seattle.[152]

On Monday, March 16, 2020, NOLA-PS closed all school buildings and suspended in-person learning, responding to Governor John Bel Edwards's stay-at-home order issued the previous Friday.[153] OPSB authorized Superintendent Dr. Henderson Lewis Jr. to access $5 million in emergency reserves for district-wide emergency purchases.[154] By the following week, he had purchased 10,000 Chromebooks and 8,000 hotspots.[155]

The system's decentralized structure proved advantageous during the sudden shift to remote learning. School leaders and educators acted quickly, communicating directly with families about what they needed.[156] By April 6, less than three weeks after Louisiana's stay-at-home order, the district had launched its coordinated distribution campaign of devices,[157] in which it provided devices to individual schools and charter management organizations (CMOs), which then configured them for compatibility with their respective learning platforms before giving them directly to students.[158]

The district also provided guidance, including a Distance Learning Resources webpage that offered families academic materials, technical support information, and guidance on technology use.[159] By June 2020, these efforts were paying off: in a district-wide survey, 86% of NOLA-PS parents agreed their child had reliable internet access for remote learning, and 77% felt supported by teachers and schools in implementing remote education.[160] The June 2020 survey also revealed that the New Orleans community generally approved of how NOLA-PS had handled the COVID-19 crisis. Nearly three out of four students, families, and educators reported feeling informed and supported by their schools during spring 2020.[161] Parents overwhelmingly agreed that they had access to key supports during the transition to distance learning.[162]

Compared to other districts, NOLA-PS's transition to remote learning was swift and coordinated: the central office provided resources and coordination, while the schools were able to pivot quickly. School leaders did not have to wait for orders or ask permission before acting.

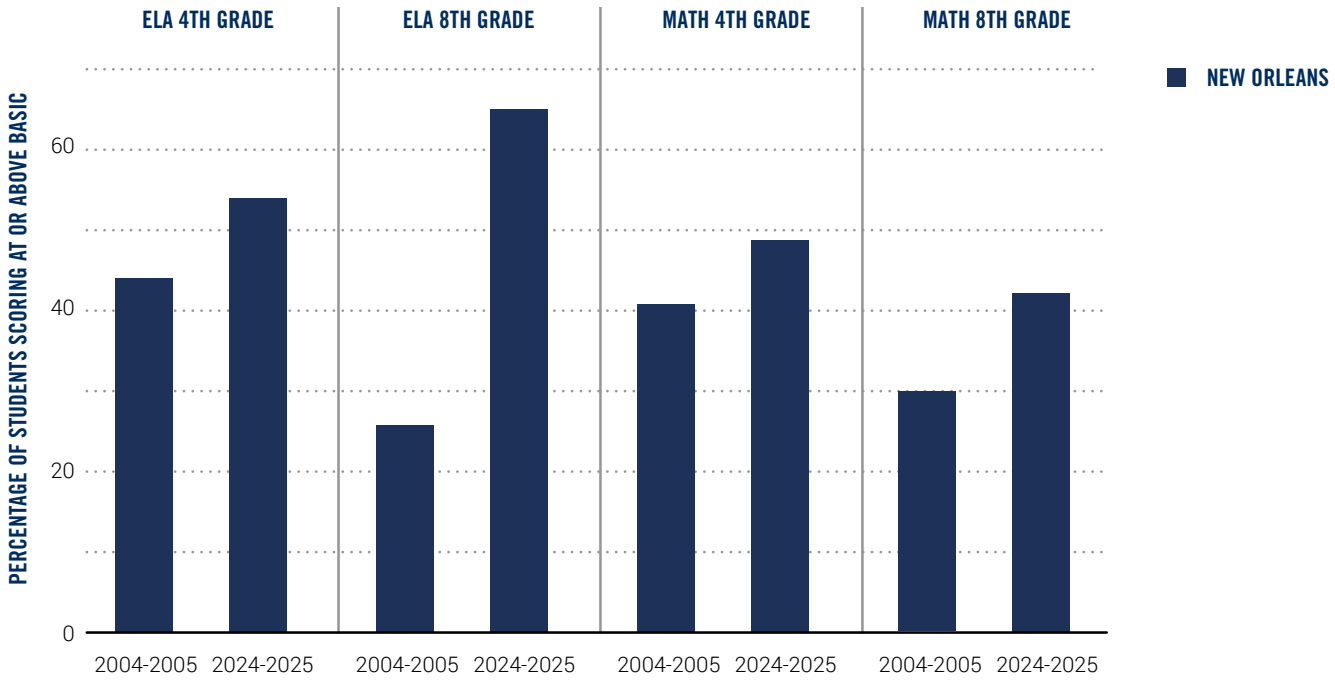
20 YEARS LATER: HAS THE SYSTEM DELIVERED FOR STUDENTS?

Academic Achievements

The radical transformation in the quality of schools in New Orleans is well documented, especially in the first decade after Katrina. Douglas N. Harris, the legendary director of the Education Research Alliance for New Orleans, which performs high-quality research on student outcomes, choice policy, and other related topics, wrote in a 2015 article, "We are not aware of any other districts that have made such large improvements in such a short time."[163] These improved outcomes have persisted since then, despite Louisiana's adoption of more rigorous standards and assessments from 2013 to 2015, which raised the bar for student performance, increasing the scores required to achieve "basic" and "mastery" levels on the tests,[164] as well as the challenges of COVID-19.[165]

For example, in 2005, 44% of fourth graders in New Orleans public schools tested at basic or above on the ELA LEAP test; by 2024, that number had risen to 54% on much tougher tests.[166] Over the same period, the statewide percentage increased modestly from 64% to 66%, meaning that New Orleans improved by 10 percentage points compared to the state's two-point gain.[167] Eighth-grade ELA scores followed a similar pattern: in 2005, only 26% of New Orleans students tested at basic or above, compared to 65% in 2024.[168] During this period, state-level scores increased from 50% to 71%, meaning that New Orleans improved almost twice as fast as the state average.[169]

FIGURE 1: TEST PERFORMANCE PRE-KATRINA TO PRESENT

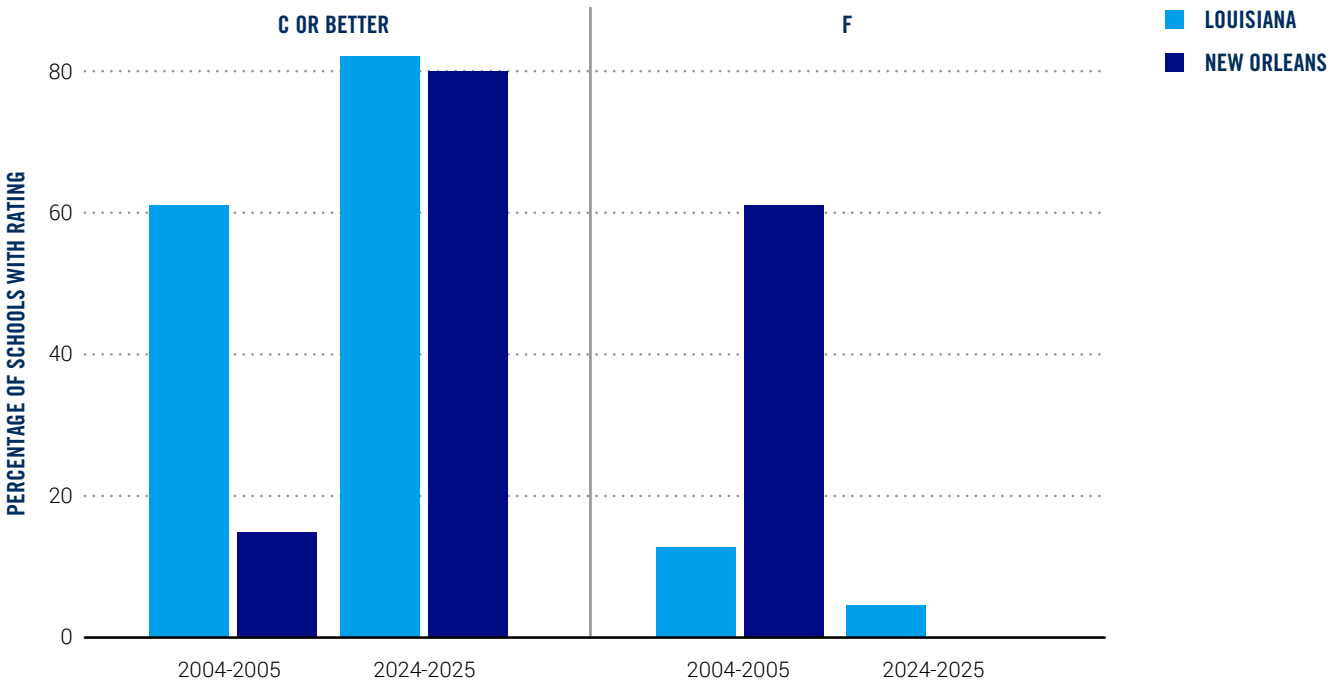


Source: NOLA Public Schools

In math, the percentage of New Orleans fourth graders scoring at basic or above increased from 41% in 2005 to 49% in 2024, compared to the state's more modest improvement from 61% to 64%.[170] At the eighth-grade level, New Orleans students testing at basic or above rose from 30% to 42%, while statewide scores *declined* by three percentage points, dropping from 51% to 48% over the same period.[171]

