

**A FRESH START FOR NEW ORLEANS' CHILDREN:
IMPROVING EDUCATION AFTER KATRINA**

HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND EARLY
CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, EDUCATION,
LABOR, AND PENSIONS
UNITED STATES SENATE

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SECOND SESSION

ON

EXAMINING THE EDUCATION SYSTEM OF NEW ORLEANS

JULY 14, 2006 (New Orleans, LA)

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FRIDAY, JULY 14, 2006

U.S. SENATE,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND EARLY CHILDHOOD
DEVELOPMENT, COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, EDUCATION,
LABOR, AND PENSIONS,
New Orleans, LA.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 3:09 p.m., in the Supreme Court Hearing Room, Louisiana Supreme Court Building, 400 Royal Street, New Orleans, Louisiana, Hon. Lamar Alexander, chairman of the subcommittee, presiding.

Present: Senators Alexander, Burr, and Landrieu.

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR ALEXANDER

Senator ALEXANDER. In the interest of time, we'll bring the Subcommittee on Education and Early Childhood Development to order. First let me thank the witnesses who are here. As they know, the military plane we were coming on couldn't fly, so we were late. You all are extremely busy individuals. You all had other things to do today. You've adjusted your schedule so that we could hear you, which is why we came, and we thank you for that. I know that several of you spent time this morning in discussion, which I hope was useful to you, and we look forward to hearing about that.

Let me suggest the rules of procedure that we'd like to follow, since we are pressed for time. I'll make a very short statement in the beginning and I'll invite Senator Landrieu and Senator Burr to do the same. There's no need for you to read your testimony to us because we and the staff have that, but we'd like to have some discussion with you. What I'd like you to do is to take about 3 minutes, not to read your testimony to us, but to tell us the one or two things that are most on your mind or to summarize what you'd most like for us to hear. Then Senator Landrieu, Senator Burr, and I will ask questions for a while.

There are nine of you and if you each take about 3 minutes and we don't get too long-winded up here, then we'll have another 30 or 45 minutes for questions, and that'll give us some time to focus. If that raises some questions, then we would like to have the opportunity to ask you to answer those in a written form. You also may send us other ideas.

I don't see this as the last chance for discussion. We've had one meeting before. A few of you were here a few months ago. I intend to be involved with Orleans Parish as it works to rebuild its schools as long as it is useful for our committee to do that. I'm here for the long term, as long as we can help put the spotlight on what you're doing and create an environment in which you can succeed.

We can't do it from Washington, and don't intend to try. But we can be supportive, shine a spotlight, help create that environment, and provide some money. That's why we're here.

These are the remarks I would like to make. At the end of World War II there was terrible devastation in Japan caused by the bombing and one of the casualties was the Japanese steel industry. It was leveled to the ground. It was a terrible tragedy, but one of the results was that the industry had to rebuild, it had to come back. Instead of just doing again what they had done before, they looked around the world and created the most efficient and best steel mills in the world in Japan. Within a few years they were competition for the U.S. steel industry; by the end of the 1950s they'd nearly put us out of business, because they started from scratch and they used the tragedy as an opportunity to create the best steel mills in the world.

In some ways what has happened here in New Orleans in terms of public schools and private schools is the same. I think there's widespread agreement that the public school system here was challenged, and most of the public schools in Orleans Parish were destroyed or severely damaged.

New Orleans has an opportunity out of that tragedy that no other city in America has. It has permission, because of what had gone on here before, to build schools from scratch. It has a green field because of the hurricane, the tragedy, to do that from scratch. It has money to do it, or at least it has a lot of new Federal dollars.

The Federal Government has put about \$170 million new dollars this year into restarting Orleans Parish schools, plus another \$44 million to create charter schools in New Orleans and all of Louisiana. Those of us from outside New Orleans and Louisiana are very excited about this prospect. There are different kinds of schools being created here. We'll hear more about that.

But the charter school phenomenon here is of special interest to me. Eighteen of the twenty-five New Orleans schools opened in the spring of this year are charter schools. Thirty-three of fifty-six public schools that will be open this fall will be charter schools. There are 3,600 charter schools in the United States and they have been around for about 15 years, and in just 1 year New Orleans will be the leading big city in America in terms of creating new charter schools.

A charter school is simply a public school that frees parents and teachers from rules and regulations and empowers them to make the best possible decisions about educating children whose parents choose for them to go to that school. Charter schools are accountable to the board that created them, to the parents who choose to send their children there, and now to the No Child Left Behind Act, which requires that we know what the scores are for children in grades 3 through 8 in math and in reading.

If I were to think of one single step that New Orleans could take, not just to rebuild itself, but to reestablish itself as one of America's most important cities and to be a magnet to attract people here, it would be to say that, you are creating and building the best big-city public school system in America—and that you've taken this tragedy, clean slate, and extra Federal dollars that have come in in order to go on the path of doing that.

What I am here today to do with Senator Landrieu and with Senator Vitter's active interest and with Senator Burr is to say that we want to put the spotlight on what you're doing. We want to hear what you think we can do to help. We want to help to create an environment for that and we want to do it over the long term.

I want especially to thank Senator Landrieu and Senator Vitter for working on a consistent basis to educate the rest of us in this. While nobody in New Orleans and Louisiana votes for me, it brings back a lot of memories from 40 years ago to be back here in the old Wildlife-Fisheries Building.

Senator Landrieu.

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR LANDRIEU

Senator LANDRIEU. I thank you, Senator Alexander, for leading this effort on a field hearing. But for those from Louisiana here in New Orleans and on the panel, Senator Alexander stepped up within days of Hurricane Katrina and Rita hitting our area. He stepped up with Senator Enzi, Senator Kennedy, Senator Carper, and a handful of Senators on both sides of the aisle, to see what they could do to help the over 300,000 school children in all of our schools, public, private, and parochial, that were displaced—children who had literally showed up to go to school 1 week, were in school a few days, and then a storm took their school, their homes, their churches, their neighborhoods, and everything they knew away from them.

It's never happened before in the history of our country in that way exactly, not the magnitude of it, not the quickness of it, not the devastation of it. These Senators stepped up to pass truly unprecedented—no precedent for the legislation that moved through, and it was one of the first pieces that moved through, to try to provide funding at least to stabilize the situation to where all these hundreds of thousands of children could find at least a temporary home in some school, somewhere, in some community, that could help them.

The reason that we pushed for that, and it was really the push from our superintendent, who is not here, but I want to give Cecil Picard tremendous credit publicly, is because he knew what many parents knew and what leaders should know instinctively, that once kids are safe, parents can calm down and start assessing what happened; getting their feet underneath them, and getting children in school was a very important thing for many families. Now, not every family that was displaced obviously had school-aged children. But for parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles, concerned cousins, it was weighted on their minds to get their children safely to school.

