

**The State of
Public Education
in
New Orleans**

2016-17

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The Cowen Institute - February 2017



The Cowen Institute at Tulane University

The mission of the Cowen Institute is to advance public education and youth success in New Orleans and beyond.

To further that mission, the Cowen Institute focuses on K-12 education, college and career success, and reconnecting opportunity youth.

The Cowen Institute is named after Tulane University President Emeritus Scott Cowen. It was founded in December 2006 and opened its doors in March 2007. Since that time, the Institute has chronicled and analyzed the transformation of public education in New Orleans. *The State of Public Education in New Orleans* is the Institute's annual report on the city's schools, students, and educators. This is the ninth edition of the report.

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The Cowen Institute at Tulane University opened in 2007 with the primary focus of chronicling, assessing, and analyzing the unique transformation of the K-12 education system in New Orleans. The year 2017 marks the Institute's ten-year anniversary, and over the past decade, our mission and work have evolved to meet the needs, challenges, and complexities of our ever-shifting educational landscape. Our work has expanded to include policy, research, and programmatic initiatives focused on reconnecting opportunity youth and advancing college and career success for young people. At the same time, providing actionable analysis about the evolution of the city's K-12 education landscape continues to be one of our three key priorities. *The State of Public Education in New Orleans* has served as our flagship publication about New Orleans' education since the launch of the Institute, and this year's edition provides data about schools, students, teachers, and education financing – just as we have done in the past.

Beginning with this year's edition, these reports will be less retrospective, with a focus more on the future of public education in New Orleans than on the changes following Hurricane Katrina. Given the legislation that passed in 2016, school unification is the spotlight issue for the 2017 report.

As we look forward, we remain committed to ensuring that all students have access to quality public education and to meaningful pathways to college and career. *The State of Public Education in New Orleans* is intended primarily as an informational document. Our hope is that it will serve as a guide that enables educators, parents, students, and the public-at-large to better understand New Orleans' complex approach to public education. As such, the report is organized around key questions commonly asked about New Orleans' public schools.



“New Orleans will be the first American city in which every family has the opportunity to send their children to an excellent public school. Thanks to the hard work of our teachers, school leaders, families and community partners, our schools have made considerable progress over the decade; now more than ever before, our schools are meeting the needs of our community and serving all students. This progress notwithstanding, we must do more to fulfill the promise of public education for all students. Far too many of our students never graduate from high schools and many hundreds more graduate without an accessible pathway to a worthwhile job or a college degree. We must work together as a community to eradicate the barriers to successful high school completion, to reengage those young people who are disconnected – especially those caught up in the judicial system – and to ensure that every high school graduate in Orleans Parish is prepared for what’s next.”

Dr. Henderson Lewis, Jr., Ph.D
Superintendent, Orleans Parish School Board

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Introduction

What is public education like in New Orleans?



A Unique Education Landscape

Over the past decade, no city in the United States has experienced as much change to its public education system as New Orleans. The Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB) recently announced its intention to convert its five directly operated schools into charter schools. If and when this occurs, New Orleans will become the first city in the United States where all non-incarcerated, public education students attend charter schools. Charters are schools that are publicly-funded, but not run by a local school board as most schools in a traditional district. Schools sign a “charter” or contract with an authorizing agency and their operators have greater autonomy over curriculum, staffing, and other decisions made at the school level than do district-run schools.

The evolution of New Orleans from a traditional school district to an all-charter city began prior to 2005, when a handful of charter schools first opened in the city. However, the expansion of charter schools greatly accelerated

following the devastation wrought by Hurricane Katrina and related levee failures. The storm destroyed 80 percent of the city’s schools and infrastructure and displaced the vast majority of its families, students, and teachers. In the decade prior to the storm, the city had one of the lowest-performing systems in the country. Despite the presence of some exceptional options, the majority of public school students did not receive a quality education. The OPSB, which was responsible for operating almost all schools in the city, was also involved in a number of corruption and financial scandals around the time of the storm.¹

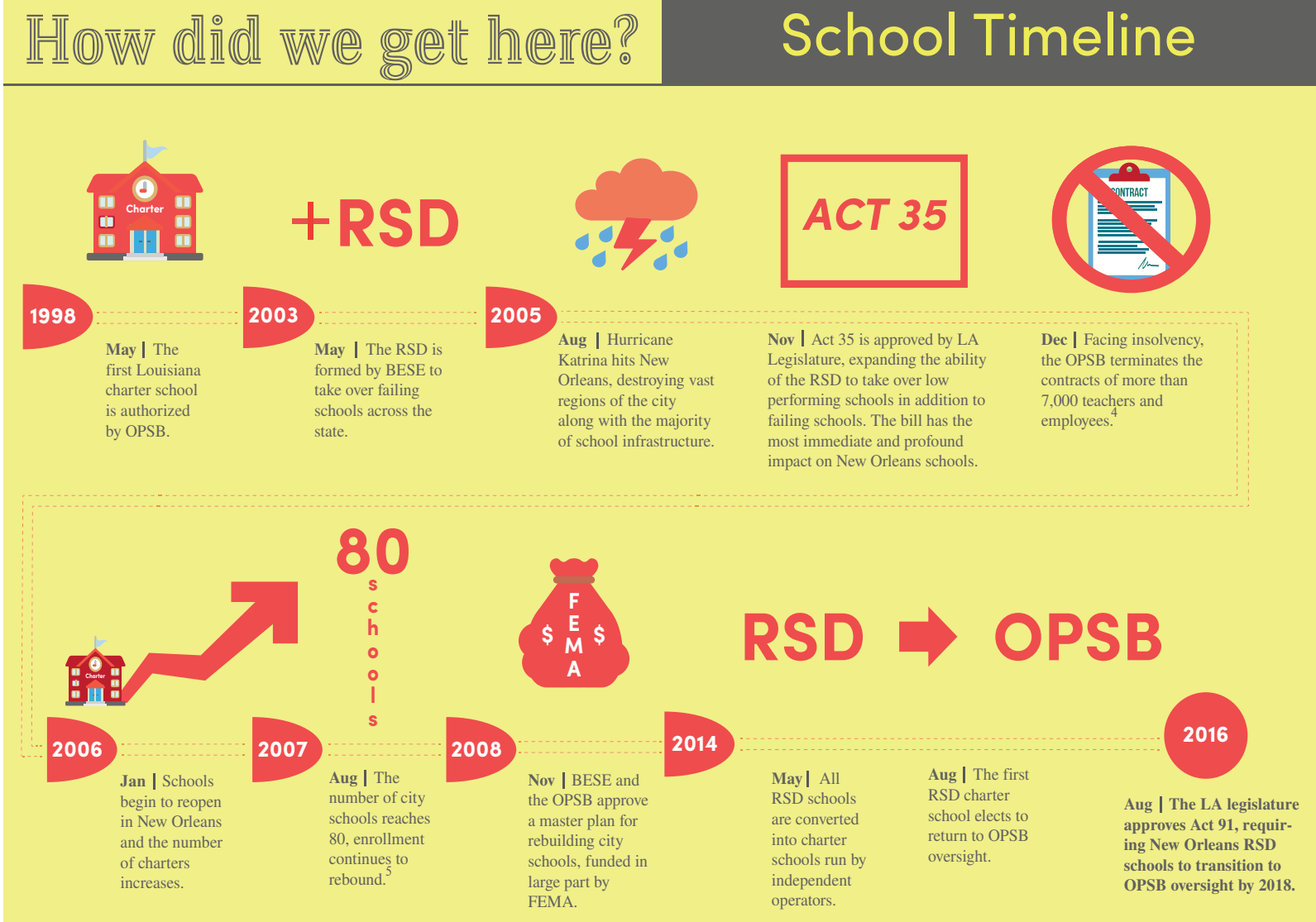
In the fall of 2005, the Louisiana Legislature voted to expand the authority of the state-run Recovery School District (RSD) to take over low-performing (rather than only failing) public schools in New Orleans.² Oversight for city schools was separated between the OPSB and the RSD, with the OPSB retaining authority over only the highest-performing schools. The RSD was tasked with improving the lowest-performing schools. By 2014, the RSD had converted all schools

under its purview into charters.³ Today, most OPSB schools are also charters, and the rest are likely to become charters in the near future. As a result, New Orleans now has the most decentralized public education system in the country.

School Unification

By almost all quantifiable indicators, school performance has improved: academic scores, graduation rates, and New Orleans’ rank among parishes statewide have all increased. Over the past decade, Cowen Institute polling has consistently shown support for many of the major changes, including charter school growth and perceptions of overall school quality. Yet, the decision to split control over authorization and the oversight of New Orleans’ schools has remained controversial among many individuals and organizations in the city over the past ten years.

However, 2016 saw significant developments around the future of the long-term governing structure of New Orleans schools. In 2015, the Louisiana Legislature considered a bill to place all New Orleans RSD schools under OPSB oversight, but the measure failed to receive approval from legislators. In 2016, though, legislators compromised on Act 91, a landmark bill that requires all RSD charter schools in New Orleans to come under OPSB oversight by June 30, 2018.⁶ The transition will occur over two years. Charter schools under the RSD will remain charter schools under the OPSB with comparable levels of autonomy. In August 2016, the OPSB released a plan for the unification of their schools that includes major milestones for the next two years. Unification of all schools under a locally elected school board marks a significant next step in the ongoing transformation of public education in the city.



What Makes New Orleans Unique?

Dominance of charter schools

93% of students attend charter schools currently, and the number could soon approach 100%, as the OPSB intends to convert its five remaining direct-run schools into charters. This is the highest percentage of any U.S. city.⁷

Common enrollment system

Families can use the EnrollNOLA application system to apply to the vast majority of schools. Families can apply to multiple schools while only having to fill out one application. A handful of schools do not currently participate in EnrollNOLA, but are required to join once their charter comes up for its next renewal.

LEA status

Most charter schools in New Orleans are their own Local Education Agency (LEA), a status usually reserved only for school boards in other places in the United States.

Open enrollment

Students can apply to and attend any public school in the city (though some schools do have selective admissions policies). Unlike in most school districts, students are not assigned to the school closest to their home.

Decentralized governance

Each charter school has a great deal of autonomy over its curriculum, staffing, and operations. However, city schools abide by a number of shared policies, regardless of their authorizer. These include:

- State-mandated accountability and student performance standards;
- Standardized expulsion processes;
- Wraparound services for chronically truant students; and
- Differentiated per pupil funding provides additional resources for serving special education, at risk, and ELL students.

Governance

How are schools governed?

Governance Overview

Last year marked a seminal turning point in the governance of public schools in New Orleans post-Katrina for three main reasons: more RSD schools elected to transfer to the OPSB than ever before; the legislature approved a bill authorizing OPSB-RSD unification by 2018; and all OPSB and RSD schools had to adopt a common funding formula.

At the start of the school year, four RSD schools transferred to OPSB oversight. Prior to the 2016-17 school year, only one RSD charter school, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Charter School, had made such a move.⁸ The transfers heralded a larger change towards full unification brought about in June, when the state legislature approved Act 91, which requires all RSD charter schools in New Orleans to come under OPSB oversight by 2018. While many of the details of the transition still need to be decided over the next two years, for the first time in over a decade, the vast majority of city schools will have the locally elected school board as their charter authorizer, rather than the state Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE).