This improvement in test scores reflects an improvement in the quality of schools available to students in New Orleans. In 2005, 61% of New Orleans public schools were deemed "academically unacceptable" — in other words, failing — by the state; by contrast, only 13% of schools statewide in the same year received that rating.[172] By 2024, New Orleans was not home to a single "F"-rated school, whereas 5% of schools in the state received an "F."[173] Before Katrina, only 15% of New Orleans's public schools were rated a grade of C or higher; in 2024, 80% of the city's schools received at least a C grade.[174]

FIGURE 2: SCHOOL RATINGS PRE-KATRINA AND PRESENT



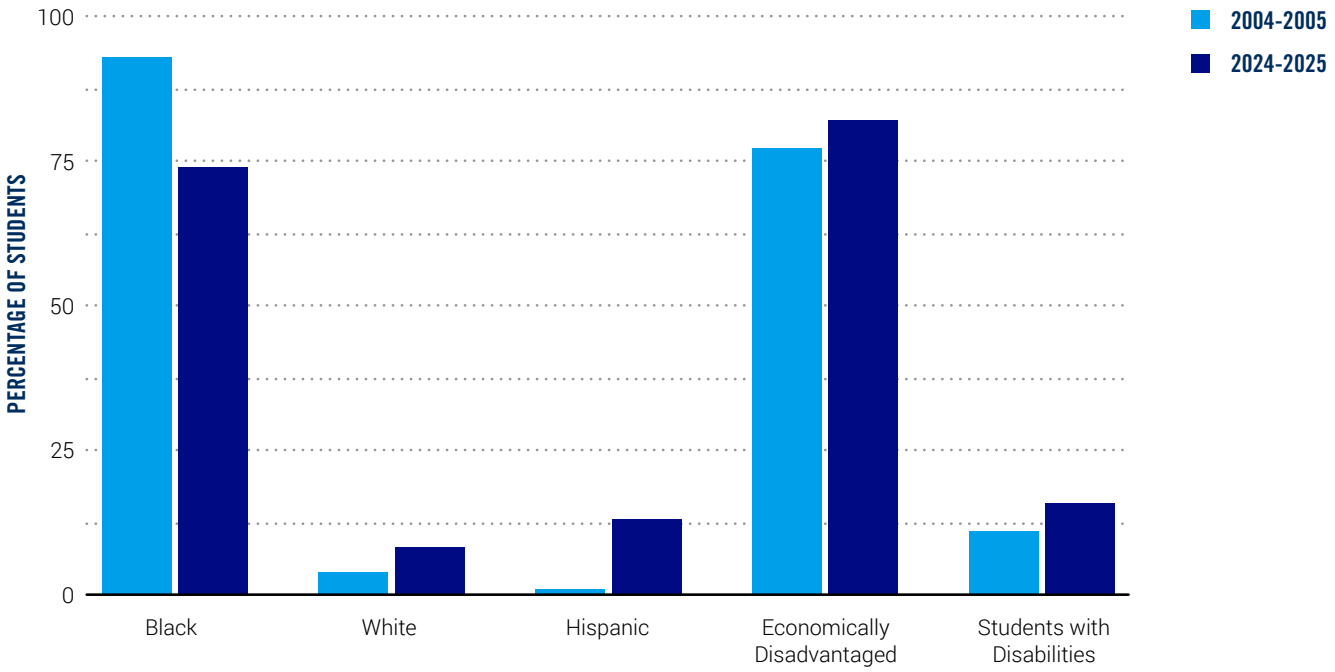
Source: NOLA Public Schools

Graduation rates have also improved since Hurricane Katrina. In 2004, only 54% of New Orleans high school students graduated on time — 11 points below the state average.[175] By 2023, New Orleans's on-time graduation rate had risen to nearly 79%, a 25-point increase, narrowing the gap to just four percentage points below the state's 83.2% graduation rate.[176] Since Katrina, college entry rates in New Orleans have risen from 37% to 65% of recent graduates, surpassing the state average of 57% — an extraordinary achievement.[177]

Outcomes Are Real, Despite Some Population Changes

The makeup of NOLA-PS's student body has shifted somewhat since Katrina. At the start of the 2024-2025 school year, NOLA-PS served 43,664 students across its 67 schools, down from the pre-Katrina enrollment of 65,610.[178] Although a similar 92% of NOLA-PS students are of color compared to 96% before the storm, the Black student population has decreased by about 20 percentage points (from 93.4% to 74.1%) while the Hispanic student population has grown significantly (1.2% to 13.2%) as well as the population of students identifying as two or more races (0% to 2.8%).[179] White students now make up 8.2% of the population, whereas they were 3.5% before Katrina.[180] The percentage of students who are "economically disadvantaged" has actually increased by five percentage points, from 77% to 82%, as has the percentage of students with disabilities (10.7% to 15.7%), with both exceeding state averages.[181] The population of English Language Learners is also up, from 1.5% to 8.6%.[182]

FIGURE 3: NEW ORLEANS SCHOOL DEMOGRAPHICS PRE-KATRINA AND PRESENT



Source: NOLA Public Schools

Some critics have argued that these population changes, though in the direction of diversifying the district, are the cause of New Orleans' improvement, rather than the changes to the district's schools.[183] A 2015 study by the Education Research Alliance for New Orleans (ERA-NO) tested this theory using four different methods and concluded that the demographic shifts were not explanatory of the aggressive improvements the city's children made in the first decade after the storm.[184]

Effects on Discipline and Crime

One concern raised in the early years of New Orleans's education reforms was that strict discipline policies would push more youth into the school-to-prison pipeline.[185] Researchers from the ERA-NO studied this allegation using conviction and adjudication data from 2013 to 2018 for two groups: middle school students (7–9) pre- and post-Katrina and upper elementary students who returned to New Orleans' public schools for at least three years after Hurricane Katrina (grades 4–6 at the time of the storm).[186] ERA-NO found reductions in youth conviction rates in both groups, relative to comparable groups, and performed further analysis to conclude that education reforms were the most likely explanatory variable.[187]

While the ERA-NO researchers note that the complexity of this type of social analysis warrants some caution,[188] the study provides useful insights about the reforms by looking at their effects beyond common metrics like test scores, highlighting the broader impact that schools can have on students and their communities.

CHALLENGES AHEAD

Outreach for NCAP

To ensure equity, districts of choice need a common enrollment system, like the New Orleans Common Enrollment Application (NCAP, formerly

OneApp). Researchers Jane Arnold Lincove and Jon Valant found that the introduction of NCAP increased Black and non-White enrollment in disproportionately White schools without any evidence of score declines,[189] and a separate team of researchers found that the NCAP reduced the information, administrative, and psychological burdens felt by families as a result of a choice system, relative to other districts.[190] However, ensuring that families are taking full advantage of the system of choice by filling out the NCAP remains a challenge for NOLA-PS, particularly because of the range of educational options available throughout the city.[191] Though New Orleans parents have access to an enrollment guide that centralizes information about each school, families still have to synthesize information about over 100 schools and sort them according to their own preferences.[192] NCAP does not eliminate either the burden or the stress of completing school enrollment paperwork by required deadlines, and families whose children's schools closed due to New Orleans' commitment to replacing low-performing schools have to repeat the process multiple times.[193]

Nonetheless, the Cowen Institute's 2024 survey of New Orleans parents and guardians revealed that respondents from households that had completed the application had far more positive perceptions of the school system than non-completers.[194] Eighty-one percent of completers graded New Orleans public education as a C or better, whereas 67% of non-completers graded it a D or lower.[195] Similarly, completing the NCAP correlated with more positive assessments of individual schools: 48% of completers graded their children's schools as an A or B, compared to only 13% of non-completers.[196] Fifty-four percent of those respondents who completed the NCAP reported being satisfied with their actual school placement, though the respondents reporting being "very dissatisfied" dramatically decreased between 2023 and 2024 (32% to 4%).[197] These findings suggest the district needs to continue ongoing outreach to families about the importance of NCAP and continue partnerships with organizations like EdNavigator to ensure that every student benefits from the system of choice.

Improving Access through Transportation

Lengthy commute times and transportation access are another lingering issue. Since Katrina, the average driving distance between a child's home and their school has increased by nearly two miles as a result of greater choice.[198] Surprisingly, neighborhood poverty is not the biggest factor affecting commute times — it's whether a family has access to a car.[199] Commute times to the city's highest-rated schools are similar from both high-poverty and low-poverty neighborhoods when families have access to the same type of transportation.[200] Families with a car can reach almost any school within 40 minutes.[201] Seventy-seven percent of families in high-poverty neighborhoods and 73% of families in low-poverty neighborhoods can access A- or B-rated schools within 20 minutes.[202]

All schools must provide "free and adequate" transportation, but each school decides how to meet that requirement.[203] Most schools provide a bus service,[204] which makes a big difference for families in low-income neighborhoods, doubling the number of A- and B-rated schools within 40 minutes for families who would otherwise use public transit and quadrupling the number for families who would otherwise walk.[205] However, bus rides are long and pickup times are early, with most occurring between 6:00 and 7:00 a.m.[206] Despite these challenges, these families have chosen the schools that are the best options for their children.