We didn't do it all perfectly, but we did it pretty well. Now our challenge is to build a better system than the one that has been left behind or torn asunder by the water and the wind. Before Katrina and Rita these Senators know that this State was about the business of building and strengthening our school system, it had made a tremendous amount of progress in my view. In fact, we were cited by some of the outstanding education art magazines and publications as having the finest accountability system in the country. The BESE board, Linda, under your guidance and many of the board members that are here, had already done a tremendous amount of work. Chris, as the Chairman of the Education Committee, you had stepped up for many years. Phyllis, as the Chair of the New Orleans School System—there had been a tremendous amount of work under way already.

But now we can take the pieces that were there and put them together, with the help of these Senators and Congressmen and the added focus and the willingness of Washington to help.

I'll end only with this. We have already appropriated, unlike the panel before that's still looking for where their money is coming from. You heard their stories. We have \$450 million already appropriated for this restart effort, already appropriated. That was appropriated 6 months ago and I can say with confidence that as this plan emerges, if it emerges in a strong reform way that can build bipartisan support, there will be more resources available to build it, because we need to build it, not just for the city, not just for the State, but for the Nation as well.

So I thank you all for what you're doing. It has not been easy, but it is going to—we're going to do it. It's doable, it's attainable, and I just thank you, Senator, for your leadership.

[The prepared statement of Senator Landrieu follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF SENATOR LANDRIEU

Good morning everyone. I would like to thank the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee for holding this very timely hearing on K-12 education in New Orleans. I would especially like to thank Senator Alexander and Senator Burr who are with me today. I am also pleased that our esteemed panelists could join us and I know they will offer depth to our discussion.

We are all here today because we care about the children of New Orleans. We want them to be able to rebuild this great city into something that we have been proud of and will continue to call home. In order to prepare them for this challenge, it is our duty as lawmakers, educators and parents to allow them every available educational opportunity. Unfortunately in the past, we have failed our children. I will not stand for failure again.

As you all know, New Orleans has a school system with multiple governing bodies, all of which are represented here today, including the Recovery School District, the Louisiana Department of Education, the Orleans Parish School Board and the Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education. All of these entities have worked tirelessly to make a difference for the children of New Orleans.

Before Katrina, the New Orleans Public School System was the 49th largest school system in the United States, with 60,000 stu-

dents in 117 public schools. Our school system was one of the worst in the country. After Katrina, only 20 percent of enrollment with 25 schools open and 12,000 students enrolled. Eighteen of these schools are charter schools. Thirty-one schools are scheduled to reopen in the fall, fifteen of these being charter schools, with 22,000 more students expected. Fifty percent of our children will be back in the city and sixty percent of the schools will be charter schools.

As I have said many times before, Hurricanes Katrina and Rita have given us an opportunity to start fresh with a clean slate. We must take this challenge and run with it. It is incomprehensible to even think of slipping back into the old patterns of our destructive behavior. Our children have survived the storms, but mark my words—they will not make it through a failed schools system with such resiliency.

We have brought you together today to discuss innovative, new ideas for the future and how we can transform these ideas into a concrete, concise plan. There is no time for nebulous ideas or a bureaucratic pace. We have a call to action and the call is now. As our children and families trickle back into the city, we must have a state-of-the-art school system awaiting them.

I believe that the school system in New Orleans should incorporate the ideas and spirit that the “Bring New Orleans Back” plan that Scott Cowen and the “Bring New Orleans Back” Education Committee, appointed by Mayor Ray Nagin, has formulated. This plan was created by collecting facts based on our previous and present school system that allowed all members of the community to participate and stay informed. The committee heard from more than 1,500 New Orleanians, including principals, teachers, parents, and students about their experiences, needs and hopes for the future of the schools system. This committee has worked with various experts including everyone from: pastors of local churches to policymakers with best practices. Student achievement and success is the basis for this plan.

As President Cowen will discuss in detail, the Bring New Orleans Back plan is a series of charter school networks with a shared service provider. There will be clusters of charter schools, anywhere from 4–10 schools, in a network. These networks will be run by local universities, authorizers, businesspersons, etc. Each network will have a shared service provider. In essence, this provider will take care of food production, garbage disposal, financial services, and any other service the principal may need additional assistance with. In creating this type of model with assistance in the very areas that many charter schools fail, we are setting up our schools for inevitable success. This plan, however, cannot be set aside on a shelf. We must act quickly and put this type of model into place immediately.

As I imagine this city in the future, I dream of the way New Orleans was when I was growing up—only better. I dream of families being reunited, I dream of classic restaurants reopening, I dream of people being able to move back to their ancestors’ land, I dream of a bustling river and music in the streets, I dream of the soul of New Orleans that has never quite left us even though the largest storms in our most recent history have knocked us to our knees. But my biggest dream, the one that gives me the greatest pleas-

ure—is the dream of a greater schools system for our children that literally cannot take another blow. Our children deserve the greatest we have to offer them.

I know that we can make this happen, but it is not going to happen on its own. We have to fight for what is best and stand united. I know that it is imperative that we get the next 31 schools open as quickly as possible in the fall, but I also know that the long-term is what will carry our great city to its ultimate success. The Bring New Orleans Back plan is a well thought out plan that can work and will be a model for the rest of the country.

I urge you, as lawmakers, educators and parents, to take a closer look at this plan and to work to see it implemented. When the country looks at New Orleans in 5 years, I want them to see a model school system with innovative ideas and excited students. I want charter school authorizers from all over the country to fight for the chance to open schools in New Orleans. I want the children who graduate from our schools to take New Orleans and all that we love about it and claim it as their own. I want them to know that hurricanes cannot destroy the spirit of a city—for it is the people that hold the spirit and the people that will bring it back. Let us educate our people, empower their spirit and soul and give them the tools to continue on the great legacy of New Orleans.

I know that you all will work to the best of your ability to make this happen for all of our children. I stand ready to help you in any and every way possible. Educating the children of New Orleans has and will continue to be my top priority. Let us work to promote a transparent education system so that all children can grow up in a healthy learning environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding. Thank you again for being a part of this panel and to my colleagues, Senators Alexander and Burr for being here with us today. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any further questions.

Senator ALEXANDER. Senator Burr.

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR BURR

Senator BURR. Thank you, Lamar.

I thank each and every one of you for your patience. Trust me, when the hood of a plane is up, you don't press your luck until somebody says it's fine.