Yet, while this change is significant, many of the core components of the newly developed public education system will remain the same under unification. Currently, nearly all students attend charter schools. The school-level autonomy of city charters, allowing individual school leaders control over such crucial issues as curriculum, staffing, and finances, will not change once the unification process is complete.

In this environment of charter school prevalence, school autonomy, parental choice, decentralized governance, and high-stakes accountability are the most notable features of New Orleans public education. The schools in New Orleans comprise a portfolio district, where a governing authority oversees a system of schools that operate under performance-based accountability and parental choice. Charter schools, not directly run by the district, have autonomy to hire and fire staff, allocate their budgets, and negotiate service contracts. Of the 80 charter schools located in the city, 74 have either the OPSB or BESE as their charter authorizer. The OPSB and BESE act as portfolio managers by authorizing new schools to open, closing low-performing schools, or turning over low-performing schools to other

charter operators. They also act as regulators, creating shared policies to ensure students across the city are served equitably. Louisiana law requires that public charter schools be governed by a local, non-profit oversight board. The board holds a contract (charter) with the authorizer and is held accountable for the operation of the school. Charter boards must ensure that a school's academic program meets state accountability standards, and that the school remains legally compliant and fiscally stable.

In this environment of charter school prevalence, school autonomy, parental choice, decentralized governance, and high-stakes accountability are the most notable features of New Orleans public education.

In Louisiana, local school boards and BESE can authorize charter schools. BESE also authorizes charter schools that operate independently of the RSD and OPSB. This decentralized system privileges autonomy – every school or charter management organization (CMO), which are organizations that operate multiple charter schools, may have its own hiring philosophy, pedagogical approach, and operations practices, among other policies, as long as schools meet state-mandated benchmarks for student success and comply with financial, enrollment, health, and safety regulations. Principals can make real-time decisions without having to run such changes through a central office with multiple layers of approval. However, decentralized governance also presents challenges for schools. The RSD, the OPSB, and charter schools have to creatively tackle system-wide challenges collectively, such as providing services for students with special needs or mental health issues, as well as transportation issues. Decentralized governance also requires different accountability structures than those in a traditional district, with local boards and distant state-level actors all responsible for new, evolving roles within an accountability framework.

The Impact of Unification on Governance

Unification will likely have a limited impact on the day-to-day operations of schools. As mentioned previously, RSD charters will retain their current autonomy once they transfer to the OPSB. The legislation guiding the unification transition process will not have any effect on school staffing or curriculum. Additionally, EnrollNOLA will move from being operated by the RSD to the OPSB and continue to serve as the common application system for applying to almost all city schools. Accountability policies and the way that schools are assessed will change during the transition period, and these changes will be made in accordance with new state policies. The Louisiana Department of Education

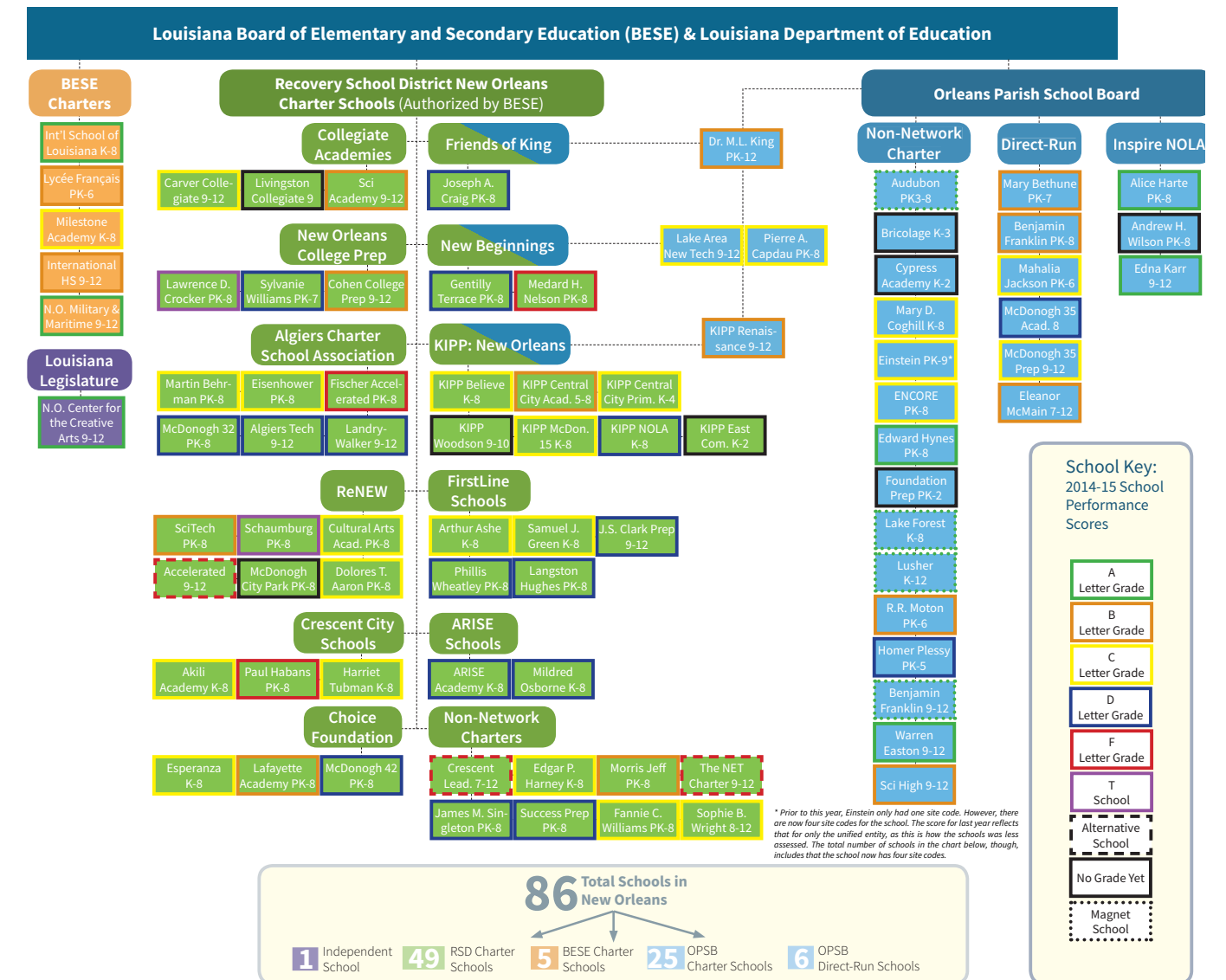
(LDOE) is currently revamping the state's accountability standards for schools in accordance with federal education legislation that the U.S. Congress passed last year.⁹

The most significant impact of unification on governance in New Orleans is that the OPSB will be the authorizer for all former RSD charter schools. The OPSB will soon adopt the vital responsibility of ensuring that all transitioning schools are meeting their accountability requirements and complying with statutes regarding academics, finances, and services for special populations of students. The OPSB will also make decisions around the nature and length of charter contract renewals.



Public School Governance in New Orleans

2016-17 School Year

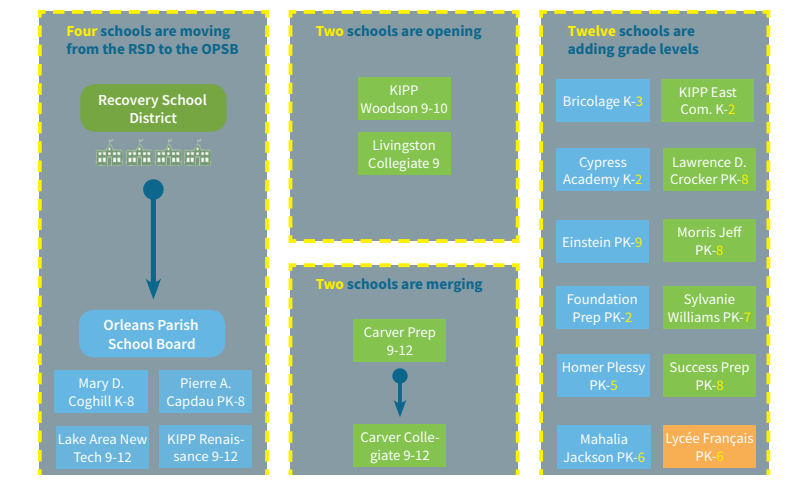


Types of Charter Schools in Louisiana, 2016-17

| | Type 1 | Type 2 | Type 3 | Type 3B | Type 4 | Type 5 |
|--|--------|--------|--------|---------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Who authorizes the charter school in New Orleans? | OPSB | BESE | OPSB | OPSB | BESE ¹ | BESE ¹ |
| How many of this type of charter school are in NOLA? | 7 | 5 | 10 | 5 | 0 | 49 |
| Where can the students come from? | NOLA | State | NOLA | NOLA | NOLA | NOLA |
| Can the school have admission requirements? | Yes | Yes | Yes | No | Yes | No |

*Some charter schools act as their own Local Education Agency (LEA), which is an agency that is recognized as a legal entity

Changes for the 2016-17 School Year



Why Is Now the Right Time?

An interview with LDOE Superintendent John White

Under the legislation guiding the unification process, all RSD schools in New Orleans must transfer to the OPSB by the start of the 2018 school year. The Cowen Institute spoke with Louisiana Department of Education Superintendent John White about his reflections on unification and why now is the right time for RSD schools to move to the OPSB.

Cowen: Why is now the right time for unification?

Supt. White: Now is the right time because over the last six years, we have spent a lot of time developing not just strong independent schools, but a strong system of independent schools. That system is focused on ensuring opportunity for every student and fairness for every student. Having done that, and that means building a strong open enrollment system, a strong system of expulsion and transfer controls, and a system of fair funding, you have the basic elements of a system of independent public schools.

To make that system complete, the last question you need to address is the role and nature of the central office. But until you have a single central office change, it's impossible for the whole system to change and operate in a uniform way. So, unification is truly just about changing the governing entity, not what is occurring at individual schools. And I believe the law gets us to a unified central office for the system, especially with the help of the two year planning process. Now is the time because we have the pillars in place to create the central office we want and need.

Cowen: How do you think unification will change New Orleans education?

Supt. White: There will be a number of positive effects to having a uniform governing body and a central office working for all schools. First, on a basic level, having a single office thinking about the outcomes in the highest and lowest schools, and being responsible for both, creates a city wide mode of accountability and responsibility that we don't currently have. Right now we have one central office responsible for some schools, and another office responsible for others. That's not healthy for a city. We want to think about all kids and all schools as a responsibility for us all. I give OPSB Supt. Lewis a lot of credit because when he was asked after the unification plan passed what our letter grade was, he said it was a C, not an A. That's because, when you put all the schools in New Orleans together, and not just the OPSB, the overall letter grade is a C. We need to look at our schools in their entirety rather than as under separate operators.