Still, transportation, especially school busing, might be an area where district involvement could improve efficiency. Schools currently create their own transportation plans, and some do so more

effectively than others.[207] Researchers Jon Valant and Jane Arnold Lincove found a weak relationship between car and bus commute times for many schools, stating that "bus stops with commute times of over 50 minutes are often located less than 10 minutes away from the school by a direct route."[208] The researchers suggested that better planning, potentially with support from the district or a centralized transportation office, could reduce commute times.[209]

Despite inefficiencies, school buses substantially increase the number of schools accessible for families, and the perception of accessibility is especially important in school selection.[210] ERA-NO found that families without reliable vehicle access are less likely to apply to higher-rated schools and tend to select schools that are closer to home.[211] Similarly, in the Cowen Institute's 2024 survey, respondents ranked "the distance students travel to school" as their third top concern about public education in New Orleans, and when asked about the incoming school board's top priorities, "shorter bus routes" ranked second only to "student safety."[212]

Researchers also found that a 2019 policy change that prioritized admissions for students living within a half mile of most elementary schools unintentionally worsened equity by giving White and higher-income students an advantage in securing seats at high-demand schools.[213] This finding suggests that improving transportation, rather than adjusting enrollment policies, offers a better path toward greater equity and broader educational opportunities for all students across the city.

Ensuring Great Teachers for Every School

The post-Katrina reforms brought big changes not only for students and families but also for teachers. Many of these changes were positive: teachers report that the last 20 years have led to improvements in school culture, greater support, and a more data-driven, goal-oriented environment.[214] Teacher turnover, however, continues to pose a significant challenge for NOLA-PS. An analysis of data between 2003 and 2014 found the rate of New Orleans teachers exiting the profession nearly doubled in the first decade after the storm.[215] Just prior to the pandemic, one study found New Orleans had a new teacher turnover rate that was double that of comparable cities, an especially acute problem when nearly 40% of teachers have three or fewer years of experience.[216] After a brief lull in turnover in 2020-2021, New Schools for New Orleans (NSNO) estimated that overall turnover returned to 30% in 2022, around the same number as prior to the pandemic, based on their annual teacher survey.[217] In 2024, NSNO's survey named a number of working conditions, such as compensation, "increased workload since the pandemic," and challenges with school leadership, as the main reasons for attrition.[218] A 2021 study by ERA-NO confirmed that newer teachers are more mobile than more experienced teachers and that teachers are more likely to leave when their principal does.[219] Contrary to NSNO's survey results, they found that low pay did not make teachers more likely to switch schools.[220]

Not all turnover is necessarily bad. In New Orleans, low-performing teachers are 2.5 times more likely than their higher-performing peers to leave their school, versus only 1.9 times in traditional public schools in neighboring districts.[221] Regrettably, the teachers replacing existing low-performers tend to also have lower performance, hampering the city's ability to improve the overall quality of its workforce, even as it does a better job of retaining high-performing teachers relative to comparable districts.[222] To ensure a great teacher for every classroom, these data show schools in New Orleans must continue to improve both recruitment and retention.

A REINVENTION, IF THE CITY CAN KEEP IT

The New Orleans education reforms have been a tremendous success, transforming a district once among the lowest performing in the nation into one approaching or exceeding state averages on most academic measures, and sustaining those gains over time. Yet, after 20 years of progress, one critical question remains: Will the key components that have driven the district's success — school autonomy, accountability, replacing failing schools, diverse educational models, and public school choice — last?

In late 2023, then-OPSB superintendent Avis Williams, then a year into what became a very short tenure, asked board members to revoke the charter of Lafayette Academy, a charter school with an "F" rating.[223] Williams had recommended that a new charter operator take over the school, but when no operators applied, she recommended closure in a January 2024 board meeting.[224] At the time, Williams believed the district lacked the resources to directly run schools, given that they didn't have essential departments like curriculum, human resources, and food service, and had even given a presentation on this point at the same meeting.[225] The board relented to the closure plan but not without several tense exchanges.[226] Surprisingly, almost immediately after the board meeting — somewhere between the very next day and a few days later, according to conflicting news reports — Williams agreed to open a district-operated school as a few board members had wanted, making the district's first move back into directly running schools since 2020.[227]

The Leah Chase School opened at the beginning of the 2024-2025 school year.[228] Despite the short lead time, the school's opening went smoothly.[229] Lafayette students received priority in the NCAP choice process, and anyone who wanted to remain at Leah Chase was guaranteed a seat.[230] The district budgeted approximately $3.7 million for startup costs.[231] It hired teachers, selected uniforms and curricula, and arranged transportation and meals.[232] District leaders also created the central administrative roles that traditional school districts typically use to directly run schools, such as a chief academic officer to oversee curriculum development and teacher training.[233]

Some community leaders and board members posit that a system built around choice and different school models should include the choice of district-operated schools, especially neighborhood ones.[234] Some charter leaders also supported the move, endorsing a "governance-agnostic" system as long as it holds all schools to the same standards, which includes closing those that fail students.[235] The risk is clear, though: elected officials have historically found it much more difficult to close a school full of their own employees than to close a charter school. Will OPSB actually hold Leah Chase School to the same standards as its charter schools? Only time will tell.

In November 2024, Superintendent Williams abruptly resigned following revelations of significant financial mismanagement.[236] Because of a financial miscalculation within NOLA-PS's budget projections, the district faced a $50 million shortfall for the 2024-25 school year.[237] The district's chief financial officer had resigned in September, shortly before the deficit became public.[238] The budgeting error stemmed from the district significantly overestimating its anticipated revenue from the city's property and sales taxes.[239] In March 2025, OPSB approved a one-time allocation of $25 million from district reserves and operational funds to help schools mitigate roughly half of the shortfall.[240]

With the budgeting crisis coinciding with the opening of OPSB's first direct-run school in several years, Caroline Roemer, the formidable long-time head of the Louisiana Association of Public Charter Schools, questioned to a *NOLA.com* reporter

whether OPSB can effectively operate traditional schools while simultaneously overseeing charter schools: "'One has to wonder with this latest crisis was NOLA-PS too busy opening their own school that they didn't take care of the schools they have?"[241]

OPSB is unlikely to open more district-operated schools because the funding shortfall came amid a declining enrollment crisis.[242] Pre-pandemic, the city enrolled about 49,000 students.[243] Enrollment steadily declined in the years following before inching back upwards in 2024-2025, which New Schools for New Orleans attributes to stronger year-to-year re-enrollment of existing students among several cohorts.[244] Nonetheless, the city has about 25% fewer students than before Katrina, and birthrates continue to decline in Orleans Parish.[245] Since schools are funded per student, too many vacant seats undermine a school's ability to maintain an array of staff, services, and programs.[246] In 2022, New Schools for New Orleans warned district leaders that schools citywide were approaching an enrollment tipping point that would make it difficult to sustain academic programs and student services.[247] After the report, several charter operators voluntarily consolidated underenrolled schools, merging schools and reducing empty seats.[248] This collaboration among operators eliminated nearly two thousand vacant seats citywide, contributing to a higher rate of enrollment at each school in the most recent school year.[249] The OPSB created a master plan in 2024 to decide the appropriate number of schools, determine fair criteria for closures beyond school performance, and ensure there are high-quality schools in modernized facilities citywide; however, the funding crisis as well as continued enrollment trouble mean the district will have to make hard decisions as it implements the plan.[250] How NOLA-PS confronts these next challenges will determine if New Orleans remains on the path to improved performance or turns back towards a district in disarray.

CONCLUSION

New Orleans Public Schools have experienced remarkable success over the past 20 years. While the district continues to face challenges, the academic progress achieved in New Orleans represents unprecedented success for a large school district facing such high levels of poverty. As Douglas Harris noted to the *Hechinger Report* in 2024, "'Test scores went up, high school graduation, college graduation, ACT scores — everything improved, which is really unusual... It's generally the most successful district school reform that we've ever seen — of any kind, not just a charter district.'"[251]

New Orleans's formula for success — separating steering from rowing, school autonomy paired with accountability, and choice among diverse school designs — has proven more effective than the centralized, bureaucratic approach inherited by most large school districts in the 20th century. If every major American public school system could achieve improvements similar to New Orleans, the impact on children nationwide would indeed be profound.

Over the past 20 years, other cities have begun to embrace New Orleans's model for a 21st-century education system.[252] Washington, D.C., has a vibrant charter sector authorized by an independent board, which functions alongside the traditional district to create a system of choice with common enrollment.[253] In Denver, the school board oversees a system made up of both charter and district-run schools and has recently pitched a return to a closure-and-restart model for low-performing schools very similar to what New Orleans pioneered.[254] Indianapolis has created "innovation schools," district schools that are exempt from the same laws and regulations

as charters, operate outside of the union contracts, and have performance contracts with the district.[255] Some, but not all, are schools of choice.[256] These cities have invented their own paths, but they're following New Orleans's formula and seeing positive results for students.