For the future of New Orleans, the State of Louisiana, and every State and locality in this Nation, it's imperative that we do all that we can do to assist all students, regardless of background, to reach academic standards that are high. Focused on the positive opportunities of the future, the New Orleans of today offers its students, parents, and educators a clean educational slate. The innovative ideas in education being implemented here and planned for the new New Orleans offer this city the opportunity to build a world-class educational system that may one day be a model of reform in the Nation's school districts as a whole.

I want to thank you for your willingness to be here, but more importantly for the level of passion that you display for the children of this community.

Mr. Chairman.

Senator ALEXANDER. Thank you, Senator Burr.

There's one other important person I'd like to introduce before we begin the testimony. Gordon Alexander Cole is here. He is 12 years old. Gordon, will you stand for just a moment, please.

[Mr. Cole stands.]

He delivered to me a letter. He wanted me to know about an organization he's starting entitled HELP, Helping Educate Louisiana Pupils, to get people to donate books in satisfactory condition to traditional public and charter schools in New Orleans. Gordon, what I'm going to do is put this in the Congressional Record so more people will know about what you're doing, and I wanted to introduce you and thank you for your work.

[Applause.]

LETTER FROM GORDON ALEXANDER COLE

GORDON ALEXANDER COLE, STUDENT,
Isidore Newman School, New Orleans, LA.

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN: Hello, my name is Gordon Alexander Cole. I am 12 years old, and I attend Isidore Newman School, New Orleans, Louisiana. I would like to inform you about an organization that I am starting, entitled "H.E.L.P." (Helping Educate Louisiana Pupils). Its purpose is to donate books in satisfactory condition to the public and charter schools of New Orleans.

Reading is very important to me because it exponentially increases the knowledge and vocabulary of the reader. Books also provide an endless window to places you have never ventured to. They also stimulate your imagination, not to mention providing personal satisfaction. That stimulation helps you to become more innovative and resourceful. Reading also provides an opportunity to open people's eyes to new experiences, while increasing intellectual curiosity, competence, ambition and dreams. Without that ambition and personal drive, there would not be any goals in life for many people.

I couldn't let this opportunity pass without attempting to contribute something to the common good. Therefore, I decided to start this organization to help replenish the libraries of the public and charter schools of New Orleans.

If you have any old books in medium/good condition, please send them to: Gordon Cole, 1435 Henry Clay Ave., New Orleans, LA 70118.

Thank you for your time and consideration regarding this matter.

Sincerely,

GORDON ALEXANDER COLE.

Senator ALEXANDER. Now, let me suggest that we start with Linda Johnson, President of the Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, and move right down the line to Senator Ullo. If you could each take about 3 minutes to give us a summary or the one or two things that highlight your testimony, then Senator Landrieu and I and Senator Burr will have a chance to ask some questions, and go back and forth.

Linda Johnson, thank you for being here.

STATEMENTS OF LINDA JOHNSON, PRESIDENT, LOUISIANA BOARD OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION; SARAH OTTINGER, PARENT, AUDUBON CHARTER SCHOOL; FATHER WILLIAM F. MAESTRI, SUPERINTENDENT OF CATHOLIC SCHOOLS, ARCHDIOCESE OF NEW ORLEANS; CAROLE BUTLER-WALLIN, DEPUTY SUPERINTENDENT, LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION; ROBIN JARVIS, PH.D., ACTING SUPERINTENDENT, RECOVERY SCHOOL DISTRICT; GREG RICHMOND, PRESIDENT, NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF CHARTER SCHOOL AUTHORIZERS; BRIAN RIEDLINGER, PH.D., CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, ALGIERS CHARTER SCHOOLS ASSOCIATION; PHYLLIS LANDRIEU, PRESIDENT, ORLEANS PARISH SCHOOL BOARD; SENATOR J. CHRIS ULLO, CHAIRMAN, LOUISIANA STATE SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Ms. JOHNSON. Thank you very much.

Senator ALEXANDER. If each of you would introduce yourselves, I think that will speed things up as we go.

Ms. JOHNSON. Thank you very much. I'd like to thank the committee for coming to New Orleans. In particular I'd like to thank Senator Landrieu for the hand-holding, for the support, for the money, for coming back, and for helping us through this disaster. I know you're from here, but we really appreciate it.

Also, I'd like for you to know that one of the other BESE members is in the audience, who represents this area, Mrs. Louella Gibbons, and she's sitting right here. I want you to know that.

Senator ALEXANDER. Welcome.

Ms. JOHNSON. There are some things that I think I should tell you about what I believe is the best thing that we could have ever done. Pre-Katrina we had a problem with the schools in New Orleans in terms of performance, student performance, pre-Katrina. Pre-Katrina, as a board we were sitting around trying to decide how do we make them better. This was pre-Katrina. We had in place a Recovery School District where we were placing one or two schools as they failed into the Recovery School District, which absolutely would not cure the problem.

That was pre-Katrina. Post-Katrina we realized that now we have an opportunity to do something and to make it better. So we amended basically the Recovery School District law that we had. We actually came up with another one. And we ended up with 108 of the schools. Please understand, 60 of those schools would have been academically unacceptable prior to Katrina, so we would have had that magnitude of problems.

One of the things that I support—and as I sit here and as you look at me, I actually look like 98 percent of the kids who were in the public school system. So I'm very supportive of the New Orleans public school children, and I'm supportive to the point of I want them to have the best opportunity possible. The way you make opportunities, you give people choice. That is one of the ways that you make opportunity. If you have the opportunity to send your child to school A or to school B and school A is better but you have that opportunity, that is where you will send your child.

I firmly believe that people in New Orleans support this, that they were looking for and are looking for places for their children

to be successful. So what we have done at BESE is we have—I think we have created a model. I personally believe it is a model in the Recovery School District. We have schools that will be operated by the State and we have schools that will be operated by charter.

We have left intact the Orleans Parish School Board system and its schools that they will operate, and there's a reason for that. You look across the country at some of the literature, you'll find that once you get into the governance issue you get off of the education issue. So we decided to stay on the education issue.

In order to stay on the education issue—oh my goodness.

Senator LANDRIEU. Three minutes is quick.

Senator ALEXANDER. Go ahead and finish your thought.

Ms. JOHNSON. But in order to stay in the education issue, we chose not to tackle the governance piece. We didn't go after the superintendent, we didn't try to change the board, we didn't try to get a committee to come in. We—and I think I speak for the other 10 members—we're about the children. So we wanted to create academic excellence. We wanted to create it for all the children in the public school system in Louisiana and in New Orleans in particular. So we didn't get involved with the governance piece. We're strictly involved with the academic piece.