But I also believe fairness for all requires transparency for all. With unification, this is possible. For instance, the weighted student funding formula could only have been approved once we had an honest conversation at one, not two school boards. Now, it wasn't an easy conversation, but we could have it in one place because we created a law that places singular responsibility in the OPSB to make hard, difficult, yet principled decisions on the behalf of all students, instead of viewing it as 'my' students or 'your' students.

Cowen: What do you believe needs to happen to move New Orleans schools from good to great?

Supt. White: The tough thing to admit is that governance is a small piece of overall school quality. There is an open question about whether OPSB can be a vigilant regulator of school quality. Will they hold schools accountable? Will they make dramatic interventions when repeated instances of failure occur? I hope the answers are yes. But even then, OPSB will be a relatively small entity with relatively limited academic levers at its disposal. Really, the academic levers to make the transition from good to great reside at the school level. And there are four areas we need to address to ensure our system improves:

We need to ensure we have diverse and capable pipelines of talent into the system and within the system so the best people stay in the schools. We do not have enough people who are coming in to work in our schools who are prepared for higher expectations. We are also struggling to keep our best people. Both of these problems can be corrected but it will require a coordinated effort.

We have students entering into system unprepared for kindergarten. That is largely due to the patchwork of daycare, Headstart, and other pre-K environments that exists in the state and we need to correct that so that all students have quality experiences prior to entering the K-12 system.

We need a system that ensures that 100% of students exiting our high schools are embarking upon pathways to prosperity, whether in education or the workforce.

Finally, we need a differentiated approach to serve the mental and physical health of students. That approach needs to be transparent and it needs to be aligned with the juvenile justice, adult education, and health care system to ensure most disadvantaged populations can have their needs addressed, either in or out of schools.

Yet, of those four things, only one involves the OPSB as the governing body — that is, measuring learning and conducting interventions at schools when needed. So to truly get our schools to the A level, we need the schools themselves, in partnership with non-profits to aggressively address the gaps that exist in our system today.

Cowen: What do you see as the biggest accomplishments and challenges in New Orleans education?

Supt. White: The greatest accomplishment is that we have created a system where if a family chooses a school and essentially participates in the system, then there are some (though not all) schools capable of educating the child, so that when he or she leaves the system, it is with economic opportunity and the skills in hand for to achieve a lifetime of opportunity. The problem of course is that not every school can make that claim today and there are both needs that kids have and opportunities beyond the school system after high school that we are not fully addressing. The problem in the K-12 system is that we have many schools, that if you stick with them throughout your education, are not able to put you on that path. But that's a problem in conjunction with the workforce and higher education systems in the state, which are also often not ready to meet the needs of all high school graduates. So while we have made tremendous progress, I believe we have to acknowledge the problems that still exist. It wasn't a manmade disaster that brought the system in New Orleans or other urban areas to a state where we had these failures, it was years of chronic neglect. But I believe these challenges are surmountable with the right effort going forward.

Schools

What type of schools do students attend?

Schools Overview

The New Orleans K-12 system is different from other public education systems across the nation due in part to the type of schools that students attend. New Orleans has both the highest percentage of students attending charter schools (93 percent of public school students) and the highest percentage of all students attending private schools (25.1 percent) in the nation.¹⁰

In the 2015-16 school year, 82 public schools served 48,375 students as of the October 1st reporting period. There were six different types of charter schools. The type of charter school signifies to which entity it is accountable, how it is funded, and to what extent requirements may be established for enrollment. Charter schools authorized by the RSD are required to be open-enrollment, meaning that a school must accept any student regardless of academic ability, whether the student has a disability, or needs additional supports, providing that a seat is available. Under state law, charter schools authorized by the RSD that transition to the OPSB are required to maintain that commitment to accessibility. This is particularly important since the Louisiana

Legislature signed Act 91 in May 2016, which requires all schools authorized by the RSD to unite under the OPSB by 2018. Ultimately, all RSD schools that transition to the OPSB will be required to maintain their open-enrollment status in the future.

Of the 82 schools in the city last year, six were operated directly by the OPSB, but the school board voted to phase-out one of these schools, McDonogh 35 Academy.¹¹ The school was removed from the common enrollment application and halted enrollment for the 2016-17 school year, and will disband following the conclusion of the 2017-18 school year. The remaining schools operated by the OPSB include Ben Franklin Elementary, Eleanor McMain Secondary, Mahalia Jackson Elementary, Mary Bethune Elementary, and McDonogh No. 35 College Prep. Of the five remaining traditional public schools in New Orleans, all have reportedly expressed a desire to become charter schools themselves. Pending approval of the OPSB, all New Orleans public school students may attend a charter school in the near future.¹²



New Orleans vs. USA

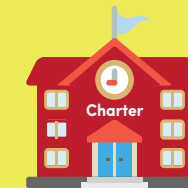
How do schools compare?

N.O. students attend charter & private schools at much higher rate.

New Orleans

93% of public school students attend charter schools.

25% of all students attend private schools.



USA

7% of public school students attend charter schools.

10% of all students attend private schools.



Student/teacher ratio and per pupil expenses are similar.

\$11,163
per pupil expenditure.



Student / teacher ratio

14.0
N.O.

15.9
National

\$11,355
per pupil expenditure.



N.O. schools serve more students of color and those from low SES* homes.