America doesn't have to accept education systems in which low-income children are consigned to failing schools year after year. Too often, these districts fall into a cycle of underperformance, where bold action is politically impossible and meaningful change never arrives. New Orleans has proven that with enough political will, it is possible to build a public education system that is both excellent and equitable. By redesigning how public schools are governed and held accountable, the city has created a system where quality, innovation, and equal opportunity can coexist — and where no child's future is limited by their zip code.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Special thanks to **David Osborne**, Director Emeritus of PPI's Reinventing America's Schools project, who generously provided feedback to earlier drafts as well as allowed the authors to pre-screen his forthcoming documentary.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Emily Langhorne is a freelance writer and a contributing author for PPI. She was the associate director of Reinventing America's Schools from 2017 to 2019. She began her career as a high school English teacher.

Rachel Canter is the Director of Education Policy at the Progressive Policy Institute. In her role at PPI, Rachel advocates effective education policies as informed by her nearly two decades of experience successfully leading change for public school children in Mississippi. She aims to reignite the nation's commitment to providing every child an excellent public education and seeks to build a broad coalition for improving public schools.

ABOUT THE REINVENTING AMERICA'S SCHOOLS PROJECT

The Reinventing America's Schools Project seeks to refocus national leadership around proven strategies to improve public schools and educational achievement. We believe that American public schools must prepare children academically to be successful adults and citizens; families should have a voice in their child's education, including a choice within the public system to find a school that best fits their child's needs; and, though education is the province of the states, the federal government must protect the promise that every child will have access to a quality public education.

References

1 "K20 Data: New Orleans by the Numbers, Twenty Year Snapshots," NOLA Public Schools, New Schools for New Orleans, and the Cowen Institute, April 2025, https://data.nolapublicschools.com/k20/data/#twenty-year-snapshots.

2 David Osborne, "Reinventing America's Schools: Creating a 21st Century Education System" (Bloomsbury, 2017), 22. See also "New Orleans Schools Before and After Katrina," *PBS Newshour*, November 1, 2005, https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/new-orleans-schools-before-and-after-katrina.

3 Douglas N. Harris and Jamie M. Carroll, "The New Orleans Post-Katrina School Reforms: 20 Years of Lessons", Education Research Alliance for New Orleans, June 2025, https://educationresearchalliancenola.org/files/publications/Key-Conclusions-Digital-Version-July-28th-Revised_2025-07-28-201830_bzxl.pdf.

4 *Eddy Oliver, Oscarlene Nixon, and Mildred Goodwin v. Orleans Parish School Board,* 2014-C-0329 consolidated with 2014-C-0330, p. 2 (La. 10/31/14), https://www.lasc.org/opinions/2014/14C0329cw14C0330.opn.pdf.

5 "2018-2019: A Unified District," NOLA Public Schools and New Schools for New Orleans, accessed July 31, 2025, https://data.nolapublicschools.com/k20/#event-64.

6 Della Hasselle, "After McDonogh 35 Vote, New Orleans Will Be First in U.S. Without Traditionally Run Public Schools," NOLA.com, December 20, 2018, https://www.nola.com/news/education/article_a05b2a6b-0c36-519c-9f55-cefa1b5744b1.html.

7 "K20 Data: New Orleans by the Numbers, Academic Outcomes."

8 "K20 Data: New Orleans by the Numbers, Academic Outcomes."

9 Gina Ramona Martinez "Top 10 Deadliest Hurricanes in U.S. History," *CBS News*, October 9, 2024, https://www.cbsnews.com/news/top-10-deadliest-hurricanes-in-us-history-katrina-maria-galveston/.

10 "How New Orleans Flooded: Storm that Drowned a City," *NOVA, PBS.org*, accessed July 31, 2025, https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/orleans/how-nf.html.

11 Eric Halpin, P.E., and Rich Varuso, Ph.D., P.E., "New Orleans Levee System (Louisiana, 2005)," ASDSO Lessons Learned, Association of State Dam Safety Officials, accessed July 31, 2025, https://damfailures.org/case-study/new-orleans-levee-system-louisiana-2005#:~:text=Over%2050%20breaches%20in%20the,I%2Dwall%20and%20earthen%20levee.

12 "K20 Data: New Orleans by the Numbers, Academic Outcomes."

13 "K20 Data: New Orleans by the Numbers, Academic Outcomes."

14 "New Orleans Schools Before and After Katrina," *PBS Newshour*, November 1, 2005, https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/new-orleans-schools-before-and-after-katrina.

15 Erin Covington, Erin Kenny, and Paul Tearnen, "Stabilizing and Transforming Education Organizations," Alvarez and Marsal, accessed August 2025, https://www.alvarezandmarsal.com/industries/education/stabilizing-transforming-education-organizations.

16 *Eddy Oliver, Oscarlene Nixon, and Mildred Goodwin v. Orleans Parish School Board*, 2014-C-0329 consolidated with 2014-C-0330, p. 2 (La. 10/31/14), https://www.lasc.org/opinions/2014/14C0329cw14C0330.opn.pdf. See also Katherine Newmark and Veronica de Rugy, "Hope After Katrina," *Education Next* 6, no. 4 (2006), https://www.educationnext.org/hope-after-katrina/.

17 Harris and Carroll, "The New Orleans Post-Katrina School Reforms." *See also* Osborne, "Reinventing America's Schools," 21-79.

18 Osborne, "Reinventing America's Schools," 22.

19 New Orleans Schools Before and After Katrina," *PBS Newshour*, November 1, 2005, https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/new-orleans-schools-before-and-after-katrina.

20 *PBS Newshour*, "New Orleans Schools Before and After Katrina."

21 "Feder [sic] Grand Jury Indicts Eleven in Orleans Parish Schools Corruption Investigation," Department of Justice, Eastern District of Louisiana, December 16, 2004, https://www.columbia.edu/itc/journalism/cases/katrina/Federal%20Government/Department%20of%20Justice/Louisiana%20DOJ/2004-12-16%20PR.pdf.

22 "Former Orleans Parish School Board President Sentenced to 18 Months in Federal Prison," Department of Justice, Eastern District of Louisiana, March 11, 2010, accessed July 31, 2025, https://archives.fbi.gov/archives/neworleans/press-releases/2010/no031110.htm.

23 Jeff Archer, "State Vows to Fix Finances in New Orleans," *Education Week*, March 8, 2005, https://www.edweek.org/leadership/state-vows-to-fix-finances-in-new-orleans/2005/03.

24 *Eddy Oliver, Oscarlene Nixon, and Mildred Goodwin v. Orleans Parish School Board*, 2014-C-0329 consolidated with 2014-C-0330, p. 2 (La. 10/31/14), https://www.lasc.org/opinions/2014/14C0329cw14C0330.opn.pdf.

25 Covington, Kenny, and Tearnen, "Stabilizing and Transforming Education Organizations."

26 Osborne, "Reinventing America's Schools."

27 Nelson Smith, "The Louisiana Recovery School District: Lessons for the Buckeye State", Thomas B. Fordham Institute, January 2012, https://fordhaminstitute.org/sites/default/files/Ohio/FORINSLRSDReport.pdf.

28 Smith, "The Louisiana Recovery School District."

29 "Hurricane Katrina Floods New Orleans," Nasa Earth Observatory, accessed July 31, 2025, https://earthobservatory.nasa.gov/images/15445/hurricane-katrina-floods-new-orleans.

30 U.S. Congress, House, Select Bipartisan Committee to Investigate the Preparation for and Response to Hurricane Katrina, *A Failure of Initiative: Final Report,* 109th Congress, 2nd sess., 2006, H. Rep. 109-377, accessed July 31, 2025, via https://damfailures.org/sites/default/files/wp-pdf/A-Failure-of-Initiative.pdf.

31 U.S. Congress, House, Select Bipartisan Committee to Investigate the Preparation for and Response to Hurricane Katrina, *A Failure of Initiative: Final Report,* 109th Congress, 2nd sess., 2006, H. Rep. 109-377.

32 U.S. Congress, House, Select Bipartisan Committee to Investigate the Preparation for and Response to Hurricane Katrina, *A Failure of Initiative: Final Report,* 109th Congress, 2nd sess., 2006, H. Rep. 109-377.

33 U.S. Congress, House, Select Bipartisan Committee to Investigate the Preparation for and Response to Hurricane Katrina, *A Failure of Initiative: Final Report,* 109th Congress, 2nd sess., 2006, H. Rep. 109-377.

34 Allison Flyer, "Facts for Features: Katrina Impact," The Data Center, August 26, 2016, https://www.datacenterresearch.org/data-resources/katrina/facts-for-impact/.

35 Newmark and de Rugy, "Hope After Katrina."

36 Newmark and de Rugy, "Hope After Katrina."

37 April Capochino, "Teachers Uncertain of Future with Orleans Public Schools," *New Orleans CityBusiness*, November 7, 2005, https://neworleanscitybusiness.com/blog/2005/11/07/teachers-uncertain-of-future-with-orleans-public-schools/.

38 Catherine Gewertz, "New Orleans Adopts Plan for Charters", *Education Week*, October 14, 2005, https://www.edweek.org/policy-politics/new-orleans-adopts-plan-for-charters/2005/10.

