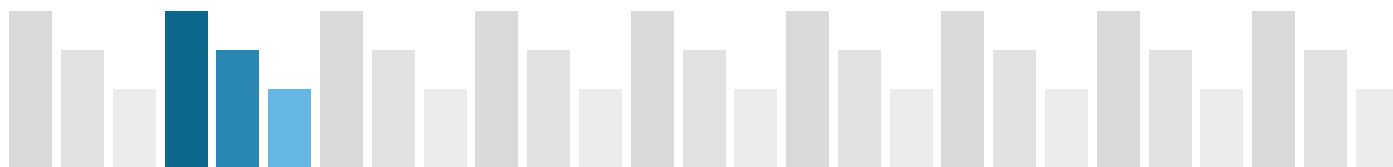


What Happens Next?

Voters' Perceptions of K-12

Public Education in New Orleans



April 2016

Introduction

In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, Louisiana lawmakers voted to expand the ability of the state-run Recovery School District (RSD) to take over the lowest performing schools in Louisiana. This had its most profound impact on New Orleans, which, at the time, was one of the lowest performing school districts in the state. The RSD assumed responsibility for the majority of city schools, leaving only the highest-performing under the control of the Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB). The RSD subsequently turned over operations of all schools under its supervision to independent charter school operators. Currently, the RSD oversees 52 schools in the city, all of which are charters. The OPSB oversees a total of 24 schools, including 18 charters and six direct-run schools.

The future governance structure of New Orleans' schools remains uncertain, including when, or if, all RSD schools will return to the OPSB. Last year, the first charter school in the city returned from RSD oversight to the OPSB. In 2016, the boards of five schools voted to explore coming under the OPSB starting in the 2016-17 school year. Additionally, during the 2015 and 2016 legislative sessions, legislation mandating that all RSD schools return to OPSB control has been introduced. Clearly, oversight and local governance are major issues in New Orleans' public education landscape and this year's legislative session will see a continued debate about the circumstances surrounding school return.

Since 2009, the Cowen Institute has conducted an annual poll to assess public perception of the education system in New Orleans. In the past, polls have included a few questions about school governance. However, given continued debate at the legislature about the issue, this year's poll focuses heavily on the governance of city schools, while also including questions about key aspects of New Orleans' unique education structure. Our polls are aimed at assessing how New Orleans voters and parents perceive the changes that have occurred in public education, as well as what they believe is the best course for our schools. Please see the final page of the report for the polling methodology.



Summary of Findings

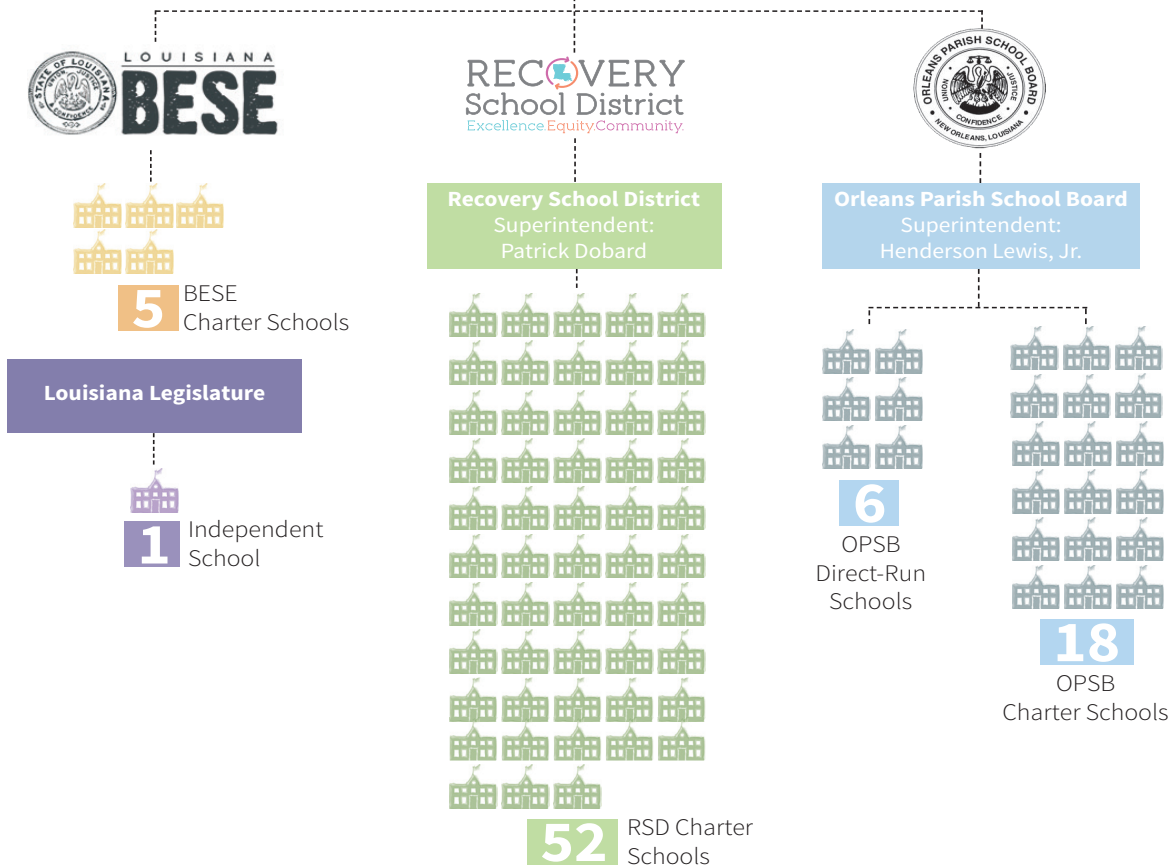
Respondents to this year's poll were divided on when, and how, schools should return to the OPSB and the best way to ensure schools return in a strategic manner. They, did, however, show support for many of the changes that have occurred in the past ten years. Some of the major results from this year's poll were:

- As in previous Cowen Institute polls, **opinion on when all schools should return to the OPSB remains divided**, with those believing schools should return in 2018 slightly outweighing those who believe the status quo should be maintained.
- An **overwhelming majority thinks that a plan should be created and implemented** prior to the enactment of any requirement that all RSD schools to return to the OPSB.
- **Public support for charter schools and the city's open enrollment policies remains high.**
- A plurality of those polled would **rate the city's schools with a C grade.**
- Nearly twice as many respondents **believe public schools are improving** as compared to those who believe they are getting worse.
- Respondents believed that the **RSD and OPSB are comparably capable** of overseeing schools.
- A majority of respondents believed that **RSD schools should be able to return to BESE** if they are unsatisfied with OPSB oversight.

New Orleans Public School Governance Structure

2015-16 School Year

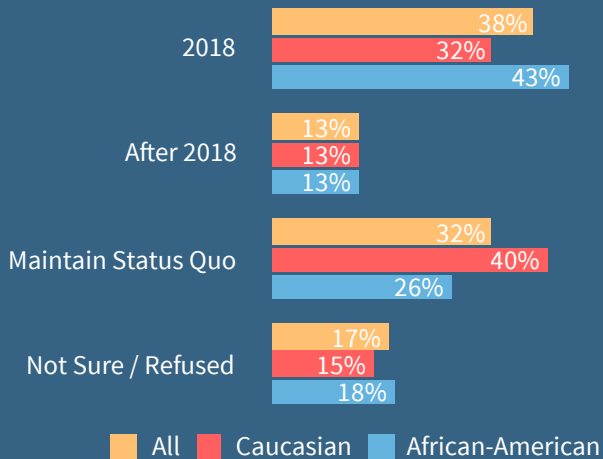
Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) & Louisiana Department of Education
State Superintendent: John White



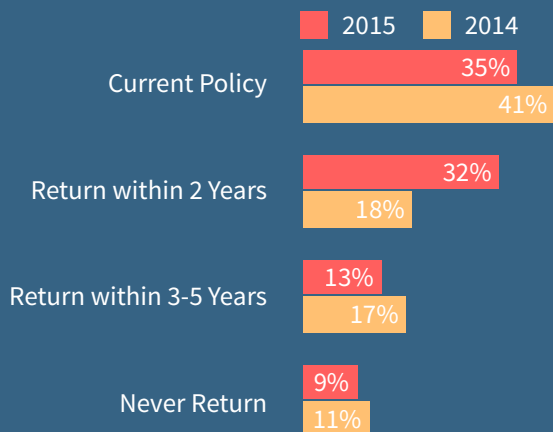
82 Public Schools * 6 Direct-Run Schools * 76 Charter Schools

Who Should Oversee City Schools?

When should all RSD schools return to OPSB?¹



In previous years, when the Cowen Institute has asked when, or if, RSD charters should return, results have been similarly divided.



This year's survey results, along with those from previous Cowen Institute polls, indicate that the **public remains divided about the future governance structure of New Orleans' public schools**. A plurality of voters, 38 percent, felt that all RSD charter schools should be required to return to the OPSB by 2018, compared to 32 percent who believe that the current policy, in which RSD schools choose the terms of return, should remain in place.