Minority students

84%

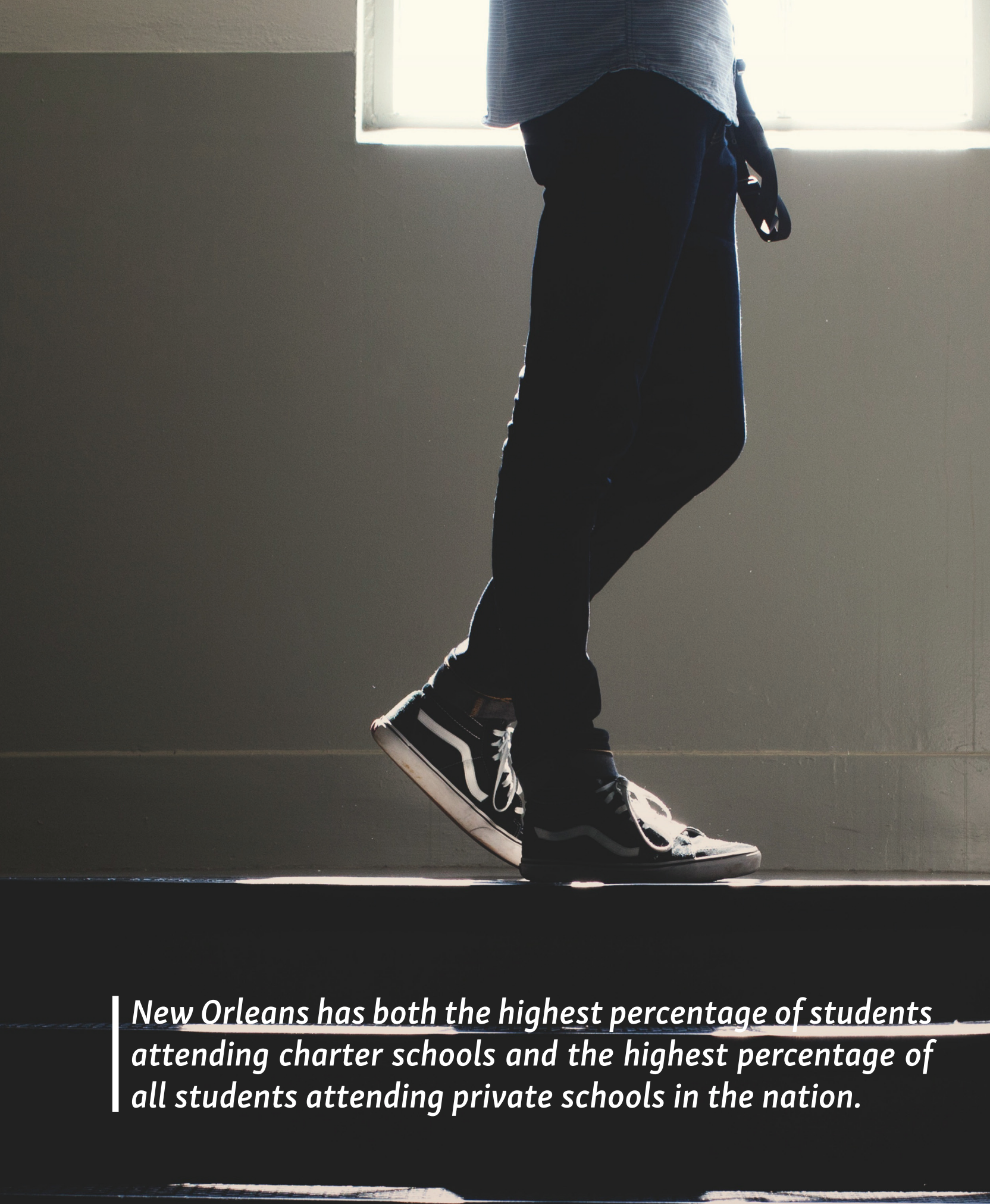


Minority students

51%

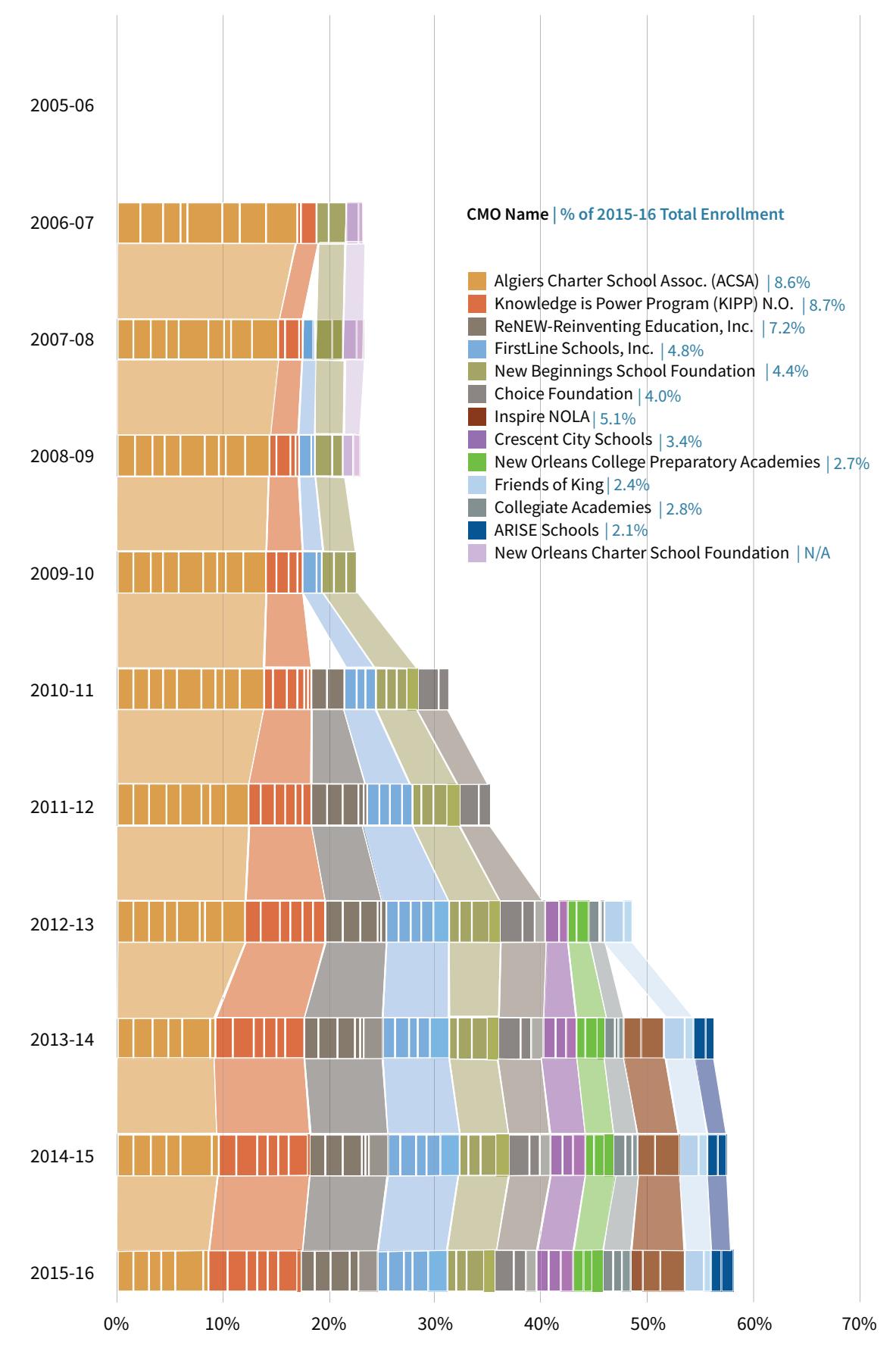
Economically disadvantaged students

* SES stands for socioeconomic status



New Orleans has both the highest percentage of students attending charter schools and the highest percentage of all students attending private schools in the nation.

CMO Growth Over Time



Students

Who are the students?

Public School Students in New Orleans

New Orleans' public school enrollment has increased since the year following Hurricane Katrina. This last year, as in previous years, the vast majority of students attending public schools in New Orleans are Black. Black students are over-represented in the public education system: 66 percent of the population in Orleans Parish is Black, while 83 percent of the public school population is. That said, in recent years, the largest growth rates in public school enrollment were among White and Hispanic students, suggesting that public school demographics in the city are shifting.¹³

Poverty remains widespread among public school students in the city. A vast majority, 88 percent, of public school students are from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. This is nearly double the national average of 48 percent and more than 20 percent higher than the state average.¹⁴

In figures that mirror national trends, schools with higher levels of socio-economically disadvantaged students also have higher concentrations of minority students and lower overall performance scores. Conversely, schools with lower enrollment numbers of economically disadvantaged students, concentrated in the OPSB and BESE, have lower percentages of minority students. Also mirroring national trends, schools with lower concentrations of economically disadvantaged students, which typically are OPSB and BESE schools with selective admissions procedures, more frequently have higher academic performance scores.¹⁵

Special Education Students

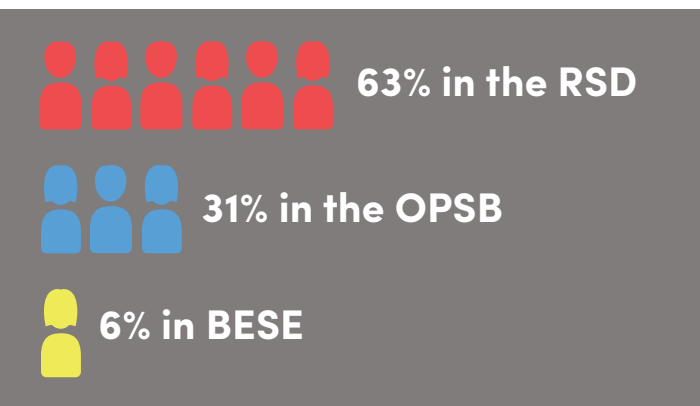
Schools across New Orleans continue to grapple with issues related to providing services to students with exceptionalities, and finding adequate funding to meet student needs. While New Orleans has a similar rate of students who qualify for special education services as public schools across Louisiana, the city lacks a coordinated body to oversee timelines, records, and services that other school districts use.

Nearly 11 percent of students in New Orleans qualified for special education services in 2015-16, a figure that mirrors the 11 percent that received services in 2014-15.¹⁶ While all public schools must provide services aligned to the needs

of their students, some New Orleans schools have selective admission examinations that limit enrollment access to students with certain learning disabilities. All RSD schools are prohibited from establishing academic requirements for enrollment, which has contributed to RSD schools serving nearly twice the per capita special education population (13.5 percent) as OPSB (7.2 percent) and BESE (6.7 percent) schools.¹⁷

Schools are required to provide special education students with a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) in accordance with the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Doing so often requires additional equipment, space, and staff. To fund these additional services, the RSD and the OPSB adopted a differentiated funding formula in 2016. This new funding formula is designed to ensure all OPSB and RSD schools receive the same level of funding for special education students.¹⁸

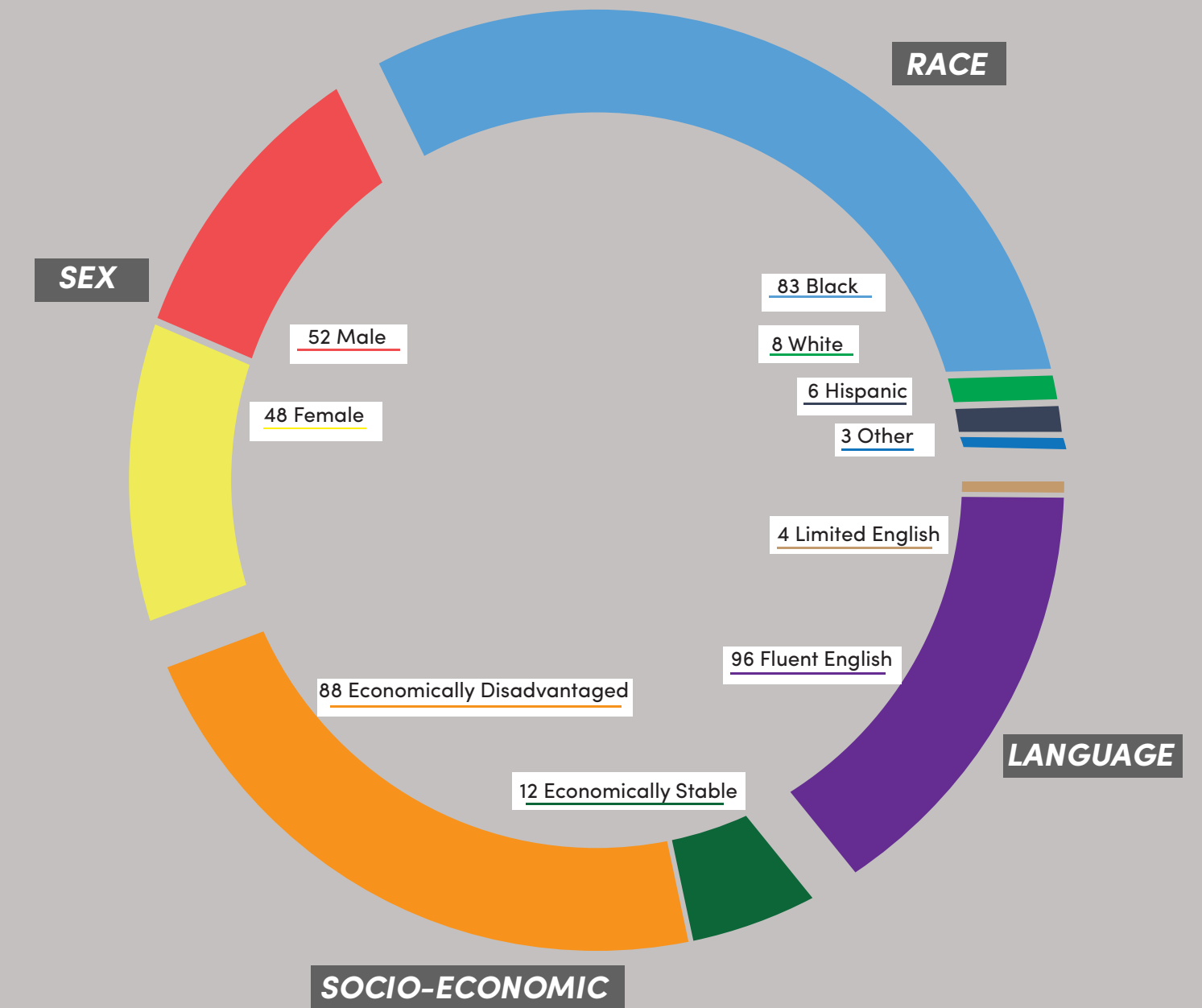
What type of public schools do students attend?



Private School Students

Private school enrollment in New Orleans remains relatively high compared to the national average (25 percent compared to ten percent of K-12 enrollment, respectively).¹⁹ Private school enrollment data in New Orleans demonstrates a different socio-demographic profile of students in the city, with a noticeably smaller concentration of minority and socioeconomically disadvantaged students.

What if there were 100 Public School Students in New Orleans?



Talent

Who educates students?

Teachers in New Orleans

Staffing decisions are one of the clearest ways in which New Orleans charter schools exercise more autonomy than schools in traditional districts across the United States. Aside from the handful of schools run directly by the OPSB, employment decisions in New Orleans are made at the school rather than district level.²⁰ This means that at charter schools, choices around hiring, firing, professional development, and salaries are made by the leaders of individual schools or CMOs, rather than by the OPSB or RSD. Traditional districts have a centralized human resources department to make uniform decisions across all schools regarding hiring, training, salary, and benefits. In New Orleans, individual schools or CMOs are also responsible for their own recruitment and benefit packages, and compete with all other schools and CMOs for the same talent pool. This allows for wide variation among schools and CMOs in terms of compensation for teachers, school leaders, and administrators.