39 Gewertz, "New Orleans Adopts Plan for Charters."

40 Covington, Kenny, and Tearnen, "Stabilizing and Transforming Education Organizations."

41 Gewertz, "New Orleans Adopts Plan for Charters."

42 Osborne, "Reinventing America's Schools." *See also* Jamie M. Carroll, et al., *A New First: Early Experiences and Outcomes of New Orleans' First District-Operated Charter School*, Education Research Alliance for New Orleans, November 17, 2022, https://educationresearchalliancenola.org/files/publications/A-New-First_FINAL.pdf.

43 Smith, The Louisiana Recovery School District."

44 Harris and Carroll, "The New Orleans Post-Katrina School Reforms."

45 *Eddy Oliver, Oscarlene Nixon, and Mildred Goodwin v. Orleans Parish School Board*, 2014-C-0329 consolidated with 2014-C-0330, p. 2 (La. 10/31/14), https://www.lasc.org/opinions/2014/14C0329cw14C0330.opn.pdf.

46 *Eddy Oliver, Oscarlene Nixon, and Mildred Goodwin v. Orleans Parish School Board*, 2014-C-0329.

47 Covington, Kenny, and Tearnen, "Stabilizing and Transforming Education Organizations."

48 *Eddy Oliver, Oscarlene Nixon, and Mildred Goodwin v. Orleans Parish School Board,* 2014-C-0329.

49 "2018-2019: A Unified District."

50 Hasselle, "After McDonogh 35 Vote."

51 "New Orleans Public Schools Governance Chart, 2024-2025," NOLA Public Schools and the Cowen Institute at Tulane University, accessed July 31, 2025, https://nolapublicschools.com/documents/2024-2025-governance-chart-final-2/download.

52 Osborne, "Reinventing America's Schools," 225.

53 Carroll, et al., "A New First."

54 Carroll, et al., "A New First."

55 See the "NOLA School Finder" tool on the NOLA Public Schools website to learn more about the variety of schools in New Orleans: https://nola.explore.avela.org/, accessed July 31, 2025.

56 "Alternative Education Schools," Louisiana Department of Education, accessed July 31, 2025, https://doe.louisiana.gov/docs/default-source/school-system-support/bese-approved-alternative-education-schools.pdf?sfvrsn=53ea991f_1.

57 "2017-2018: New Orleans Career Center," NOLA Public Schools and New Schools for New Orleans, accessed, July 31, 2025, https://data.nolapublicschools.com/k20/#event-59.

58 "About," Opportunities Academy, accessed July 31, 2025, https://oa.collegiateacademies.org/about.

59 "New Orleans Public Schools Governance Chart, 2024-2025," NOLA Public Schools and the Cowen Institute, accessed July 31, 2025, https://nolapublicschools.com/documents/2024-2025-governance-chart-final-2/download.

60 Whitney Bross, et al., "Extreme Measures: When and How School Closures and Charter School Takeovers Benefit Students", Education Research Alliance for New Orleans, October 17, 2016, https://educationresearchalliancenola.org/files/publications/ERA-1610-Policy-Brief-Closure.pdf.

61 Harris and Carroll, "New Orleans Post-Katrina School Reforms."

62 Harris and Carroll, "New Orleans Post-Katrina School Reforms."

63 Harris and Carroll, "New Orleans Post-Katrina School Reforms."

64 Harris and Carroll, "New Orleans Post-Katrina School Reforms."

65 Harris and Carroll, "New Orleans Post-Katrina School Reforms."

66 Jon Valant, *What Happens When Families Whose Schools Close Receive EdNavigator Support and OneApp Priority?*, National Center for Research on Education Access and Choice and Education Research Alliance for New Orleans, June 14, 2022, https://reachcentered.org/publications/what-happens-when-families-whose-schools-close-receive-ednavigator-support-and-oneapp-priority.

67 Dana Brinson, et al., "New Orleans-Style Education Reform: A Guide for Cities: Lessons Learned, 2004-2012". *New Schools for New Orleans*, 2011, https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED539572.pdf.

68 Osborne, "Reinventing America's Schools," 28.

69 "New Schools for New Orleans," Philanthropy Roundtable, accessed July 31, 2025, https://www.philanthropyroundtable.org/almanac/new-schools-for-new-orleans/.

70 Brinson, et al., "New Orleans-Style Education Reform."

71 Osborne, "Reinventing America's Schools," 28.

72 Osborne, "Reinventing America's Schools," 28.

73 "For Families," EdNavigator, accessed July 31, 2025, https://www.ednavigator.org/for-families.

74 Gail Robinson, "Big Challenges in the Big Easy," Carnegie Corporation of New York, May 5, 2017, https://www.carnegie.org/our-work/article/big-challenges-big-easy/. See also Mareesa Nicosia, "Parents at Work: Has EdNavigator Fixed School Engagement by Making it a Job Benefit?," *The74*, January 24, 2017, https://www.the74million.org/article/parents-at-work-has-ednavigator-fixed-school-engagement-by-making-it-a-job-benefit/.

75 Tim Daly, "Bringing Education Support to the Pediatrician's Office: Our New Focus," EdNavigator, May 1, 2023, https://www.ednavigator.org/blog/bringing-education-support-to-the-pediatricians-office-our-new-focus.

76 "About the Cowen Institute," The Cowen Institute, accessed July 31, 2025, https://www.coweninstitute.org/about.

77 "About the Cowen Institute."

78 "About," Education Research Alliance for New Orleans, accessed July 31, 2025, https://educationresearchalliancenola.org/about.

79 Paula Arce-Trigatti, et al., "Is There Choice in School Choice? School Program Offerings in the New Orleans Market", Education Research Alliance for New Orleans, April 20, 2016, https://educationresearchalliancenola.org/files/publications/ERA-Policy-Brief-School-Choice-New-Orleans-COVER.pdf. See also Chelsea Brasted, "How a New Orleans Nonprofit Trains Hundreds of High School Students a Year for New Jobs," *Axios New Orleans*, September 20, 2024, https://www.axios.com/local/new-orleans/2024/09/20/career-training-high-school-students.

80 Anthony P. Carnavale, et al., "After Everything: Projections of Jobs, Education, and Training Requirements through 2031 – National Report," Center on Education and the Workforce, McCourt School of Public Policy, Georgetown University, 2023, https://cew.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/Projections2031-National-Report.pdf.

81 "About YouthForce NOLA," YouthForce NOLA, accessed July 31, 2025, https://www.youthforcenola.org/about-us.

82 "Students and Families."

83 "Annual Report 2024," YouthForce NOLA, accessed July 31, 2025, https://www.youthforcenola.org/annual-report-2024.

84 Brasted, "How a New Orleans Nonprofit Trains Hundreds." See also Eva Jacob Barkoff, "New Orleans Career Center Prepares High Schoolers and Adults for Success in the Workforce," *NOLA.com*, October 25, 2024, https://www.nola.com/louisiana_inspired/new-orleans-career-center-free-training-for-in-demand-jobs/article_e4cfc8ec-6f99-11ef-8b3d-4319862d293a.html.

85 "NOCC 2023 Annual Report," *New Orleans Career Center*, accessed July 31, 2025, https://www.nolacc.org/impact.

86 Newmark and de Rugy, "Hope After Katrina."

87 Newmark and de Rugy, "Hope After Katrina."

88 Erik W. Robelen, "56 New Orleans Schools to Accept Students for New Year," *Education Week*, July 12, 2006, https://www.edweek.org/leadership/56-new-orleans-schools-to-accept-students-for-new-year/2006/07.

89 Osborne, "Reinventing America's Schools," 29.

90 Osborne, "Reinventing America's Schools," 29.

91 Osborne, "Reinventing America's Schools", 29-30.

92 Osborne, "Reinventing America's Schools", 29-30.

93 Adam Nossiter, "A Tamer of Schools Has Plan in New Orleans," *New York Times*, September 24, 2007, https://www.nytimes.com/2007/09/24/education/24orleans.html.

94 Nossiter, "A Tamer of Schools Has Plan in New Orleans."

95 Nossiter, "A Tamer of Schools Has Plan in New Orleans."

96 Smith, The Louisiana Recovery School District."

97 Smith, The Louisiana Recovery School District."

98 Brinson, et al., "New Orleans-Style Education Reform."

99 Douglas N. Harris, "Good News for New Orleans," *Education Next* 15, no. 4 (2015), https://www.educationnext.org/good-news-new-orleans-evidence-reform-student-achievement/.

100 Peter Meyer, "The New Superintendent of Schools for New Orleans: A Conversation with John White," *Education Next* 11, no. 4 (2011), https://www.educationnext.org/the-new-superintendent-of-schools-for-new-orleans/.

101 "2011-2012: Changes in Leadership," NOLA Public Schools, New Schools for New Orleans, and the Cowen Institute, accessed July 31, 2025, https://data.nolapublicschools.com/k20/#event-34.

102 Peter Meyer, "The New Superintendent of Schools for New Orleans: A Conversation with John White." See also "Interview with New RSD Superintendent John White," NOLA Family, April 23, 2016, https://nolafamily.com/interview-with-new-rsd-superintendent-john-white/.