I think we have created a system, and anything that you create that's new, you know it's change, so it takes some getting used to. It takes some communications processes that we may have to improve upon in order for people to understand what it is we're doing. I have heard some of that today.

But yes, it's not as transparent as we would like for it to be, but it's getting there. So I'm very satisfied with the system of education, the model that we have, and I do think it'll be a model for the country.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Johnson follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF LINDA JOHNSON

OVERVIEW

Elsewhere in the country, when a State or city "takes over" a failing school district, they really take over the governance, by changing the school board and/or controlling the superintendency. The new governing authority inherits the existing central office, the existing policies and procedures and the historical culture of the district. These efforts to reform the "system" have met with some limited success, but have not transformed the academic performance of a low-performing district.

In New Orleans, the State's takeover is the reverse of other efforts nationally. The local school board and its superintendent were left intact, and the board retained the right to run 16 schools and remains the taxing and bonding authority for all public schools in Orleans Parish. The State, in essence, took over empty school buildings, the right to operate the schools, and the money (local, State and Federal) to educate the students attending State controlled schools. The State did not take over the central office; it did not retain existing employees, it did not inherit existing policies and procedures.

A NEW MODEL FOR URBAN EDUCATION

As the State reopens schools, it is doing so in a new framework. The State Board of Education (BESE) has approved an operational plan for the Recovery School District (RSD) that outlines the principles and goals of the RSD and how the RSD will operate its own schools and work with schools it charters.

The Bottom Line.—New Orleans now has the most free market public education system in the country. The challenge for the RSD is to find the right balance between the free market and the need for systemization of some areas of operation.

PUBLIC SCHOOL CHOICE

Parents can choose to send their child to any school in the RSD, space allowing. The RSD operated and chartered schools are open to any student, and none of the schools have attendance zones. If demand exceeds supply, the school must hold a lottery. Schools are also required to provide transportation for any student who lives more than 1 mile from school.

EQUITY OF SCHOOL FINANCE

Whether RSD operated or RSD chartered, the money will follow the student. BESE has adopted a school financing formula that provides one funding amount for a regular education student and different funding for students with special needs. Schools will only be funded for the students they educate.

STRONG AND TRANSPARENT ACCOUNTABILITY

All RSD schools are subject to Louisiana's school accountability system, which was ranked No. 1 in the country by *Education Week*. Every summer, the State will release the performance scores for all RSD schools, so parents can exercise informed choice.

BESE has established the 2006–2007 school year as the baseline year. Charter schools must meet certain growth requirements by the end of year three, or their charter is revoked. They must meet additional growth requirements by the end of year five, or their charter is not renewed.

COMPETITION FOR EMPLOYEES

A majority of schools in the RSD and in the city will be charter schools. Each charter school can establish their own pay and benefit structure and is not subject to a collective bargaining agreement or the State's tenure law.

BESE has adopted a salary schedule for all RSD operated schools, and the RSD operated schools must provide tenure.

COMPETITION IN NONACADEMIC SERVICES

BESE is requiring all RSD schools to use the same Student Information System and IT platform. Otherwise, schools will be able to purchase services from a shared service center operated by the State, or from other vendors. This structure requires that the RSD build quality support services that schools value, or schools can purchase services elsewhere. Some of these services include transportation, food service and building maintenance.

SCHOOL FOCUS

The RSD began operations with no central office staff. It will be operating schools with a minimal central office, allowing resources to be spent at the school site.

RSD chartered schools have control over their time, people and money. The plan adopted by BESE recognizes the autonomy of the charter schools. The funding formula passes 98.4 percent of the per-pupil funding directly to the charter school.

The RSD operated schools are being managed in a more traditional manner, although the State is allowing principals to select and manage their staffs.

CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

New Orleans has a tradition of highly mobile students. While a family can move and attend the same school (there are no attendance zones), the RSD is working to balance the autonomy of charters with the need for some continuity among schools.

All but one school in the RSD will be using Louisiana's Comprehensive Curriculum. All schools will participate in tests based on Louisiana's Grade Level Expectations, which will require that schools cover the same content in each grade. The professional development provided to RSD operated schools will also be offered to RSD chartered schools.

OTHER POLICIES ADOPTED BY BESE

Special Education.—All charters must have 10 percent special needs students.

Expulsion.—The State will conduct all expulsion hearings for RSD schools.

Alternative Schools.—The RSD will be operating 2–3 alternative schools to serve students citywide.

SHORT-TERM CHALLENGES

- Need to “camouflage” the complexity of the governance model
 - One place for parents to get information on schools, register, file complaints, etc.
- Need for a clearinghouse for Community Involvement
 - Anyone wishing to interact with the charter schools has no place to go. This includes donors, business partners, volunteers, social service agencies, etc.
- Educating the Public
 - Everyone is accustomed to a top-down model for public education. They are used to going to the board and/or the superintendent to get a decision made affecting all schools. With the majority of schools in the parish now chartered, New Orleans has a decentralized decisionmaking structure.

UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES (POSITIVE)

- *More civic engagement.*—Sectors of the community that long ago abandoned public education are now serving as charter board members and engaging in public education.
- *No more circus-like board meetings.*—The OPSB board meetings were destructive and prevented civil discourse. Now, with the lack of one central authority, the obstructionists cannot gain a foothold. While charter board meetings are subject to the open meetings law, they are not televised, there are too many meetings to monitor, and truly interested parties now participate, preventing the obstructionists from gaining control.
- This structure was the only way to terminate OPSB central office employees, eliminate the collective bargaining agreement and leverage the opportunity to start anew.

Senator ALEXANDER. We'll come back to you. Thank you very much.

Ms. Ottinger.

Ms. OTTINGER. Good afternoon. My name is Sarah Ottinger. I'm a parent of a 3rd grader at Audubon Charter School here in New Orleans, and I just want to let you all know that my son turns 9 today and that this is a very good place for me to be on his birthday.

I'm really enormously grateful for the opportunity to talk about public school education in New Orleans today, and thank you very much, Senator Alexander, for inviting me to do so.

In my 3 minutes, the points that I'd like to emphasize: I come from a school that prior to Katrina, or my son goes to a school that prior to Katrina, was what we called a citywide access school, CWAS, with a very unique curriculum that had been in place for 25 years. We have a part French program and a part Montessori program, and we were a very strong community and we have very, very strong values, cultural values, in our community, that have really carried us through Katrina in a way that has allowed us to rebuild our school so that it's better than we could have imagined. I understand that I have tremendous—my son, I, all of the parents and kids at Audubon have a tremendous privilege to be in that position right now.