Only five and eight percent of respondents supported requiring schools to return in 2019 or 2020, respectively. There were notable differences in responses based on race and whether the respondent had children in public schools: 43 percent of African-Americans polled wanted schools to return in 2018, compared to 32 percent of Caucasian respondents. Forty percent of Caucasian voters supported the status quo, while only 26 percent of African-Americans did.

Previous Cowen Institute polling shows similar responses. Last year, 35 percent of respondents favored the status quo, while 32 percent wanted schools to return within two years, and 13 percent opted for return within three-to-five years.



¹In some cases, percentages do not add up to 100 due to non-response to a particular question.

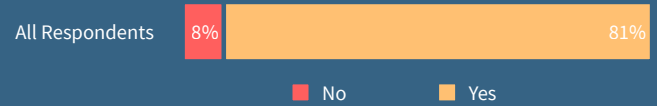
Regardless of when respondents thought schools should return, there was **overwhelming support for ensuring that a plan was created and implemented to facilitate the transition of RSD schools back to the OPSB**: 81 percent of voters supported such a plan, compared to just eight percent who opposed it. This support was consistent across all demographic characteristics of respondents.

However, opinion was more divided on whether RSD schools should be required to return if a transition plan had not been fully implemented by a set deadline. A plurality of respondents, 45 percent, said RSD schools should still be required to return, while 36 percent said schools should not. Views differed widely based on race: 51 percent of African-Americans wanted schools to return whether or not a plan had been implemented, compared to 36 percent of Caucasian voters. In contrast, 45 percent of Caucasian voters said schools should not be required to return, while 30 percent of African-Americans said the same.

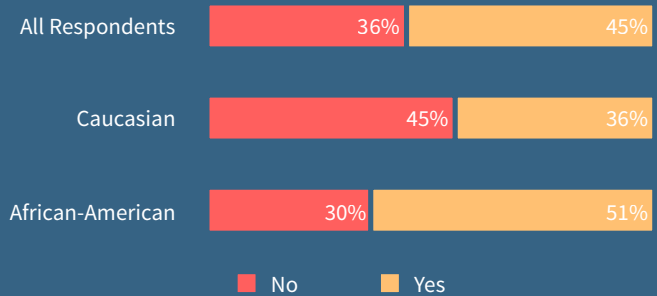
A plurality of respondents, 41 percent, believe that the OPSB could effectively manage all public schools in the city, along with EnrollNOLA, the city’s common school enrollment system that is presently run by the RSD. Comparatively, 35 percent believed OPSB could not effectively manage this and 24 percent were not sure. Respondents gave a variety of answers as to what would need to change for the OPSB to be ready to govern all schools. A majority, 52 percent, were unsure of what changes would need to be made, while nine percent said the OPSB needed to “prove it was ready”, and six percent said OPSB would “need better management”.

As to what should happen if RSD schools return, but are dissatisfied with OPSB oversight, **63 percent of voters said RSD schools should be able to return to the oversight of the State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE).** Only 15 percent of respondents believed schools should not have this option.

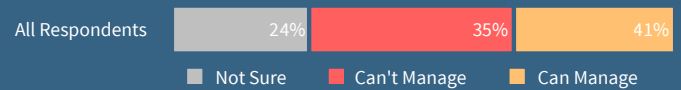
If RSD charter schools are required to return to the OPSB, should the RSD and OPSB be required to create and implement a transition plan prior to returning schools?



If the RSD and OPSB have not completed the creation and implementation of a transition plan by a set deadline, should RSD charter schools be required to return to the OPSB?



Can the OPSB, at present, effectively manage all public schools in New Orleans, both its own and RSD schools, as well as take over the management of EnrollNOLA from the RSD?



If RSD schools are required to return to the OPSB, should they have the option of returning to be governed by BESE, which now oversees the RSD, if they are not satisfied with the OPSB?