103 "New Orleans Schools Violating Federal Law by Discouraging Enrollment Based on Immigration Status," Southern Poverty Law Center, October 15, 2014, accessed July 31, 2025, https://www.splcenter.org/resources/stories/new-orleans-schools-violating-federal-law-discouraging-enrollment-based-immigration-status/. See also Huriya Jabbar, "How Do School Leaders Respond to Competition? Evidence from New Orleans", Education Research Alliance for New Orleans, March 26, 2015, https://educationresearchalliancenola.org/files/publications/ERA1501-Policy-Brief-Competition-DD2.pdf.

104 Cindy Chang, "Paul Vallas Continues to Tweak Recovery School District," *NOLA.com*, August 11, 2010, https://www.nola.com/news/education/paul-vallas-continues-to-tweak-recovery-school-district/article_bb05dc1d-6904-51b5-be55-c78ca9f668c4.html.

105 Dana Brinson, et al., "New Orleans-Style Education Reform."

106 "2011-212: New Citywide Enrollment Application," NOLA Public Schools and New Schools for New Orleans, accessed July 31, 2025, https://data.nolapublicschools.com/k20/#event-32. See also, "2013-2014: OneApp Options Expand," NOLA Public Schools and New Schools for New Orleans, accessed July 31, 2025, https://data.nolapublicschools.com/k20/#event-38.

107 Douglas Harris, et al., "The New Orleans OneApp: Centralized Enrollment Matches Students and Schools of Choice," Education Next 15, no. 4 (2015), https://educationresearchalliancenola.org/files/publications/ednext_XV_4_New-Orleans-OneApp-gross.pdf.

108 Douglas Harris, et al., "The New Orleans OneApp."

109 Douglas Harris, et al., "The New Orleans OneApp."

110 Douglas Harris, et al., "The New Orleans OneApp."

111 Cindy Chang, "Paul Vallas Continues to Tweak Recovery School District."

112 "Students with Disabilities Encounter Discrimination in New Orleans Schools," Southern Poverty Law Center, March 12, 2014, https://www.splcenter.org/resources/stories/students-disabilities-encounter-discrimination-new-orleans-schools/#:~:text=%E2%80%9CWe%20have%20this%20choice%20system,the%20ability%20to%20do%20it.%E2%80%9D.

113 "Students with Disabilities Encounter Discrimination in New Orleans."

114 Sharon Lurye, "Can Charter Schools Afford to Welcome Students in Special Education?," *Hechinger Report* via Disability Scoop, September 14, 2018, https://www.disabilityscoop.com/2018/09/14/can-charter-schools-afford-sped/25493/#:~:text=Webber%20said%20that%20special%20education,inequality%20and%20innovation%20in%20education.

115 Lurye, "Can Charter Schools Afford to Welcome Students in Special Education?"

116 Lurye, "Can Charter Schools Afford to Welcome Students in Special Education?"

117 Shakti Belway, "Access Denied: New Orleans Students and Parents Identify Barriers to Public Education", Southern Poverty Law Center, 2010, https://www.splcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/files/d6_legacy_files/downloads/publication/SPLC_report_Access_Denied.pdf.

118 Shakti Belway, "Access Denied."

119 "2012-2013: Disciplinary Policy and Restorative Practices," NOLA Public Schools, New Schools for New Orleans, and the Cowen Institute, accessed July 31, 2025, https://data.nolapublicschools.com/k20/#event-36. See also Monica Hernandez, "The Effects of the New Orleans School Reforms on Exclusionary Disciplinary Practices", Education Research Alliance for New Orleans, March 19, 2019, https://educationresearchalliancenola.org/files/publications/03192019-Hernandez-Effects-of-the-New-Orleans-School-Reforms-on-Exclusionary-Discipline-Practices.pdf.

120 *Eddy Oliver, Oscarlene Nixon, and Mildred Goodwin v. Orleans Parish School Board*, 2014-C-0329 consolidated with 2014-C-0330, p. 2 (La. 10/31/14), https://www.lasc.org/opinions/2014/14C0329cw14C0330.opn.pdf.

121 Emmanual Felton, *"What Happened When a City Full of Teachers, Most of Them Black, Was Fired," The Hechinger Report*, May 31, 2017, https://hechingerreport.org/happened-city-full-teachers-black-fired. See also Jane Arnold Lincove, et al., "Did the Teachers Dismissed After Hurricane Katrina Return to Public Education?", *Education Research Alliance for New Orleans*, May 31, 2017, https://educationresearchalliancenola.org/files/publications/ERA-1705-Policy-Brief-Labor-Market_170804_161710.pdf.

122 Lincove, et al., "Did the Teachers Dismissed After Hurricane Katrina."

123 Emmanual Felton, "New Orleans Uphill Battle for More Black and Homegrown Teachers," Hechinger Report, October 26, 2016, https://hechingerreport.org/new-orleans-uphill-battle-black-homegrown-teachers/.

124 Nathan Barrett and Douglas Harris, Significant Changes in the New Orleans Teacher Workforce, Education Research Alliance for New Orleans, August 24, 2015, https://educationresearchalliancenola.org/files/publications/ERA-Policy-Brief-Changes-in-the-New-Orleans-Teacher-Workforce.pdf.

125 Felton, "What Happened When a City Full of Teachers."

126 Harris and Carroll, "The New Orleans Post-Katrina School Reforms." The proportion of Black students in K-8 in New Orleans Public Schools was 73.7% in 2023-2024; for 9-12 students, it was 78.2%. See student demographics via "Data Dashboard," New Orleans Public Schools and New Schools for New Orleans, accessed July 31, 2025, https://data.nolapublicschools.com/dashboard/.

127 Carroll, et al., "A New First."

128 Kevin Mahnken, "Research Show That New Orleans Schools Have Improved Since Katrina. So Why Don't Black Residents Agree?," *The74*, July 22, 2019, https://www.the74million.org/research-shows-that-new-orleans-schools-have-improved-since-katrina-so-why-dont-black-residents-agree/.

129 Ebony N. Bridwell-Mitchell and Stefan Lallinger, "Access, Autonomy and Accountability: School Governance Dilemmas in Post-Katrina New Orleans (A)", Public Education Leadership Project at Harvard University, Harvard Graduate School of Education and Harvard Business School, May 1, 2020, https://pelp.fas.harvard.edu/sites/g/files/omnuum5016/files/pelp/files/pel092p2.pdf. See also Amy Waldman, "Reading, Writing, Resurrection," The Atlantic, January/February 2007, https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2007/01/reading-writing-resurrection/305560/.

130 David Osborne, "Turnaround: The Reinvention of New Orleans' Education System", 2025.

131 Osborne, "Turnaround: The Reinvention of New Orleans' Education System."

132 Osborne, "Turnaround: The Reinvention of New Orleans' Education System."

133 Osborne, "Turnaround: The Reinvention of New Orleans' Education System."

134 "A Medley of Culture and Academics in New Orleans Schools," Education Week, August 19, 2015, https://www.edweek.org/leadership/video-a-medley-of-culture-and-academics-in-new-orleans-schools/2015/08.

135 Osborne, "Turnaround: The Reinvention of New Orleans' Education System."

136 Osborne, "Turnaround: The Reinvention of New Orleans' Education System."

137 Osborne, "Turnaround: The Reinvention of New Orleans' Education System."

138 Carroll, et al., "A New First."

139 Carroll, et al., "A New First."

140 Carroll, et al., "A New First."

141 Carroll, et al., "A New First."

142 Carroll, et al., "A New First."

143 Carroll, et al., "A New First."

144 Carroll, et al., "A New First."

145 Carroll, et al., "A New First."

146 Carroll, et al., "A New First."

147 Carroll, et al., "A New First."

148 Carroll, et al., "A New First."

149 "2019-2020: COVID-19 School Closures," NOLA Public Schools, New Schools for New Orleans, and the Cowen Institute, https://data.nolapublicschools.com/k20/#event-72.

150 Mark Zeller, et al., "Emergency of an Early SARS-CoV-2 Epidemic in the United States," *Cell* 184, no. 19 (2021): 4939-4952, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cell.2021.07.030.

151 Rebecca Klar, "Louisiana Governor Warns New Orleans Could Run Out of Ventilators by Early April," *The Hill*, March 29, 2020, https://thehill.com/policy/healthcare/489532-louisiana-governor-warns-new-orleans-could-run-out-of-ventilators-by-early.

152 Julie Dermansky, "Why New Orleans' Coronavirus Death Rate Is Twice New York's: Obesity Is a Factor," *Yahoo News*, April 2, 2020, https://news.yahoo.com/why-orleans-coronavirus-death-rate-100627119.html.

153 "NOLA-PS Announces Districtwide School Closures Due to COVID-19," New Orleans Public Schools, March 13, 2020, https://nolapublicschools.com/news-blog/nola-ps-announces-districtwide-school-closures-due-to-COVID-19.

154 "NOLA-PS Announces Districtwide School Closures."

155 *New Orleans Public Schools,* "NOLA-PS Issues Continuing Updates Surrounding District's COVID-19 Response, March 24," March 24, 2020, https://nolapublicschools.com/news-blog/nola-ps-issues-continuing-updates-surrounding-district-s-covid-19-response-march-24. See also the press release from April 6, 2020, in which the district adjusts its hotspots number to 8,000: New Orleans Public Schools, "NOLA-PS Issues Continuing Updates Surrounding District's COVID-19 Response," April 6, 2020, https://nolapublicschools.com/news-blog/nola-ps-issues-continuing-updates-surrounding-district-s-covid-19-response-april-6.