A couple things that I want to emphasize. One of the things is that we were a very diverse population before Katrina. We had about 59 percent of our student population whom were African-American. Forty-one qualified for free and reduced lunches. We are continuing—we made a very important decision this year within our charter school to remain an open enrollment school, so that children throughout the city have access to our school. We do that because we believe the Montessori curriculum and the French cur-

riculum is made for all kids and that kids will succeed within that environment.

I would like to stress that I think that parent involvement makes for a very, very good school. We talk a lot about parent involvement as a passive concept. I think that parents need to become a force, not that we need to run schools, because we all know we're not qualified to, although sometimes we think we are. But parents need to be there organizing and advocating on behalf of their children, on behalf of their communities. It's something that needs to come from within the community and not from the school administration, although I think that the resources are very, very necessary in order for that to come in all school communities in New Orleans. I've set out more in detail what I think about that in the written testimony.

The final thing I'll do in 3 seconds, which I have to do, is that one of the biggest struggles we've faced as a school is that our funding has not come through in a prompt manner. We have had a lot of difficulty meeting payroll and the only reason that we were ultimately able to do that and have kept a really happy school environment for doing that was because we happened to have a PTO account of a substantial amount of money. But we've had a tremendous amount of difficulties. We're still waiting on title I funding that was for the 2005–2006 year and we're not sure it's even going to be awarded, as I understand it, before September. So the money that has been set aside is not making it quickly to us.

Thank you very much for the opportunity.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Ottinger follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF SARAH OTTINGER

Good morning. My name is Sarah Ottinger and I am the mother of an Audubon Charter School student here in New Orleans. My son turns 9 today, and I can think of no better way to spend the morning of his birthday than talking about public school education in New Orleans.

First I'd like to thank you, Senator Alexander, for this extraordinary opportunity to share my thoughts about New Orleans public schools following the tragic flooding of our beautiful city. When I was first invited to do so, I thought I would be on a panel of parents today. When I later discovered that I would be the only parent, I felt a bit overwhelmed. I must point out that I am only one parent whose privilege and work experience has made it possible for me to take full advantage of the opportunity this horrible disaster ironically offered to participate in rebuilding my son's school so that it is better than I could have imagined before August 29, 2005. Everyone involved in rebuilding New Orleans public schools should strive to make the same true for all our public school parents and children.

I'd like to share our school's story because I think it is illustrative of what parents and children need in a New Orleans public school system.

THE EARLY PERIOD: WRITING OUR CHARTER

In early September of last year, I found myself in Houston, Texas, disconnected from my home, my life, and everything familiar. Some of the first contacts I made, by text messaging and e-mail, were with the parents and teachers at my son's school. I was President of the PTO at the time and we had several e-mail systems in place that allowed those of us who had the means to evacuate to contact one another easily. Those early communications were welcome lifelines in a sea of despair. Our school community was a strong one and it helped us all survive the tragedy unfolding before our eyes on television.

Early on, we exulted in learning that our school building was intact and had not been flooded. But our joy was short-lived. Soon afterward, we heard that our school as it existed prior to Katrina would be closed. Instead, it would reopen as an open access citywide school that would not preserve Audubon's community or our curriculum. We were a unique school with two unique and separate pre-K through 8th

grade curricula: a Montessori program and a French program. Our school was founded in 1980, and we were about to celebrate our 25th anniversary. The storm apparently had wiped us out.

In late September, still in Houston, I received a call from one of the founders of Audubon Montessori/L'Ecole Franco-Americaine. She and the second founder wanted to explore the viability of writing a charter school proposal for Audubon. Would I be willing to contact as many parents and teachers as possible and to schedule a meeting in New Orleans to discuss chartering Audubon?

Yes, I was willing! It would be our only chance to survive as a school and a community. So, many phone calls and e-mail discussions later, a small group of us met in New Orleans on October 8 to discuss our options. We all agreed and committed to push forward to preserve our school in the only way possible—by seeking a charter.

I cannot say that the process of writing the charter proposal was easy. It was a Herculean task that needed to be accomplished in a few short weeks, by October 27, and we reached several junctures of passionate disagreement that required swift, sometimes ruthless, compromise for the greater goal of completing the charter application. My job in the process was to contact parents and teachers to poll their support for the charter and to write the portions of the charter dealing with legal issues and parent involvement. The co-founders of our school, Jill Otis and Joyous Van Buskirk, worked with two teachers to write the remainder of the charter application. I do not know how they did it, although I know the process involved deep commitment and significant sleep deprivation.

AUDUBON CHARTER SCHOOL: OPENING OUR DOORS

The Orleans Parish School Board approved our charter school proposal unanimously on October 28, 2005 and we became Audubon Charter School. We had promised to reopen the school's doors for students on January 3, 2006. The newly created non-profit organization responsible for accomplishing this task, French and Montessori Education, Inc. (FAME), had a bank account with a balance of zero.

At that time, I knew of only five parents from our community living in New Orleans, however several PTO Board members spread out across the country had been actively involved in reestablishing connections with other parents. Our PTO had been incorporated as a non-profit organization for 6 years and had, along the way, managed to save almost \$140,000 designated for capital improvements to our school. Parents organized to collect all the e-mail addresses we had and establish an online voting site to approve a loan of \$50,000 to FAME so that it could begin the job of opening our school. With that money, FAME was able to rehire our Principal, Janice Dupuy, and to pay for the early expenses involved in reopening our school and registering students. During the 2 months leading up to reopening Audubon Charter School, everything else was accomplished by volunteers and donations.

I cannot overstate our Principal's leadership abilities or her commitment to our school and our community. She had lost family members and her house to the flooding, and her own children were in schools in Baton Rouge and St. Francisville. She had no place to live in New Orleans. Yet she returned, organized volunteer parents, teachers, and staff, and began the tremendous process of recreating our safe, vibrant, academically excellent school in a devastated city. She did all this with grace, compassion, and composure that were rare in our city following Katrina, for we were a city of traumatized people who were all very raw around the edges.

We knew our success and viability as a school depended on registering a sufficient number of students (we estimated 200) for the spring semester. We also knew that preserving the culture of our school and community meant reaching our diverse parent body and an equally diverse new parent body. We were terrified, frankly, that our school would lose its economic and racial diversity. Prior to Katrina, 41 percent of our student body had been receiving free or reduced lunches and 59 percent of the student body was African-American.