The lack of unionization among New Orleans teachers is also unique when compared to schools nationally - though it is relatively common across Louisiana. The collective bargaining agreement between United Teachers of New Orleans (UTNO) and OPSB collapsed in 2006.²¹ During this past year, some schools' staff voted on whether to unionize, but overwhelmingly, teachers are not part of unions at RSD or OPSB charter schools.²²

Teacher Demographics

Over the past decade, the demographics of teachers in New Orleans schools have changed dramatically. Black teachers no longer constitute a majority of the teacher corps, falling from 71 percent in 2003-2004 to 49 percent in 2013-2014 and only 37 percent of new hires were Black in 2013-2014, which is far lower than prior to Hurricane Katrina. Additionally, far fewer New Orleans teachers are graduates of local colleges: 60 percent graduated from a local university in 2003-2004 compared to 34 percent in 2013-2014.²³ A majority of teachers in the city now have fewer than five years of teaching experience, compared to a third a decade ago. And over the same period, teachers with 20 or more years of experience fell from nearly 40 percent to under ten percent. This is significant, because according to most

academic research, teachers improve most significantly between their fifth and tenth years in the classroom.²⁴

Changes in certification requirements, including the growth of alternative certification programs like Teach For America and TeachNOLA, account for some of the difference in teacher demographics, as both programs resulted in teachers who were more likely to be younger and white entering city classrooms. However, it should be noted that both programs have ongoing recruitment efforts to bolster the diversity of their teaching corps. The percentage of teachers with bachelor's and master's degrees has remained relatively stable over the past decade.²⁵

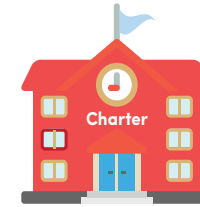
In 2014-2015, OPSB teachers had nearly twice the amount of classroom experience as teachers in RSD charters: 12 years to 6.6 years, respectively. Both were less than the state average of 12.5 years. Teacher student ratios were relatively similar at all schools in the city, regardless of their authorizer.²⁶

In New Orleans, the overall student-teacher ratios is 14:1. The OPSB and RSD have similar student ratios, at 13.9:1, and 14.3:1, respectively. Nationally, the student-teacher ratio is 15.9:1 students.²⁷

Teacher Training and Talent Pipeline

Building out the teacher corps and talent pipeline in New Orleans is becoming an increasing priority for the OPSB, schools, and education-focused organizations across the city. One of the goals of the unification plan is for the OPSB to develop a strong pipeline of new school candidates to meet the needs of New Orleans' students. The OPSB is still deciding on the details of how this talent pipeline will function, but the goal of this effort is to have a backbench of high-quality school operators who are ready to open schools in New Orleans when growth in enrollment necessitates launching additional schools.²⁸ Additionally, New Schools for New Orleans (NSNO), a non-profit that directly invests in improving schools, as well as Xavier University are helping to lead an effort to bolster teaching training programs at local universities to increase the number of local graduates who are ready to teach in city schools.

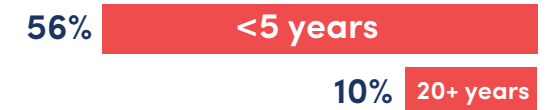
Spotlight on New Orleans' Teachers



They're hired at the school level.

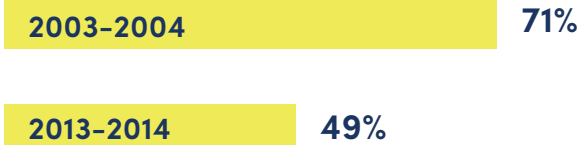
In New Orleans, most staffing decisions are made at the school level rather than the district level.

The majority of teachers are early-career.



There are fewer black teachers than before the storm.

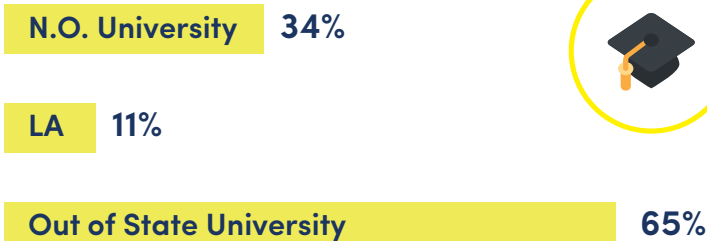
In 2003-2004, 71% of New Orleans teachers were black. Now, less than half of the city's teachers are black.



OPSB teachers have more experience than RSD teachers.

On average, OPSB teachers have twice the classroom experience but it is still lower than the state average of 12.5 years.

Most teachers didn't attend local universities.



Achievement

How have students performed?

School Performance

Students in grades 3-8 participate annually in standardized assessments every spring. Though these scores no longer affect student promotion decisions in grades 4 and 8, as they did in the past, they remain the most accessible indicator of progress for stakeholders interested in public education.

Assessment scores in grades 3-8 are measured by performance levels. Basic and above formerly represented a level of content proficiency which all students were expected to achieve. While students in the RSD schools have outpaced the growth of both the state average and OPSB schools in this measure since Katrina, LDOE officials announced the transition to a higher bar in November 2013. In the Spring of 2016, 49 percent of 8th grade students met this bar in ELA, but only 30 percent in Math. Taken collectively, the scores of New Orleans' schools roughly mirrored those of the state. However, students in RSD schools scored comparatively lower at 37 percent and 26 percent respectively.²⁹

This new expectation for student success is part of a broader plan to ensure that all A-rated schools in the state better prepare students for success after high school, and allow for improved comparisons to other states with similarly high bars.

High School Performance

Students in high school participate in both statewide End-of-Course (EOC) testing and national ACT testing. In 2008-09, 43 percent of students in Louisiana were proficient across all EOC subject areas. By May 2016, that figure had increased to 62 percent. OPSB schools improved by 20 percent, and RSD schools in New Orleans increased 33 percent, even after a three percent decline from 2015.³⁰

ACT Scores have shown less improvement, and average scores for both Louisiana and New Orleans have declined since 2006-07. The 2012-13 school year marked the implementation of a new policy requiring all high school students to take the assessment. Since the change, the average New Orleans score has increased from 18.1 to 18.7, while the state average remains at 19.5.³¹

Enrollment Changes

Prior to Hurricane Katrina, enrollment was centralized through the OPSB, and students were required to attend a school within their residential district. The OPSB also offered 23 schools under the City Wide Access Schools (CWAS) program designed to attract students with specialized needs, interests, or talents.³²

Following the wake of Hurricane Katrina in August 2005, 102 of the 126 public schools in New Orleans became charter schools. Rather than enrollment being restricted to residential districts, parents and students were given choices across the city – though some schools outside of the RSD maintained selective admissions criteria. This created a fractured system of application requirements and deadlines that became frustrating for parents, students, school leaders, and district administrators.³³

From 2006 to 2012, schools maintained individual and CMO-based applications. In spring 2012, there were at least 17 different application deadlines and processes, and since desired seats often outweighed available seats, parents were forced to submit multiple applications on different timelines. Parents could secure multiple slots under this process, and school leaders would not know their actual enrollment numbers until the first week of school. The lack of a centralized enrollment system also resulted in a lack of transparency, which led to accusations of cherry-picking, prioritizing students without exceptional behavioral and academic needs.

To address this situation, the RSD began planning a coordinated enrollment system alongside community stakeholders in 2011.³⁴ The result was OneApp, a single application for all participating schools that allows parents to rank preferences,

and requires that all school admission requirements and preferences are transparently displayed. The first OPSB network schools joined in 2013-14, and 89 percent of all public schools in New Orleans participated in OneApp for the 2015-16 school year.³⁵ OneApp also coordinates both enrollment in early childhood Head Start centers and non-public schools through the Louisiana Scholarship program. All non-participating charter schools in New Orleans will be required to participate in OneApp following their next charter renewal, which will occur no later than 2021. According to the OPSB, as of July 2017, only three selective admissions schools will not participate in EnrollNOLA.³⁶

Nonpublic Schools

The Louisiana Scholarship Program, founded in 2008 and expanded statewide in 2012, allows low-income students in low-performing public schools to attend state-approved private institutions. Schools participating in the program must be approved by BESE and employ an open admissions process to enroll eligible students. Participating schools must also ensure that scholarship students participate in all statewide assessments, and while scholarship schools are not required to provide special education services, they do face increased accountability in the form of an annual independent financial audit. For the 2015-16 school year, more than 12,000 students applied, with 7,200 students accepting and enrolling at one of 121 nonpublic schools.³⁷

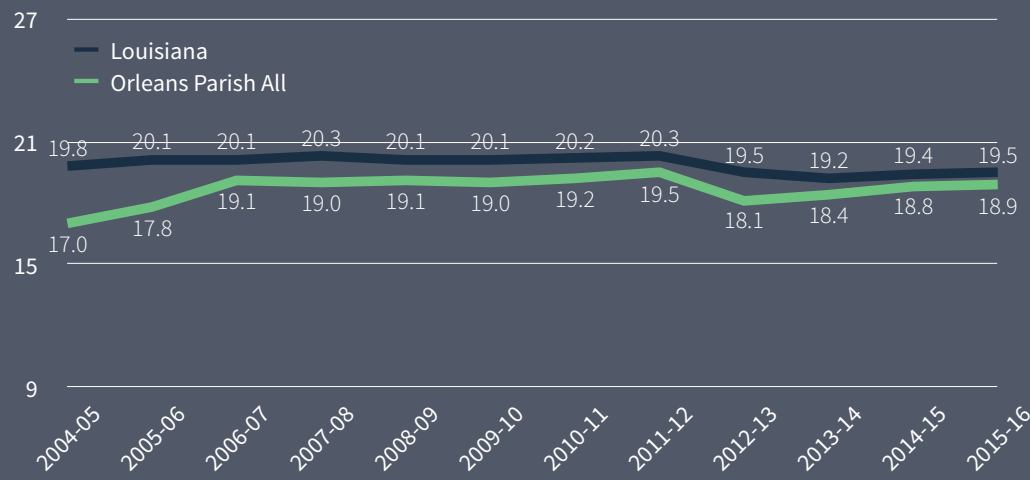


“The unification of schools is an extremely important milestone in our continued redefining of what local control and public education mean in New Orleans. We must continue to improve and pursue our North Star of excellent schools for all children and advance a system that will ensure that equity and quality, for all, are nonnegotiable standards.”