156 "NOLA Stands Out: How Our Schools Responded to COVID-19," New Schools for New Orleans, May 20, 2020, https://newschoolsforneworleans.org/nola-stands-out-how-our-schools-responded-to-covid-19/.

157 "NOLA-PS Issues Continuing Updates."

158 "NOLA Stands Out."

159 "NOLA Stands Out."

160 "Highlights from the NOLA-PS Stakeholder Survey: A Look into Reopening Our Schools," New Orleans Public Schools, June 19, 2020, https://drive.google.com/file/d/1I1FwVEFXsRCddayAAfoLk05m-oFtZsy_/view.

161 "Highlights from the NOLA-PS Stakeholder Survey."

162 "Highlights from the NOLA-PS Stakeholder Survey."

163 Harris, "Good News for New Orleans."

164 Harris and Carroll, "The New Orleans Post-Katrina School Reforms."

165 Harris and Carroll, "The New Orleans Post-Katrina School Reforms."

166 "K20 Data: New Orleans by the Numbers: Academic Outcomes, LEAP Scores," NOLA Public Schools, New Schools for New Orleans, and the Cowen Institute, April 2025, https://data.nolapublicschools.com/k20/data/#leap-scores-annual.

167 "K20 Data: New Orleans by the Numbers: Academic Outcomes, LEAP Scores."

168 "K20 Data: New Orleans by the Numbers: Academic Outcomes, LEAP Scores."

169 "K20 Data: New Orleans by the Numbers: Academic Outcomes, LEAP Scores."

170 "K20 Data: New Orleans by the Numbers: Academic Outcomes, LEAP Scores."

171 "K20 Data: New Orleans by the Numbers: Academic Outcomes, LEAP Scores."

172 "K20 Data: New Orleans by the Numbers: Twenty Year Snapshots,% of Failing Schools," NOLA Public Schools, New Schools for New Orleans, and the Cowen Institute, April 2025, https://data.nolapublicschools.com/k20/data/#failing-schools-20.

173 "K20 Data: New Orleans by the Numbers: Academic Outcomes, LEAP Scores."

174 "K20: New Orleans by the Numbers: Academic Outcomes, Letter Grades," NOLA Public Schools, New Schools for New Orleans, and the Cowen Institute, April 2025, https://data.nolapublicschools.com/k20/data/#letter-grade-distribution-annual.

175 "K20: New Orleans by the Numbers: Academic Outcomes, Graduation Rates," NOLA Public Schools, New Schools for New Orleans, and the Cowen Institute, April 2025, https://data.nolapublicschools.com/k20/data/#graduation-rate-annual.

176 "K20 Data: New Orleans by the Numbers: Academic Outcomes, LEAP Scores."

177 "K20: New Orleans by the Numbers: Academic Outcomes, College Enrollment," NOLA Public Schools, New Schools for New Orleans, and the Cowen Institute, April 2025, https://data.nolapublicschools.com/k20/data/#college-enrollment-annual.

178 "New Orleans Public Schools Governance Chart, 2024-2025."

179 "K20 Data: New Orleans by the Numbers: Enrollment & Demographics, Racial Subgroups," NOLA Public Schools, New Schools for New Orleans, and the Cowen Institute, April 2025, https://data.nolapublicschools.com/k20/data/#racial-subgroups-over-time.

180 "K20 Data: New Orleans by the Numbers: Enrollment & Demographic."

181 "K20 Data: New Orleans by the Numbers: Enrollment & Demographics, Economic Disadvantage," NOLA Public Schools, New Schools for New Orleans, and the Cowen Institute, April 2025, https://data.nolapublicschools.com/k20/data/#economic-disadvantage-over-time. See also "K20 Data: New Orleans by the Numbers: Enrollment & Demographics, Students with Disabilities," NOLA Public Schools, New Schools for New Orleans, and the Cowen Institute, April 2025, https://data.nolapublicschools.com/k20/data/#disabilities-over-time.

182 "K20 Data: New Orleans by the Numbers: Enrollment & Demographics, Students with Disabilities."

183 Douglas N. Harris and Matthew F. Larsen, "What Effect Did the New Orleans School Reforms Have on Student Achievement, High School Graduation, and College Outcomes?" Education Research Alliance for New Orleans, July 15, 2018, https://educationresearchalliancenola.org/files/publications/071518-Harris-Larsen-What-Effect-Did-the-New-Orleans-School-Reforms-Have-on-Student-Achievement-High-School-Graduation-and-College-Outcomes.pdf.

184 Harris and Larsen, "What Effect Did the New Orleans School Reforms Have on Student Achievement."

185 Nathan Barrett, et al., "What Effect Did the New Orleans School Reforms Have on Youth Crime?", Education Research Alliance for New Orleans, November 15, 2022, https://educationresearchalliancenola.org/publications/what-effect-did-the-new-orleans-school-reforms-have-on-youth-crime.

186 Barrett, et al., "What Effect Did the New Orleans School Reforms Have on Youth Crime?"

187 Barrett, et al., "What Effect Did the New Orleans School Reforms Have on Youth Crime?"

188 Barrett, et al., "What Effect Did the New Orleans School Reforms Have on Youth Crime?"

189 Jane Arnold Lincove and Jon Valant, "How Has Centralized Enrollment Affected New Orleans Schools?", Research on Education Access and Choice and Education Research Alliance for New Orleans, December 7, 2023, https://reachcentered.org/publications/the-effects-of-unified-enrollment-systems-on-new-orleans-schools.

190 Huriya Jabbar et al., "The Double Burden of School Choice," Research on Education Access and Choice, April 23, 2025, https://reachcentered.org/publications/the-double-burden-of-school-choice.

191 At least one-quarter of respondents to a recent public opinion poll had never filled out the NCAP. See "Annual Poll, 2024-2025: Parents and Guardians' Opinions on K-12 Public Education in New Orleans, Poll Policy Brief No. 1," *The Cowen Institute*, November 2024, https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5efbd94a6fb7083aebcccb33/t/6722a368c8bc33530315b5a9/1730323307864/First+Brief+2024-2025+Poll+October+EXTERNAL.pdf.

192 Jabbar, et al., "The Double Burden of School Choice."

193 Jabbar, et al., "The Double Burden of School Choice."

194 "Annual Poll, 2024-2025: Parents and Guardians' Opinions."

195 "Annual Poll, 2024-2025: Parents and Guardians' Opinions."

196 "Annual Poll, 2024-2025: Parents and Guardians' Opinions."

197 "Annual Poll, 2024-2025: Parents and Guardians' Opinions."

198 Douglas N. Harris and Matthew F. Larsen, "What Schools Do Families Want (and Why)? New Orleans Families and Their School Choices Before and After Katrina", January 15, 2015, https://educationresearchalliancenola.org/files/publications/Technical-Report-Final-Combined.pdf

199 Jon Valant and Jane Arnold Lincove, "How Do Families' Transportation Options Shape School Choices in New Orleans?", Education Research Alliance for New Orleans, April 18, 2023, https://educationresearchalliancenola.org/files/publications/20230418-Valant-Lincove-How-Do-Families-Transportation-Options-Shape-School-Choices-in-New-Orleans.pdf.

200 Valant and Lincove, "How Do Families' Transportation Options."

201 Valant and Lincove, "How Do Families' Transportation Options."

202 Valant and Lincove, "How Do Families' Transportation Options."

203 Jane Arnold Lincove and Jon Valant, "New Orleans Students' Commute Times by Car, Public Transit, and School Bus," Urban Institute, September 27, 2018, https://educationresearchalliancenola.org/files/publications/new_orleans_students_commute_times_by_car_public_transit_and_school_bus.pdf.

204 Lincove and Valant, "New Orleans Students' Commute Times."

205 Valant and Lincove, "How Do Families' Transportation Options."

206 Lincove and Valant, "New Orleans Students' Commute Times."

207 Lincove and Valant, "New Orleans Students' Commute Times."

208 Lincove and Valant, "New Orleans Students' Commute Times."

209 Lincove and Valant, "New Orleans Students' Commute Times."

210 Valant and Lincove, "How Do Families' Transportation Options."

211 Valant and Lincove, "How Do Families' Transportation Options."

212 *The Cowen Institute*, "Annual Poll, 2024-2025: Parents and Guardians' Opinions."

213 Jon Valant and Brigham Walker, "Setting Priorities in School Choice Enrollment Systems: Who Benefits from Placement Algorithm Preferences?", *National Center for Research on Education Access and Choice*, December 7, 2023, https://reachcentered.org/publications/when-schools-choose-students-disparities-challenges-and-opportunities-in-school-choice-placement-algorithms.

214 Lindsay Bell Weixler, et al., "Teachers' Perspectives on Learning and Work Environments Under the New Orleans School Reforms," *Education Research Alliance for New Orleans*, May 9, 2017, https://educationresearchalliancenola.org/files/publications/Embargoed-050917-Bell-Weixler-Harris-Barrett-Teachers-Perspectives-on-Learning-and-Work-Environments-Under-the-New-Orleans-School-Reforms.pdf.