Our online communications were reaching only 10 percent of parents and largely those with economic privilege, so we organized a phone outreach campaign. A single parent combed through the emergency contacts for every child that had been registered to attend Audubon in the fall and compiled a database of last known telephone numbers. Several parent volunteers then called the 500 previously registered families one by one, generally reaching families through cell phone numbers. Those who made the phone calls were overwhelmed by the losses our overall community of parents had sustained, yet equally overwhelmed by the tears of joy and relief shed when parents learned that Audubon would reopen. Many parents expressed that the knowledge that their child or children were assured a place at Audubon,

beginning either in January or the following August, gave them hope that they might return to New Orleans despite the significant losses they had sustained.

Meanwhile our Principal located and hired as many of our previous faculty and staff as she could contact and began the hiring process for new school personnel. Her almost 30 years' experience in the Orleans Parish Public Schools, her excellent reputation as a teacher, administrator, and leader, and Audubon's excellent reputation as a school made it possible for her to recruit and hire the most qualified and committed administrators and teachers.

As we began envisioning reopening, we realized that we needed to put as many of our former strengths as a school back in place. For a long time, after school care at Audubon, offered through the New Orleans Public School ADEPT program, had been considered inadequate by many parents due mainly to what we considered to be a failure to provide both structured and enriching activities for the children as well as adequate adult supervision and interaction with children. For 2 years prior to Katrina, the PTO had organized and offered an after school arts program, called Arts Reach, to children who wished to register for a fee. We did our best to make scholarships available to children who could not afford the fee. We offered classes taught by local art teachers, musicians, and artists ranging from music and dance, to painting and pottery, to basketball and chess (we had a broad definition of "arts"!).

We knew we needed to get our after school arts program up and running by January. The former director of the program would not be returning to New Orleans, but we found a parent artist who had previously expressed interest in directing the program. She spent countless hours from Florida tracking down previous teachers and creating a new curriculum without any sense of the number of children who would be returning to Audubon. When Audubon reopened in January it did so with a full curriculum of after school arts classes and we were able to give out 50 scholarships to students who could not afford to register for the classes.

In addition, Ms. Dupuy, our Principal, hired an extremely qualified coordinator for after school care. The new coordinator ran the program as her own stand-alone program, though the program maintained a bank account administered through Audubon Charter. The new coordinator hired her own staff for the program and made numerous changes to what had existed before, resulting in much higher quality after school care. Adults staffing the program engaged meaningfully with children and provided many activities, allowing children to choose what they liked to do with their time. My son, who had always resented after school care, starting asking me if he could stay for it on days I didn't need it. The main and very simple difference for him was that he was allowed as much time as he wanted to play outside on the basketball court and playground equipment.

I should point out in this context that the playground equipment at our school, which is excellent, was not something we had obtained through the public school system. Instead, a couple years earlier when parents became disgusted with broken-down rusty playground equipment, and concerned at the number of injuries to children that occurred on the equipment, the PTO voted to spend about \$70,000 of its capital improvement fund to have the equipment installed.

In addition to strengthening our after school programming, we were able to provide our children with many additional opportunities for learning and growth during the school day. Given the anticipated budget, Ms. Dupuy was able to hire a full-time art teacher, physical education teacher, and music teacher as well as a part-time dance teacher. Ms. Dupuy was also able to hire part-time teaching assistants through the FAME budget for the school, something the school system had never provided and parents had diligently worked to raise funding for through the PTO.

Finally, we were able to do what we had been frustrated from doing for many years as an Orleans Parish Public School. We are now able to provide ongoing Montessori training and certification for our teachers and administrators in the Montessori program, as well as ongoing training in France through the French government for our teachers and administrators in the French program. Particularly when it came to our Montessori program, for years prior to becoming a charter school we had fought systemwide curriculum requirements and teacher training imposed on our school that had no relevance to the educational curriculum provided there. Freeing ourselves from requirements that did not make sense at our school was truly liberating to administrators, teachers, staff, and parents alike.

AUDUBON CHARTER SCHOOL: SURVIVING AND GROWING

We reopened in January with 250 students and crept up in numbers in the course of the spring semester to 350 students. Our biggest challenge in the beginning was that we did not have a steady source of money and had very little in our bank ac-

count. Without grants from the French government and loans from the PTO capital improvements account, Audubon would not have met payroll and expenses on several occasions through March. Both Federal and State funding was shamefully slow in coming and did not arrive on dates we had been promised it would arrive.

Audubon also would not have opened its doors or kept them open without the valuable business operations assistance of a past Audubon parent who quit her job so that she could put all her time, on a volunteer basis as a member of the FAME Board of Directors, into working through the myriad of services and ongoing maintenance related to keeping a school building open. She was assisted by Alvarez & Marsal, which met with all the newly-opening charter schools in New Orleans as a group, to provide guidance and group bargaining power to the charter schools working through the complexities of repairing storm damage to school buildings, re-establishing office communications systems, providing school lunches and custodial services, obtaining adequate insurance, establishing payroll and billing systems, and the many, many other tasks that had formerly been handled by the school system.

Seeking funding to sustain our viability as a charter school was critical. Until the FAME Board of Directors was up and running and fully established as a 501(c)(3), the PTO Board identified grant opportunities and wrote applications for them. We also sent out a fundraising letter to every French and Montessori school we could find across the country. Once school reopened, the FAME Board established an executive fundraising committee composed of FAME and PTO Board members and other parent volunteers. Our FAME Board Chair secured a donation of a part-time experienced fundraiser and grant writer and under her direction we had weekly phone conference calls to aggressively pursue grants and donations. The end result was that between January and the close of our fiscal year on June 30, we raised \$500,000 in private grants and donations. This includes a local grant we recently received for a full-time social worker, a particularly critical need for all schools post-Katrina.

Meanwhile, our Principal and her very capable administrative staff applied for every form of State and Federal funding appropriate to our school and student body. This was no easy task, as deadlines and requirements kept changing. While several applications for title grants have been successful, my understanding is that we must spend the money before we can receive it through reimbursement. Our goal in private fundraising is to have a sufficient reserve of cash on hand to benefit from title funding.

We have actively sought in-kind donations as well as monetary ones. Our teachers have wish lists, and we provide those to people who contact us wanting to make donations. In the course of the spring semester we have received donations of books, sports equipment, musical instruments, video equipment, and art supplies, and we have a large donation of computers forthcoming. Over the summer, a parent carpenter will be building wood cubbies in Montessori classrooms for the cost of the materials, to be paid for by the PTO. And we received an extraordinary donation from the Rex Parade Crewe's Project Purple. They donated the services of a local landscaper and the plants and trees the landscaper selected, then recruited an out-of-town pharmaceutical company that was in New Orleans for a convention to do the planting. The ongoing watering of the plants and trees became the project of several Montessori classes. Our school grounds have never been so beautiful.