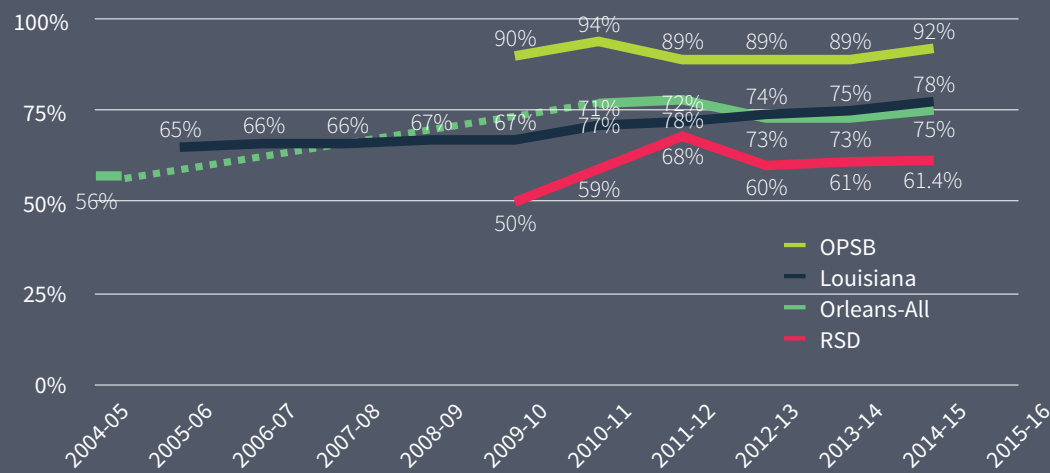
Patrick Dobard
Superintendent, Recovery School District

Student Performance 2004-2016

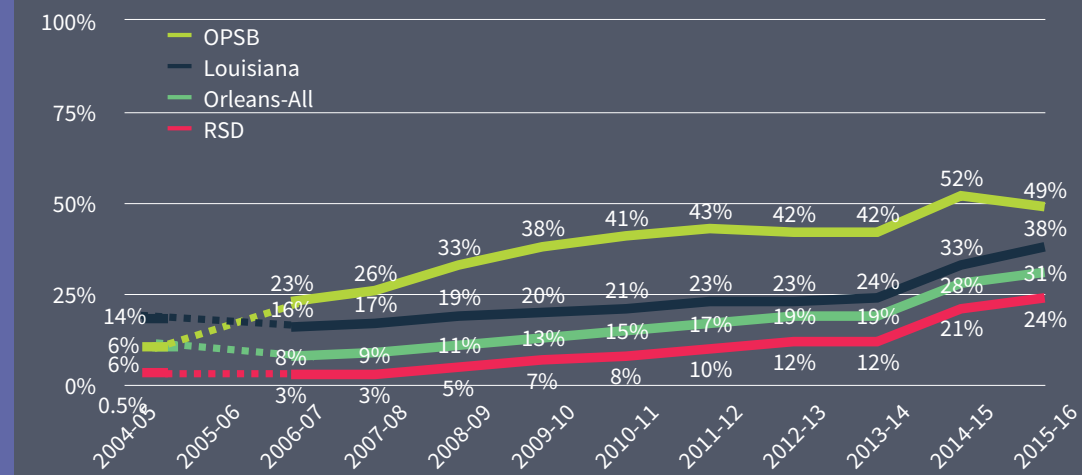
ACT



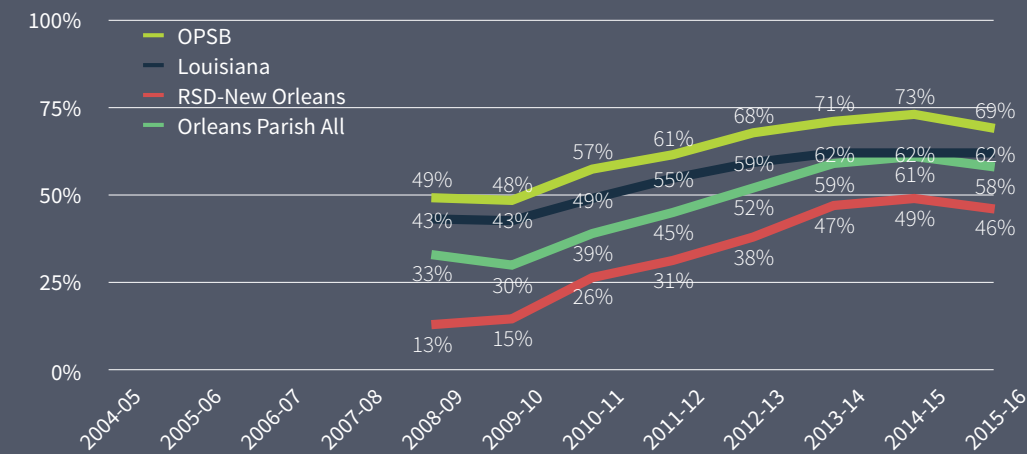
Graduation Rates



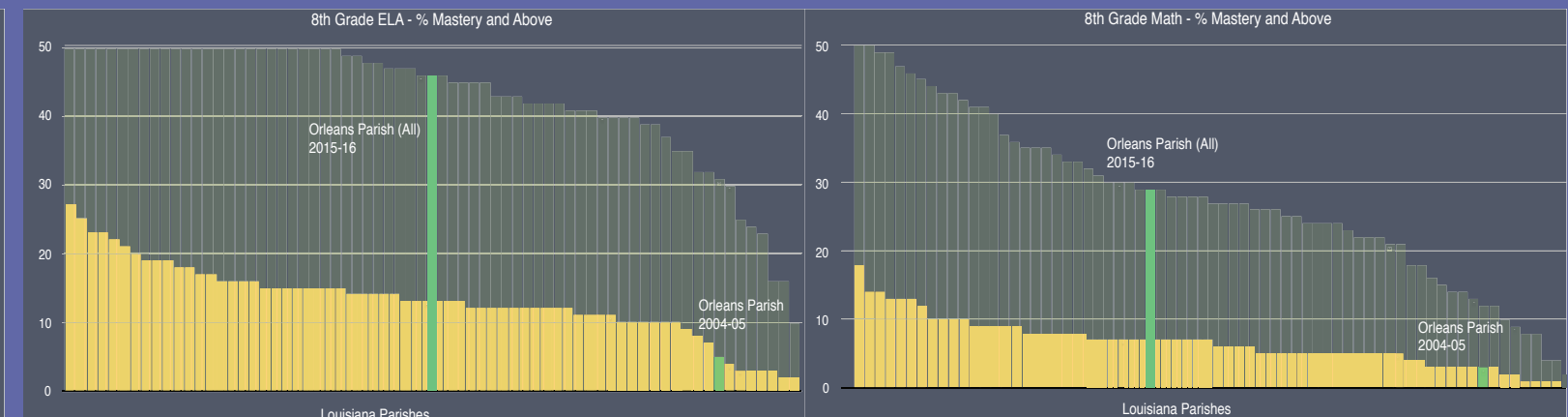
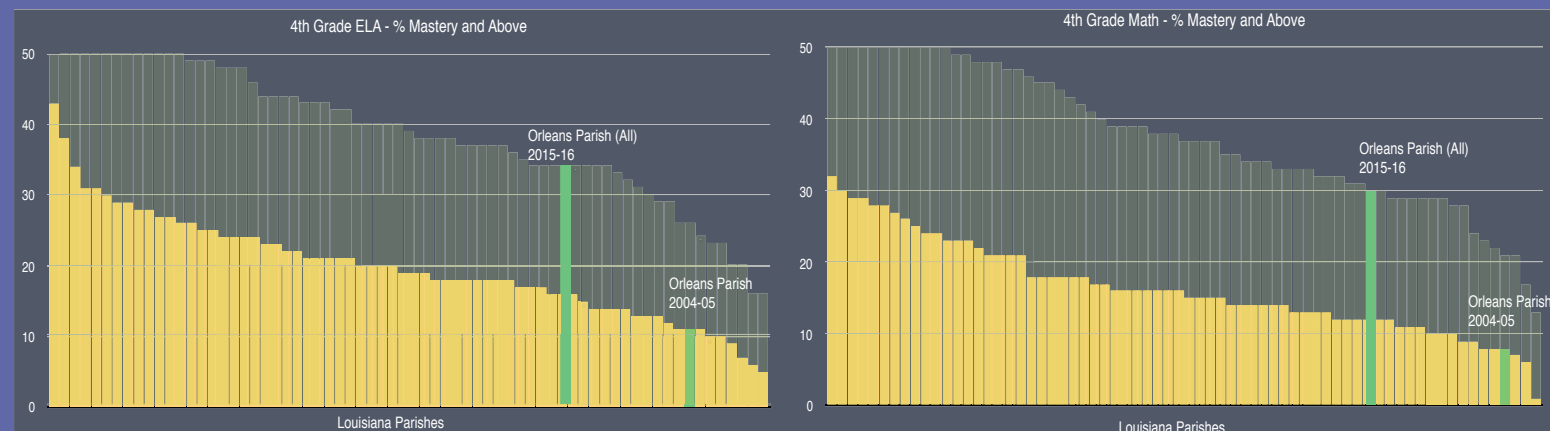
Mastery & Above



End of Course Exams



Mastery & Above by Grade Level vs All Louisiana Parishes - ELA (Language Skills) and Math



Finances

How is public education paid for?

Finances Overview

K-12 public education funding is a complicated mix of federal, state, and local resources. In Louisiana, local tax dollars (47 percent) make up the largest share of school funding, followed by state tax dollars (38 percent), and federal grants (15 percent).³⁸ Federal grants are usually administered to the state, which then distributes the funds locally to districts and schools. The LDOE distributes state and local tax dollars through the Minimum Foundation Program (MFP), with districts and schools receiving funding on a per-pupil basis. Charter schools are also able to raise additional philanthropic dollars through donations and grants. In 2014-15, Louisiana spent an average of \$11,163 per student, which is only slightly lower than the national average of \$11,355. Per pupil expenditures in New Orleans, however, were slightly higher, with averages of \$13,939 and \$12,231, per pupil at OPSB and RSD schools respectively. Some of the factors that account for New Orleans' higher per pupil spending include higher local tax revenue and a higher rate of economically disadvantaged students.³⁹

Differentiated Funding

Differentiated funding was an important and controversial topic in New Orleans education in 2016. During the year, following legislation that passed in 2015, all OPSB and RSD schools adopted the same differentiated funding formula. Differentiated funding is a way to fund education in which schools receive per student funding proportionate to the time, resources, and type of instruction required to educate the student. In practical terms, this means that schools receive greater amounts for students who require more individualized support. Two selective admissions schools objected to the new differentiated funding formula and filed suit over it, but eventually dropped their challenge. Going forward, all OPSB and RSD schools will use the same differentiated funding formula.

Teacher Salaries

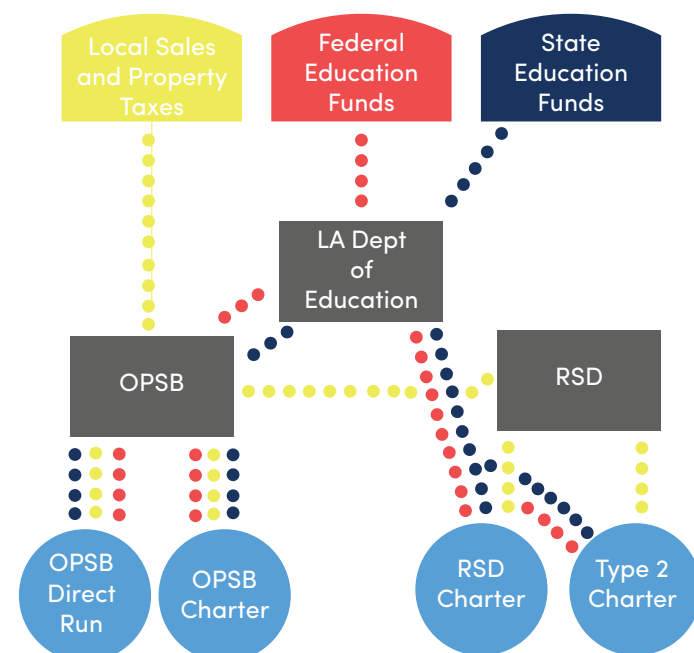
Teacher salaries in New Orleans are slightly lower than the state average, but are higher than they were prior to Hurricane Katrina when adjusted for experience and inflation. On average, OPSB teachers receive \$48,642 and RSD teachers \$48,453, while statewide, salaries average \$49,289. Partially, this is due to teachers in New Orleans having less

average experience than teachers in Louisiana as a whole, as compensation generally increases with experience. City and state teacher salaries lag compared to the national average of \$56,610.⁴⁰

Transportation Costs

Open enrollment at most schools in New Orleans has the benefit of allowing students to attend schools anywhere in the city, regardless of where they live. In order to ensure a family's transportation needs are not a barrier to school choice parish-wide, most schools must provide transportation to students, either directly, by providing buses that transport student to and from school, or indirectly, through compensating students to take public transportation. However, one drawback to the policy is that it does contribute to higher transportation costs for schools. This has the most profound impact on RSD charter schools, which spent 51 percent more than the state per pupil average on transportation for students. Comparatively, OPSB schools spent 20 percent less on transportation than the state average.