215 Nathan Barrett and Douglas Harris, "Significant Changes in the New Orleans Teacher Workforce," Education Research Alliance for New Orleans, August 24, 2015, https://educationresearchalliancenola.org/files/publications/ERA-Policy-Brief-Changes-in-the-New-Orleans-Teacher-Workforce.pdf.

216 Katy Reckdahl, "New Orleans Loses Teachers at Double the Rate of Other Cities Like It," *Hechinger Report*, September 9, 2019, https://hechingerreport.org/new-orleans-loses-teachers-at-double-the-rate-of-other-cities-like-it/.

217 Maria Fazio, "'Teachers Are Miserable.' Across New Orleans, Schools Grapple with Teacher Shortage," *NOLA.com*, August 14, 2022, https://www.nola.com/news/education/teachers-are-miserable-across-new-orleans-schools-grapple-with-teacher-shortage/article_d277e7d2-1a33-11ed-add7-6771b7b2631a.html.

218 Marie Fazio, "Could Former Students Help Solve Louisiana's Teacher Shortage? New Grads Return to the Classroom," *NOLA.com*, August 24, 2024, https://www.nola.com/news/education/grow-your-own-programs-help-teacher-shortage-in-new-orleans/article_dd85058e-6161-11ef-87d0-f319e41e9439.html.

219 Olivia Carr, "What Factors Are Associate with Teacher Mobility in New Orleans?", *Education Research Alliance for New Orleans*, March 16, 2021, https://educationresearchalliancenola.org/publications/what-factors-are-associated-with-teacher-mobility-within-new-orleans.

220 Carr, "What Factors."

221 Nathan Barrett, et al., "Do Charter Schools Keep Their Best Teachers and Improve Quality? Retention and Rewards for Teachers in New Orleans," National Center for Research on Education Access and Choice and Education Research Alliance for New Orleans, March 9, 2020, https://educationresearchalliancenola.org/files/publications/REACH-Policy-Brief-March-9-2020-Do-Charter-Schools-Keep-Their-Best-Teachers-and-Improve-Quality-New-Orleans.pdf.

222 Barrett, et al., "Do Charter Schools Keep Their Best."

223 Ariel Gilreath, "All-Charter No More: New Orleans Opens Its First Traditional School in Nearly Two Decades," *Hechinger Report*, September 9, 2024, https://hechingerreport.org/all-charter-no-more-new-orleans-opens-its-first-traditional-school-in-nearly-two-decades/.

224 Beth Hawkins, "With the Opening of a New School, New Orleans Is an All-Charter District No More," *The74,* August 2, 2024, https://www.the74million.org/article/with-the-opening-of-a-new-school-new-orleans-is-an-all-charter-district-no-more/.

225 Hawkins, "With the Opening of a New School."

226 Hawkins, "With the Opening of a New School."

227 Hawkins, "With the Opening of a New School." See also Gilreath, "All-Charter No More."

228 Gilreath, "All-Charter No More."

229 Gilreath, "All-Charter No More."

230 Minh Ha, "NOLA-PS Gearing Up to Open Doors at Leah Chase School This Fall," *Verite News*, April 18, 2024, https://veritenews.org/2024/04/18/nola-ps-gearing-up-to-open-doors-at-leah-chase-school-this-fall/.

231 Patrick Wall, "New Orleans School Board Says It's Ready to Run Schools Again," *NOLA.com*, February 22, 2024, https://www.nola.com/news/education/new-orleans-leah-chase-lafayette-academy-charter-school/article_86a3978c-d109-11ee-b3bf-17fe3a6a75ab.html.

232 Ha, "NOLA-PS Gearing Up to Open Doors." See also Gilreath, "All-Charter No More."

233 Ha, "NOLA-PS Gearing Up to Open Doors."

234 Gilreath, "All-Charter No More."

235 Hawkins, "With the Opening of a New School."

236 Marta Jewson, "'Catastrophic': Superintendent Resigns Amid District's $36 Million Gaffe." *The Lens*, November 14, 2024. https://thelensnola.org/2024/11/14/catastrophic-superintendent-resigns-amid-districts-36-million-gaffe/

237 Jewson, "'Catastrophic': Superintendent Resigns Amid District's $36 Million Gaffe." See a revised assessment here: "Fact Sheet: Funding Issue Facing NOLA Public Schools," New Schools for New Orleans, April 11, 2025, https://drive.google.com/file/d/1JAQzJviJnzhPlEiBGIPwHOUDwHa6YaSA/view.

238 Jewson, "'Catastrophic': Superintendent Resigns Amid District's $36 Million Gaffe."

239 Jewson, "'Catastrophic': Superintendent Resigns Amid District's $36 Million Gaffe."

240 Taslin Alfonzo, "OPSB Passes Resolution to Address Financial Over-Projection with Strategic Funding Plan," *NOLA Public Schools*, March 20, 2025, https://www.nolapublicschools.com/news-blog/opsb-passes-resolution-to-address-financial-over-projection-with-strategic-funding-plan.

241 Marie Fazio, "As New Orleans mulls running schools, big questions remain," *NOLA.com*, October 24, 2024, https://www.nola.com/news/education/new-orleans-school-board-open-schools-plan/article_d2ef17dc-931f-11ef-8c05-bf34644763e1.html.

242 "School Sustainability Analysis: 2024-2025 School Year Update," *New Schools for New Orleans*, February 21, 2025, https://drive.google.com/file/d/1S-rrMixqCM0rsGmbPxtbGF1UxKzHvKu2/view.

243 "School Sustainability Analysis: 2024-2025 School Year Update."

244 "School Sustainability Analysis: 2024-2025 School Year Update."

245 "School Sustainability Analysis: 2024-2025 School Year Update."

246 "School Sustainability Analysis: 2024-2025 School Year Update."

247 "Enrollment Landscape Analysis: 2021-2022 School Year," *New Schools for New Orleans*, October 2022, https://drive.google.com/file/d/1-vNXtbF0irPCcysvptnV1N9zzkJZdmx6/view.

248 Marta Jewson, "First School Closure Announced as NOLA Public Schools Tackles 'Right-Sizing' amid Declining Enrollment," *The Lens*, January 3, 2022, https://thelensnola.org/2022/01/03/first-school-closure-announced-as-nola-public-schools-tackles-right-sizing-amid-declining-enrollment/. See also Hawkins, "With the Opening of a New School."

249 Jewson, "First School Closure Announced." See also *New Schools for New Orleans*, "School Sustainability Analysis: 2024-2025 School Year Update."

250 "The 5-Year Portfolio Plan" NOLA-PS, accessed July 31, 2025, https://nolapublicschools.com/community/5ypp. See also https://www.wwno.org/education/2025-02-24/as-enrollment-declines-hard-decisions-loom-for-new-orleans-schools

251 Gilreath, "All-Charter No More."

252 Matt Barnum, "A Chalkbeat Explainer: What Is the 'Portfolio Model' of Running Schools?" *Chalkbeat*, March 8, 2019, https://www.chalkbeat.org/2019/3/8/21107014/a-chalkbeat-explainer-what-is-the-portfolio-model-of-running-schools/.

253 "What Is a Public Charter School?" DC Public Charter School Board, accessed July 31, 2025, https://www.dcpcsb.org/families/what-public-charter-school#:~:text=Traditional%20schools%20are%20run%20by,School%20Board%20(DC%20PCSB). See also "DC Public Schools Fast Facts 2024," District of Columbia Public Schools, accessed July 31, 2025, https://dcps.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/dcps/publication/attachments/02.29.24%20DCPS%20Fast%20Facts.pdf.

254 Melanie Asmar, "A New Denver School Improvement Strategy Could End in Closures for Struggling Schools," *Chalkbeat*, May 16, 2025, https://www.chalkbeat.org/colorado/2025/05/16/denver-unveils-new-school-improvement-strategy-could-end-in-closure/.

255 Dylan Peers McCoy, "What's an IPS Innovation School? Here's Your Cheat Sheet," Chalkbeat, February 13, 2020, https://www.chalkbeat.org/indiana/2020/2/13/21178704/what-s-an-ips-innovation-school-here-s-your-cheat-sheet/.

256 Peers McCoy, "What's an IPS Innovation School?"

ppi

The Progressive Policy Institute is a catalyst for policy innovation and political reform based in Washington, D.C. Its mission is to create radically pragmatic ideas for moving America beyond ideological and partisan deadlock.

Founded in 1989, PPI started as the intellectual home of the New Democrats and earned a reputation as President Bill Clinton's "idea mill." Many of its mold-breaking ideas have been translated into public policy and law and have influenced international efforts to modernize progressive politics.

Today, PPI is developing fresh proposals for stimulating U.S. economic innovation and growth; equipping all Americans with the skills and assets that social mobility in the knowledge economy requires; modernizing an overly bureaucratic and centralized public sector; and defending liberal democracy in a dangerous world.

PROGRESSIVE POLICY INSTITUTE
1919 M Street NW,
Suite 300,
Washington, DC 20036

Tel 202.525.3926
Fax 202.525.3941

info@ppionline.org
progressivepolicy.org