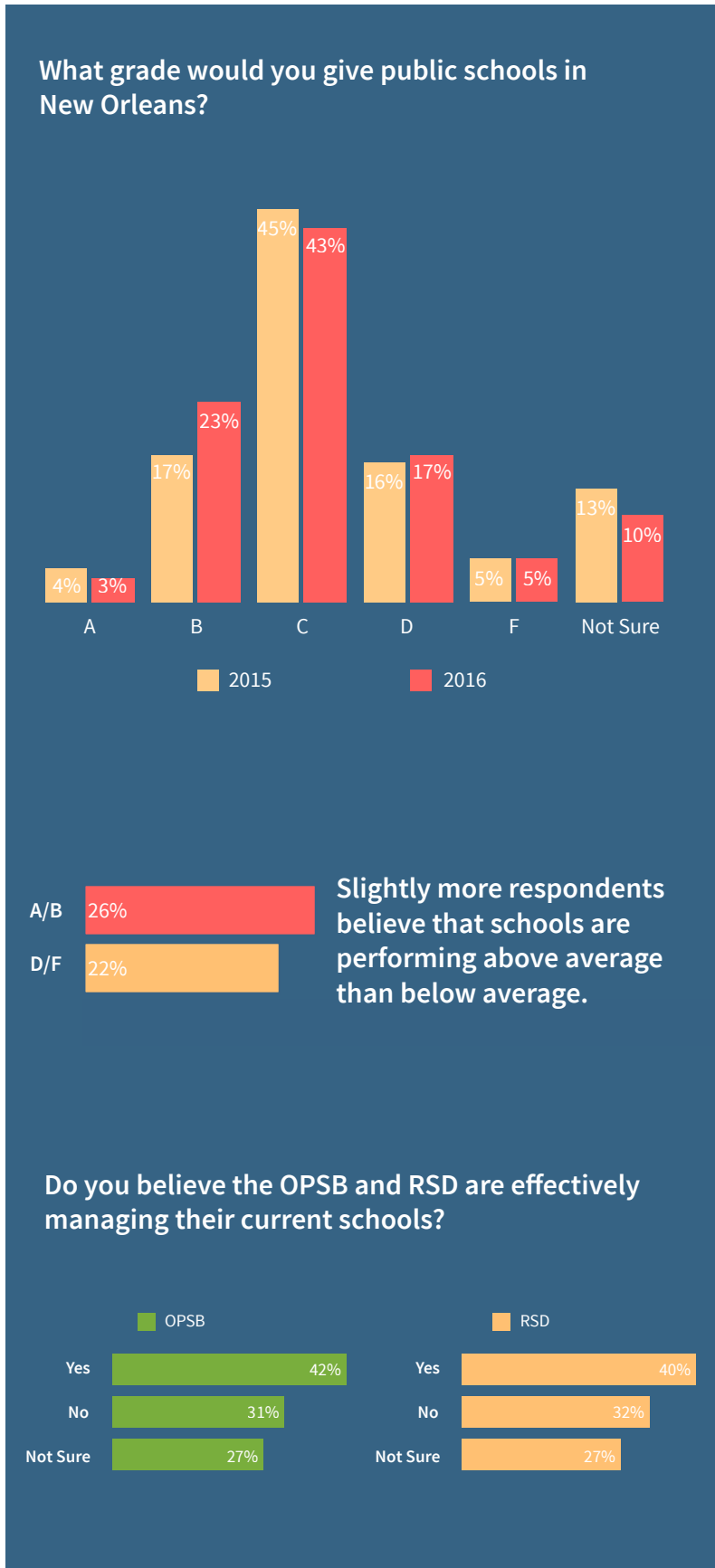


Is the Current Structure Working?

Overall, a majority of those polled would grade public schools in New Orleans with either a B or C. A plurality of respondents, 43 percent, gave schools a C, compared to 23 percent who gave a B, and 17 percent who gave a D. Respondents gave similar grades to schools regardless of their ethnicity. A plurality also gave schools a C grade last year.

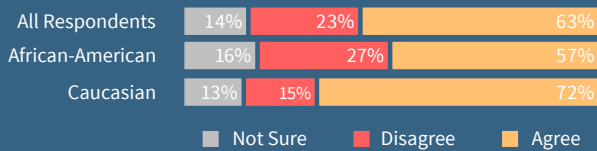
When asked whether they thought public schools were getting better, worse, or staying the same, 36 percent said better, 31 percent said the same, and 19 percent said worse. However, 43 percent of Caucasian respondents thought schools were getting better compared to 31 percent of African-American voters. Twenty-three percent of African-Americans thought schools were getting worse, in contrast to 15 percent of Caucasian voters.

Respondents also viewed the performance of the RSD and OPSB similarly. Forty percent of respondents think the RSD is effectively overseeing its 52 schools, while 32 percent do not. As for the OPSB, 42 percent of those polled think it is effectively overseeing its 24 schools, compared to 31 percent who do not. There were no major differences in views based on ethnicity.