The FAME Board made a critical decision back in February, one that I wish all charter schools would make. We will be an open enrollment school in Kindergarten through 3rd grade. While preference will be given to students who attend Audubon's pre-K or students with prior Montessori or French education, the remaining spots will be determined by lottery once the application procedure has been completed. Admission to the 4th–8th grades, which will likely have very few spots available, will be determined by a matrix system that factors in an applicant's ability to excel in our French or Montessori curriculum.

In May, the Orleans Parish School Board granted Audubon's request for an additional school building. We will open in August with two campuses, the Broadway Campus and the Carrollton Campus. The Broadway Campus will house students in Kindergarten through 5th grade. The Carrollton Campus will house our pre-K and 6th through 8th grade students. Our enrollment will expand significantly with an anticipated 650 students next year. The numbers are being added primarily in pre-K through 3rd grades. Over the next several years, our numbers will increase in the 4th through 8th grade classes and our overall enrollment will increase to 850 students. This represents an increase of almost 350 students from our pre-Katrina days.

Audubon is an oasis in the midst of the destruction to our city and our lives following the levee breaks. The atmosphere of the school is lighter, less tense, more optimistic following becoming a charter. People are happy—teachers, administra-

tors, staff, and parents. Governing decisions are made by a Board that wholeheartedly supports our culture and curricula, and makes its decisions in an evenhanded, fair manner. We have more resources and are able to allocate them consistent with the mission of our school. We are stronger than we have been for a long, long time and are no longer subject to constantly changing policy in constantly changing school system administrations. We have experienced a rebirth.

There is not a day that goes by when I do not feel how fortunate I am to drop my son off at Audubon. We are blessed beyond what I could have imagined. I'm not an educator, but I think what I have learned as an involved parent can be applied systemwide in public schools.

LESSONS LEARNED

Schools thrive when their community and culture are strong. A strong school community and culture develops over time with strong leadership; with a strong academic curriculum, enhanced by opportunities outside the academic—the arts, physical education, excellent after care programming; with competent and committed administration, teachers, and staff who are appreciated, supported, and compensated for their commitment and caring; with welcoming, well-maintained school facilities and grounds that include high quality play and sports areas; and with the active involvement of parents and caregivers. If everyone involved in rebuilding New Orleans Public Schools aspires to these essential components, we will thrive as a public school system.

WHAT PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS CAN CONTRIBUTE

I want to spend my time today talking about what we call “parent involvement.” There is universal agreement that parent and caretaker involvement in schools is an essential component to successful schools. Certainly the RSD Plan identifies parent, as well as community, involvement as one of its seven core principles in rebuilding schools.

But “parent involvement” is a passive concept: it implies schools reaching out to parents to direct their participation in the school community. That is not enough to make schools strong. Parents and caregivers need to become not just “involved” in school communities; they need to become a force in school communities, not dependent on school administration for their survival as a force.

At Audubon, parents are a force. We have our own separate existence, our own separate non-profit corporation, and we define our mission and goals for the work we do for our school independent of the school administration. Do I think we are able to do all this because we are somehow better parents than those in other schools who do not have such structure in place? Not at all. I think we are able to do it because some of our parents have the incredible resource of time to devote to our school. We have several parents who are not working outside the home and others who have jobs that allow flexibility, making it easier to spend time in and around the school. We also have a good pool of skills in our parent body that have been essential to our organizing: business, secretarial, fundraising, legal. We actively seek out and utilize those skills. The bulk of the work we do is accomplished by a handful of parents. We then meet once a month as a full parent body to update and take direction from every parent and caretaker who chooses to participate in our PTO.

I believe that every school will have at least one natural parent or caretaker leader, probably many. The real issue is whether those leaders can afford to spend their time in their children's school. We need to create paid parent organizer positions in schools with a budget for the organizing work they do. These would not be “liaison” positions, as we had in the past. The job of the parent organizer would be to organize, not just to facilitate communication. And the parent's organizing role would need to be supported by the Principal and overall school administration. Too often, those in control fear true empowerment, which implies independence. Good leadership recognizes that we all benefit from the independence and creativity of differing perspectives.

A good parent organizer with a modest budget would be able to draw upon and enlist help from the community at large. Our PTO, for example, would be happy to meet with other parent groups to talk about defining mission and goals, setting up organizational structure, stimulating parent interest in and attendance at meetings, even incorporating as non-profit organizations should that be the direction groups wish to take. In fact, just last August before the levees broke, a number of PTOs and PTAs had begun meeting to share our knowledge and ideas for the future of our schools. This is just one example of resources out there. Others include free training on fundraising and grant-writing, free training on advocating for students

with special needs, free leadership training. The list goes on and on, and a good organizer can put that list together and make it happen.

A good parent organizer would set up avenues of communication that work for parents, through a newsletter or informally, by being there when parents drop off and pick up their children. I had some of the most important conversations with parents at the school gate in the morning. They couldn't show up to meetings, but they could contribute, right there, where they were most able to do so. Phone trees are essential to communication as well and can include phone numbers of relatives or neighbors who can pass on information to those who don't have telephones. While e-mail works for some, it leaves many in the dark and simply cannot be relied upon to communicate meaningfully with parents and caregivers.

A good parent organizer would schedule meetings in a time and manner that is most convenient, providing free food and childcare, advertising topics that parents do not wish to miss. In doing so, the organizer would begin to build interest and momentum. Word of mouth travels fast, and if meetings are interesting and well-run, increasing numbers will show up for meetings.

These are just a few cornerstones of organizing communities. We know a lot about successful community organizing techniques—there's lots of literature out there about it. But the most important aspect of organizing any community is that ongoing leadership be developed from within. The school system itself must make the initial investment in developing parent leadership from within, by hiring a parent organizer and giving that person a working budget, but then it must get out of the way so that parents and caregivers can learn their own power.

I'm sure there are many who would say that I have no idea what I'm talking about, that I come at this as a parent in a privileged community. I do—that is certainly my experience as an Audubon parent. But I also come at this as an advocate and organizer. When I worked at the Juvenile Justice Project of Louisiana, and we were trying to put an end to abusive conditions of incarceration for kids and envision more effective rehabilitative alternatives to incarceration, we worked with parents of children in prisons across the State. With minimal and non-intrusive support from our office, parents formed a group called Friends and Families of Louisiana's Incarcerated Children, they developed a mission statement and goals, and they ultimately ended up powerfully advocating in the State legislature for closure of juvenile prisons. Due in large part to parent efforts, the population in Louisiana's juvenile prisons has been cut in half.