Follow the Money: An Education Funding Map



How Does Differentiated Funding Affect Per Pupil Funding?

A bill passed by the legislature in 2015, Act 467, required the Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) to adopt a funding formula by July 1, 2016 to ensure equitable funding for all schools. Act 467 required that a single formula be created through a "collaborative process" led by the LDOE to fund OPSB and RSD schools in the same way. The law required that the process include representatives from the RSD, the Louisiana Association of Public Charter Schools, the OPSB, any organization representing OPSB's charter schools, and advocates for students with disabilities. A 12-member working group was convened and met multiple times in 2016 to create a formula. The working group approved the new funding formula by a vote of 10-1-1.

The working group created a formula that provides weights to calculate how much each school should receive for each student. The weights are aligned to the costs of educating students based on their needs. For a typical student, schools receive around \$7,500. The new model, detailed in the chart above, has five different weighted tiers for special education students, with schools receiving additional funding above this baseline for educating students with greater needs.

| Student Funding Category | Student Weights |
|---|-----------------|
| Elementary School (8th grade and below) Typical Student | 1.000 |
| High School (9th grade and above) Typical Student | 1.050 |
| Special Education Tier 1 | 0.200 |
| Special Education Tier 2 | 1.175 |
| Special Education Tier 3 | 1.875 |
| Special Education Tier 4 | 2.175 |
| Special Education Tier 5 | 3.000 |
| Gifted or Talented | 0.050 |
| English Language Learner | 0.300 |
| Over-Age | 0.225 |

Schools will also receive additional funds for gifted or talented students, English Language Learners, and over-age students.

The total amount of funding received by New Orleans schools was not changed by the new formula. The OPSB Superintendent also put forward a two percent revenue reduction cap for any schools adversely affected by the proposed funding formula. That cap guarantees that no school will have its total funding reduced by more than two percent from one school year to the next. This is designed to limit the losses any individual school will incur from the new formula. The funding formula will apply to schools starting next year.

Funding By Student

| Student Funding Category | Former OPSB Formula | Former RSD Formula | New Formula |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------|--------------------|-------------|
| Elementary School Typical Student | \$7,953 | \$7,419 | \$7,495 |
| High School Typical Student | \$7,953 | \$7,419 | \$7,870 |
| Special Education - All Tiers | \$3,236 | n/a | n/a |
| Special Education Tier 1 | \$0 | \$1,484 | \$1,499 |
| Special Education Tier 2 | \$0 | \$8,717 | \$8,807 |
| Special Education Tier 3 | \$0 | \$13,911 | \$14,053 |
| Special Education Tier 4 | \$0 | \$16,136 | \$16,302 |
| Special Education Tier 5 | \$0 | \$22,257 | \$22,485 |
| At-risk | \$475 | \$0 | \$0 |
| Career/technical education | \$129 | \$0 | \$0 |
| Gifted or Talented | \$1,295 | \$0 | \$375 |
| English Language Learner | \$0 | \$1,484 | \$2,249 |
| Over-Age | \$0 | \$927 | \$1,686 |

Academic Initiatives

What is taught in schools?

Academic Autonomy

The public charter school system in New Orleans has encouraged and allowed for a relatively unprecedented amount of academic autonomy at the school level. All schools are required to teach core curriculum classes laid out by the state, but remain free to create additional curriculum and programming for their students. As a result, a number of unique academic programs have emerged, focused on in-depth exploration of specific subjects. Several schools in the city offer immersive language programs. High schools provide a range of programming from the creative arts, to STEM, to military and maritime training. While all schools must meet state-mandated accountability and performance standards, schools are allowed to create their own extracurricular programs to serve their students.

Common Core

A movement of anti-Common Core sentiment in Louisiana over the past several years garnered a significant amount of public, media, and legislative attention, leading BESE to review and revise Common Core standards for the state. BESE convened a steering committee and three content sub-committees to review the academic content. Committees were comprised of more than 100 educators from around the state, along with representatives from parental and education organizations.⁴¹ The proposed changes were approved by legislators in June 2016. Overall, the changes to

the curriculum were minor and impacted 21 percent of the English and Math standards used in public schools.⁴² The resulting curriculum was one argued to be more ‘Louisiana-specific,’ while aiming to retain a high standard of education for public school students. While the issue received a high degree of public attention, the changes resulting from the legislative changes have had a relatively minor impact on public school students’ educational curriculum.

College Readiness

For the past ten years, most public schools in New Orleans have placed an emphasis on college readiness. That is, schools were focused on preparing all students for graduation and college entrance, rather than immediate entry into the workforce post-graduation. High schools offered three diplomas: TOPS University, Basic, and Career Diplomas. Both the TOPS University and the Basic diplomas were considered college preparatory curriculums. Only two percent of students pursued the career diploma.⁴³

Following this model, over the last decade, there was a notable increase in the percentage of public school students who graduated and entered college. In 2014, 73 percent of public school students graduated from high school, compared with 53 percent in 2004. Similarly, 59 percent of high school graduates entered a two- or four-year college in 2014, compared with 39 percent in 2004.⁴⁴

The improvement in these figures reflects the commitment of many schools and educators to ensuring students can graduate and enroll in college. However, ascertaining how students are performing once enrolled is difficult: data addressing the persistence rates of students after they enroll in college is largely unavailable. The need for high-quality, detailed data on college persistence is crucial to accurately assessing schools in the future.

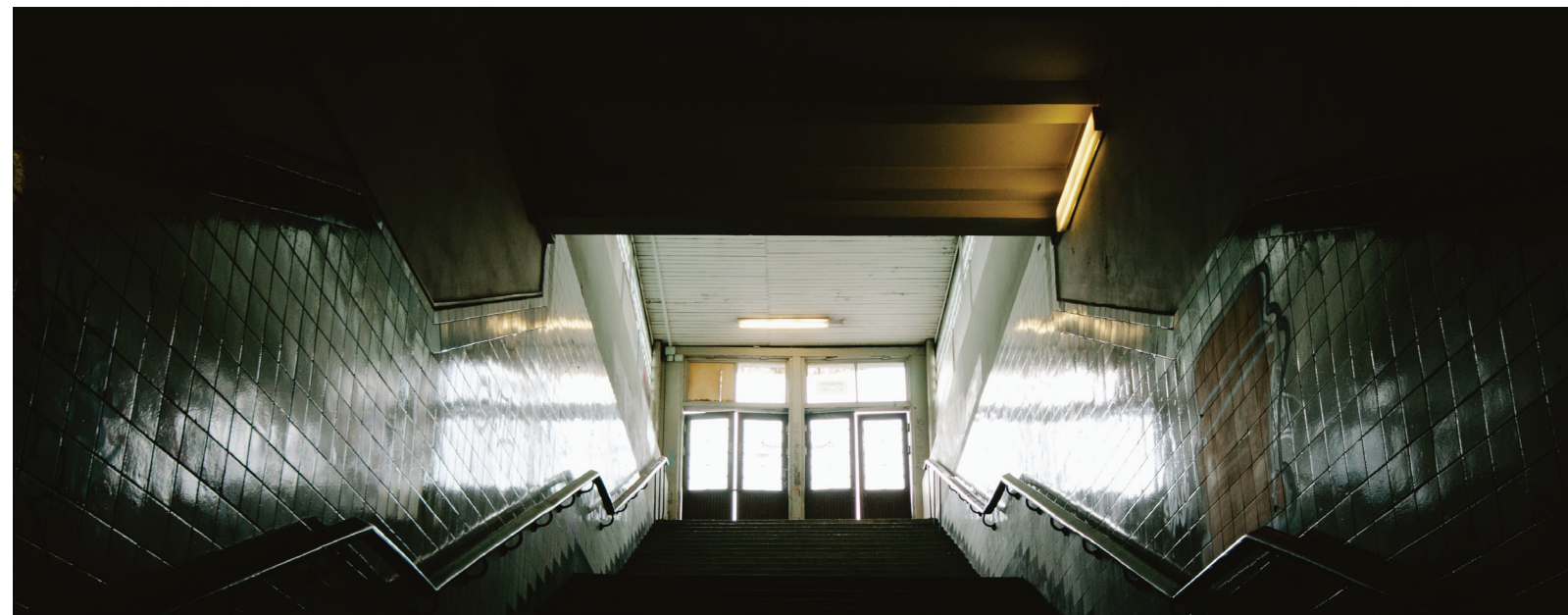
Career and Technical Education (Jump Start)

While high schools in New Orleans have focused on college readiness, the LDOE designed a new career and technical education program for high school students in Louisiana called Jump Start. It aims to provide students with an opportunity to attain industry-driven, career credentials upon graduating high school. It replaces, and is a more demanding version of the career diploma, which was virtually unused by high school students in recent years. Jump Start was officially launched by the LDOE in February 2014 and will be fully implemented by the 2017-18 school year. With the implementation of Jump Start, schools in Louisiana will now offer only two high school diplomas: the TOPS University Diploma and the Jump Start Career Diploma.

The Jump Start program aligns the LDOE’s K-12 Career and Technical Education (CTE) strategy with the state’s economic development strategies. It focuses on training students in key areas where there is a demonstrated need

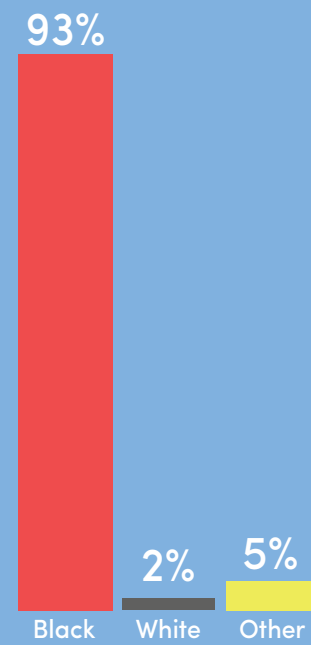
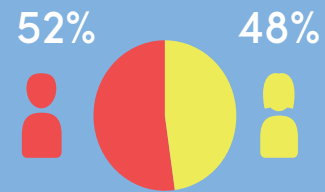
for qualified workers. Each career pathway has its own road map demonstrating how students can fulfill the requirements necessary to graduate with a Jump Start Career Diploma in a particular field. Students working towards a Jump Start Career Diploma are offered many of the same core classes as those pursuing a TOPS University Diploma. However, Career Diploma students will also complete many industry-specific professional courses, while TOPS University students complete additional academic coursework. The Jump Start Career Diploma will prepare students to attend two-year community colleges in Louisiana. However, the Jump Start Career Diploma does not meet the requirements of most four-year universities. Students are eligible to transfer to a four-year university after completing two years of community college credits.