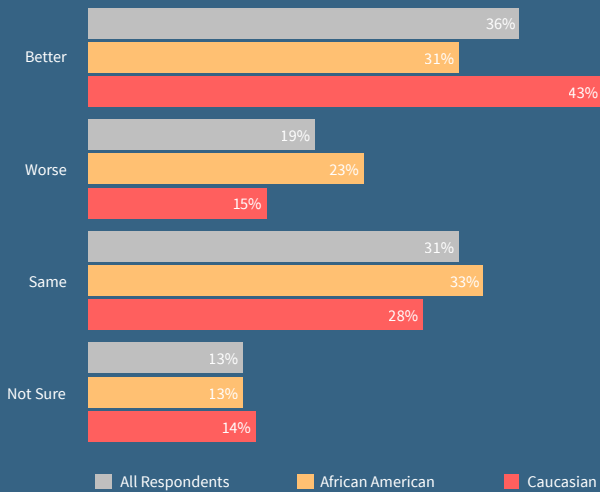


Is There Support for Current Policies?

Do you agree or disagree with the following sentence: “Public charter schools have improved public education in New Orleans”?



Approximately a third of respondents felt New Orleans schools are getting better. Opinions were divided along the lines of race.



Charter Schools

New Orleans has the highest rate of charter school enrollment in the nation, with 93 percent of public school students attending charters. **Respondents showed significant approval of charters schools, with 63 percent agreeing that charter schools have improved public education in New Orleans**, compared to 23 percent who disagreed. Notably, both Caucasian and African-American respondents approved of charter schools, though support among Caucasian respondents was markedly higher: 72 percent of Caucasian respondents thought charters had improved education, in comparison to 57 percent of African-Americans. These responses were similar to those in the 2015 Cowen Institute poll, in which 59 percent of respondents agreed charter schools had improved public education, and only 18 percent disagreed.



57% of African American respondents believed that charter schools have improved public education in New Orleans.

72% of Caucasian respondents believed that charter schools have improved public education in New Orleans.

Open Enrollment

Another unique feature of public education in New Orleans is that aside from a few selective enrollment schools, students are allowed to apply to and attend any school in the city, regardless of where they live. **Large majorities of those polled approved of this policy: 62 percent of respondents stated this policy has had a positive impact on the quality of education in New Orleans, compared to just 13 percent who thought it has had a negative impact.** Additionally, 75 percent of voters believed parents should be able to send their children to any school, without any geographic restrictions, compared to 21 percent who thought students should be assigned to the school closest to their home. Similarly, 77 percent of voters believed that the OPSB should be required to continue the open enrollment policy, rather than having the authority to assign students to the school closest to their home, if and when all RSD charters return to OPSB oversight. Support for open enrollment was consistent across all demographic profiles. These numbers echo last year's poll, in which 72 percent of those polled supported open enrollment, while 23 percent preferred assigning students to schools based on geographic alone.

Methodology

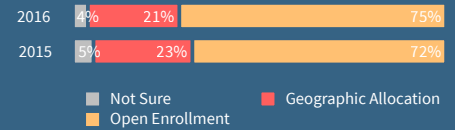
This is the seventh public opinion poll on education published by the Cowen Institute. All questions were created by Cowen Institute and Market Research Insight staff along with significant input from legislators, educators, and education advocates.

The survey was conducted by phone from March 31 to April 5, 2016, by Market Research Insight with Dr. Verne Kennedy as director. MRI is a nationally recognized polling firm. A sample of 600 voters was randomly drawn from the latest list of registered voters in New Orleans by city council district to ensure geographical representation. The questionnaire was programed into a CATI system and multiple attempts, at least two, were made to reach each individual. Interviews were conducted from a call center with trained and experienced staff. At least two monitor stations were constantly observed and listened to interviews to assure quality. Results were compared with census and voter registration demographics to be certain the collected sample represented important characteristics of the Orleans population. Since New Orleans has higher cell phone use than similar cities because many residents switched to cell phones after Hurricane Katrina, 54 percent of interviews were conducted on cell phones. The sample provides an error factor of four percent at the .95 level of confidence that account for the fact that council districts and other populations having error factors based on the cell size of each group. Both public and private school parents were proportionally and well represented based on their makeup of the New Orleans population.

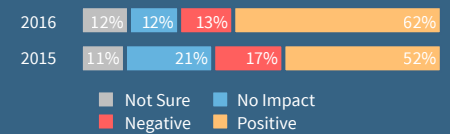
Overall, 57 percent of respondents were African American, 38 percent where white, and five percent were classified as either Hispanic or other, closely matching the ethnic distribution of the adult residents in the city. Income, gender, age, and residence location were also proportionally distributed across respondents. A total of 222 parents, including 179 with children in public schools, were interviewed.

Demographic	African-American	Caucasian	Other
Respondents	57%	38%	5%
Adult Population	60%	33%	7%

Do you think parents should be able to send their child to any open enrollment school in New Orleans with no geographic restrictions or should students be assigned to the school closest to their home?



Do you think open enrollment has had a positive impact, a negative impact, or no impact on the quality of public education in New Orleans?



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