There were 13 career pathways available to New Orleans students in 2016-17, with most schools offering an average of two pathways. The most frequently offered pathways were Digital Media, STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math), and Manufacturing, Construction, Crafts, and Logic. Currently, the OPSB, RSD, Delgado Community College, Nunez Community College, GNO Inc and Youth Force NOLA are among the New Orleans team members steering the Jump Start program implementation. The program is still being developed and it is likely that the number of available pathways will continue to expand over the next few years.⁴⁵



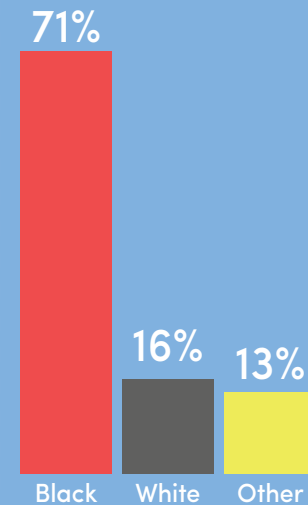
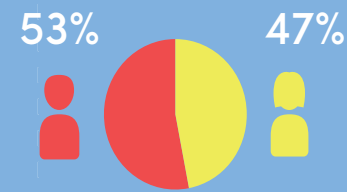
PUBLIC SCHOOL STUDENTS

R S D



Economically Disadvantaged

O P S B



Economically Disadvantaged

The Future

Where do we go from here?

The Future of Schools

As the city's public education system works to improve under the OPSB's oversight in the coming years, innovative school designs and initiatives could be a key component to a successful transition. This is just one of many key areas to follow in the years ahead to assess the progress of public education in the city. Here are some of the topics the Cowen Institute will be monitoring:

- **Greater diversity in academics:** A wider range of academic approaches would give students and families more possibilities when selecting a school. Harnessing the education talent in the city to create more innovative options and more choices for parents and students will only strengthen the public education system.
- **College persistence:** Graduation and college matriculation rates have increased over the past decade. However, college matriculation does not guarantee that students will graduate with a higher education degree. Efforts like College Beyond, KIPP Through College, CA Next, and the Cowen Institute's College Persistence collaborative are already trying to address this issue.
- **Career readiness:** Ensuring that all students leave high school with a post-graduation success plan is vital to the future viability of public education in New Orleans, as well as the local economy. The state's Jump Start initiative is changing the way career and technical education takes place in high schools across the city. But additional efforts to align education with the available opportunities in the local workforce and economy are key. Programs like YouthForce NOLA have also arisen to help students gain skills that make them more workforce ready.
- **Equitable opportunities for all students:** Services for special needs students have improved in the past five years at city schools. However, continued growth is still needed to allow all students to have high quality public education opportunities. Additionally, schools need more resources to support students from the most

vulnerable populations, including mental health, special education, wrap-around supports, early warning indicators for opportunity youth, and drop-out prevention measures.

- **Rethinking accountability:** As mentioned previously, the new accountability models under consideration by both the OPSB and BESE will likely place more weight on student progress than absolute student achievement. Expanding accountability models to also include greater emphasis for how schools interact with families, meet the needs of special population students, and track data could give the public a better sense of how well schools are performing.
- **Stronger emphasis on early childhood learning:** The importance of early childhood learning has garnered increasing attention in recent years. New Orleans, and Louisiana as a whole, however, still lack a sufficient number of high quality early childhood seats. There is no local dedicated funding stream for early childhood at this time. Going forward, efforts to create such a dedicated funding stream to support early childhood learning would help to improve the entire educational pipeline in the city for students and families.
- **Talent pipeline, development, and retention:** Retaining and finding the best talent to teach students is becoming an increasing challenge for public schools. Efforts to bolster the talent pipeline, like those by NSNO and Xavier University, are seeking to address this challenge.
- **High quality schools in every neighborhood:** Though schools have improved in the past decade, the quality of schools in specific areas of the city varies greatly. The stated goal of many education leaders, including members of the OPSB and the RSD, is to have continued across-the-board improvement in school quality so that students can attend a high-performing school in their neighborhood, rather than travel to find the school right for them.

TOPS

The high school graduation and college enrollment rates of New Orleans' students are far higher now than prior to Hurricane Katrina. However, being accepted into and enrolling in college is not enough to ensure career success for many youth. In the years ahead, college persistence will only become more important for New Orleans' students and educators. To address this critical challenge, the Cowen Institute, in partnership with College Beyond, is leading a citywide College and Career Counseling Collaborative, College Counseling Training program, and College Persistence Collaborative to build high school counselors' capacity to increase college access and persistence for their students.

Additionally, one of the main challenges facing New Orleans' students as they embark upon their postsecondary pathways is the financial burden of college. Unfortunately, due to a state budget crisis, the future of the Taylor Opportunity Program for Students (TOPS), one of the main financial supports for students in New Orleans and all of Louisiana, is uncertain. That uncertainty has left many students across the city facing serious challenges of both in selecting a college, and figuring out how to pay for it.

TOPS is a merit-based scholarship program for Louisiana residents who attend in-state, postsecondary education institutions. Created in 1998, the program became available to all Louisiana high school students in 2001. The original intent of the program was to encourage the state's highest performing students to stay in-state for college by covering the full cost of their tuition, while prioritizing scholarship funding to students who could not otherwise afford the cost of college. Louisiana high school students can qualify for four main TOPS scholarships and each of these awards have different eligibility and academic requirements.⁴⁶

However, the cost of TOPS has skyrocketed in recent years.⁴⁷ This increase was due to a variety of factors, including higher tuition at state universities sparked by state higher education budget cuts, and a rise in the number of students receiving

awards. The majority of the program's costs come directly out of state general funds, which has made TOPS a prime target for cuts during Louisiana's ongoing budget crisis.

For the first time in the program's history, during the 2016 legislative session, legislators voted to reduce TOPS funding. Students received around 70 percent of their entire award amounts, leaving many students, families, educators, and institutions scrambling to find ways to cover the gap. Legislators also voted to decouple individual awards from tuition, meaning that if a state institution raises its tuition, students will no longer see their TOPS award rise commensurately.⁴⁸

Quite obviously, these changes and cuts to the program disproportionately affect low-income students. Heading into the 2017 legislative session, it remains unclear whether legislators will restore full-funding or ensure the future viability of TOPS.

Recognizing that college access is a gateway to upward social mobility and career success, the Cowen Institute is working with a diverse, statewide coalition of organizations, educators, schools, and civic leaders in the Louisiana College Access Coalition (LCAC). The goal of the LCAC is to ensure Louisiana students continue to have financial supports that enable them to achieve their college aspirations. The LCAC has already begun advocacy with legislators to restore full funding to TOPS, and if that is not possible, to then have awards prioritized to low-income students who could not otherwise afford college. The number of students receiving TOPS awards from families who could otherwise afford college has increased dramatically in recent years: in 2015, 40 percent of all TOPS recipients came from families making \$100,000 or more. The LCAC will continue its work through the legislative session and in subsequent years. College affordability is a long-term issue that the state will have to confront to ensure that worthy students have the ability to attain the education they need to succeed.

ESSA

In December 2015, President Obama signed into law the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). This bill was a reauthorization of the nation's existing education legislation, No Child Left Behind. However, ESSA also changes much about the previous legislation and will have a significant impact on how schools in Louisiana specifically, and the country as a whole, are assessed and incentivized to serve students.

The LDOE and BESE are currently engaged in an ongoing planning process on how ESSA will be implemented in the state. As part of that process, BESE and the LDOE held meetings on ESSA at the end of 2016, and additional meetings will occur in the beginning of 2017 in order for policymakers to solicit public feedback. The LDOE is committed to having a finalized plan ready to submit to the U.S. Department of Education for approval by summer 2017.

That plan will likely have a significant impact on school accountability measures statewide. The most notable change is that student progress will be given more importance in how schools are assessed. That means that schools will

receive higher scores for helping advance students who are behind grade level, regardless of the students' overall score on state accountability measures. The plan, as currently composed, will also include rigorous long-term indicators to judge whether schools and students are improving, including graduation rates and ACT scores, and raising that bar so that quality schools ensure students are at a mastery, rather than basic level of performance. The plan also places greater emphasis on serving the special needs population and preparing students for post-high school success.

Taken together, through ESSA, school assessment and accountability in Louisiana will likely become more holistic. Less emphasis will be placed strictly on mastery of test scores, and more on how students are progressing on tests over time. There is also a focus on equity, to ensure that all students, regardless of their individual needs, are being provided opportunities for a quality education. The adaptation of New Orleans schools to the new standards will be pivotal in the coming years.

Appendix

Citations & glossary

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Glossary of Terms

Authorizer – An authorizer is in charge of deciding when to open new schools, which charter management applications to approve, when to close schools, and whether to intervene when schools are not performing up to standards. To make these decisions, the authorizer relies upon a list of rules and policies laid out in the school performance framework.

Autonomy – Autonomy in the context of public education generally refers to decisions that are made at the school level, rather than by a district board. In Orleans Parish, most charter schools are autonomous with regards to curriculum, hiring, and finances. As schools unify, RSD charter schools will retain this autonomy, though the OPSB will become their authorizer.

Charter School – A charter school is a publicly funded school granted greater flexibility in its operation than a school run by a traditional school district. The charter is a contract outlining the school’s mission, program, accountability standards, and students served with the body authorizing the charter’s ability to operate.

Charter Management Organization (CMO) – Non-profit entities that manage two or more charter schools.

Differentiated Funding – Differentiated funding provides schools with different amounts of funding based on the needs of their students, rather than basing funding on total enrollment. For example, schools with more English Language Learners or more students with disabilities would receive additional funding to provide resources for these students. This is also often referred to as student-based funding.

Facilities – The term used to refer to school buildings and property. All facilities in New Orleans are owned by the OPSB.

Funding – Broadly, the money schools receive to pay for programing, staff, facilities, and other costs associated with operations.

Local Education Agency (LEA) – An LEA is an entity that operates public schools. Usually, this is synonymous with a school district. In New Orleans, however, many charter schools operated as their own LEAs. Under unification, schools will decide whether to remain their own LEA or to join the OPSB’s LEA. LEA status is especially important for how schools are held accountable in meeting federal special education standards.

Neighborhood school – A colloquial expression used to describe schools students are assigned to attend because they live in the school’s geographic area or attendance zone.

Open enrollment – In New Orleans, open enrollment means that any student is eligible to attend any school, regardless of its location or where the student lives, without having to meet any special requirements.

School Board – In Orleans Parish, the school board is a group of seven publicly elected officials who are responsible for maintaining and making decisions regarding public schools. They are meant to be accessible by, and responsible to, the general public. The OPSB is also an administrative entity responsible to the board that oversees many schools in the parish.

School District – A geographically defined, legal district which is responsible for public education in a given area. It is generally run by a school board.

Superintendent – A school superintendent is the head administrator or manager of public schools in a school district.



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