If you know anything about which children we lock up in Louisiana, you know it is children from our most oppressed communities. The parents who organized against abusive incarceration came mostly from very poor communities and were mostly African-American. They also overcame the stigma of being dead-beat parents, because we regularly and completely inappropriately assume that parents cause all their children's problems, rather than acknowledging that societal conditions make it virtually impossible for so many children to succeed and thrive.

It is possible, indeed necessary to the survival of public schools, for parents from oppressed communities to organize around their children's education. Such organization and participation, combined with excellent school leadership, teachers, and staff, a strong curriculum that meets the needs of a diverse student body, and resources and opportunities that benefit all children, together create strong school cultures and communities. We desperately need to move in this direction in all schools in New Orleans.

Talk is cheap, and I hesitate to put out all these opinions without making a commitment to following through on what I suggest. I challenge this Senate Committee, as well as the distinguished community leaders that are part of the two panels speaking today, to find a way to devote resources to a full-time parent organizer in each and every school that reopens without an organized parent body in place. In exchange, I commit here and now to work with other parents in the city to establish a non-profit citywide parent organization devoted to securing private funding and training opportunities for parent groups in the schools most in need of resources in New Orleans.

Thank you again, very much, for the opportunity to share my views on this critical topic.

Senator ALEXANDER. Father Maestri.

Father MAESTRI. Mr. Chairman and members of the committee: My name is Father William Maestri and I'm Superintendent of Catholic Schools for the Archdiocese of New Orleans. I find myself in somewhat of a different position because I represent the private and religious sector of our community, which is quite profound. But

I would like to suggest to you that it is crucially important to understand that this private sector serves the common good and serves the public good.

During the height of Katrina, in the aftermath, over 500 public school children were taken into our schools, many of whom could not pay tuition. None was charged, none were rejected. All were welcomed, because we thought it was so important to bring children back to schools. Schools were hopes, were magnets of hope for all people, irregardless of race or creed or belief. It was crucial that we bring students back to school.

If you read the Andrew after-action report, the two most important factors in reviving communities were energy and schools. So therefore we wanted to make sure that all children were welcomed.

Before Katrina we had 107 schools and 50,000 children. Almost immediately, we began reopening schools, so that to date we have 83 schools reopened and 40,000 children back in school. Many of them are not our own. At Archbishop Rummell High School, we had over 2,000 displaced students taken in from 14 schools. All were welcomed, again because we believe that it's so important to provide a safe education environment for our children.

The Archdiocese of New Orleans finds itself in somewhat of a different position than public entities. We did not wait. We responded. I think an important lesson from all of this is the importance that the greater the level of crisis, the greater the degree of decentralization. You have to empower local entities to respond. You have to empower local entities that know best their particular resources, not simply economic capital, but also personal capital, moral capital, social capital. That's where the wisdom is. Trust the people that you have put in charge at the local level and they do an incredible job.

I would simply want to end, because my time is running out, and because I'm a Catholic and a person of faith, we also ought to be grateful. I want to express my deep thanks to Senator Alexander. You had a previous life before this in which you were Governor of Tennessee and also Secretary of Education, in which your far-thinking brought about a tremendous amount of reform in education. So you are not a newly arrived member to this issue of education. I have spoken to you before and we, in the Archdiocese, are tremendously grateful for your sustained commitment, and I want to acknowledge that publicly if I may.

I'm also very grateful to Senator Vitter, and I have to say how grateful we in the Archdiocese and I am to Senator Landrieu and her work with the Kennedy-Enzi bill, with including us in the process and including us at every kind of public discussion and public hearing as a private and religious entity. It has meant a great deal to us and has meant a great deal to our recovery to allow us to continue to go forward and to serve what we believe is the common good.

I would simply end by saying that, Senator Alexander, you began by talking about World War II. Well, right after World War II, Winston Churchill was being lauded and praised on the BBC about what a great job he did during World War II, and he said: "The men, the men, theirs were the heart of lions. I was but privileged to give the roar." So in my position as superintendent I did nothing

but give the roar. The real work was done by so many people in our communities, both public and private, who work for us, and many in our State Department of Education have done tremendous work for us in the Archdiocese and we are extremely appreciative of that and appreciative of your presence here, and I want to thank you on behalf of us.

[The prepared statement of Father Maestri follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF FATHER WILLIAM F. MAESTRI

The Archdiocese of New Orleans is both a responder to the devastation caused by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita as well as a victim. Throughout these past months, the archdiocese has continued to place ministry over money; the needs of people over our financial concerns. This is a great challenge given the damage the archdiocese has suffered. Consider the following:

1. The Archdiocese owns over 1,200 properties throughout eight civil parishes. 1,100 of these were damaged by wind, water, or both.
2. The Archdiocese has sustained an \$84 million gap between storm damage and insurance coverage.
3. The Archdiocese continues to provide spiritual and material ministry at a deficit of \$1 million a month.

One of the most significant achievements of the archdiocese's response to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita is the story of our Catholic schools. Before the hurricanes, the archdiocese operated 107 schools (both elementary and secondary) with 50,000 students in eight civil parishes. To this date, we have reopened 83 schools with almost 40,000 students in all eight civil parishes. In addition to our own students, the archdiocese provided schooling for hundreds of public and private school students whose places of learning had not reopened. NO STUDENT was turned away from ANY school because of tuition.

Our approach was simple: return children to school. Schools supplied and continue to supply anchors for community restoration and provide stability during very unsettling times. Our philosophy was to open schools to allow families to return, for common sense says a family cannot return to begin restoring the area without having a safe place to send their children where they could receive a quality education.

At one point after the storms, the archdiocese had students displaced to 49 States. We set as a priority and our first level of response the location of our displaced students and teachers. Our major task was to locate them and then relocate them into a Catholic school or assist them with placement in an appropriate private or public school where they settled.

The second phase of our response was re-entry. That is, our Catholic schools had to be re-opened—safely and quickly. Our first schools were reopened in the third week of September. In October, we reopened the first schools in Orleans Parish. As the population returned and facilities were made ready, schools were gradually opened to accommodate the growing student population into March 2006.

The Federal aid attained for private schools and private school students through the tremendous efforts of Senators Landrieu and Vitter along with the entire Louisiana delegation and the great support of Senators visiting our State to witness first-hand Katrina's wide-spread devastation has been extremely helpful to the Catholic schools and our families in recovery. This landmark legislation that broke the barriers of public and private for the sake of children is to be commended.

Thanks to the immense legislative efforts on behalf of schools throughout the New Orleans area, our displaced students, many of whom lost everything, were eligible for tuition reimbursements totaling \$3 million. This funding also provided relief to schools who did not take tuition from students who could not afford to pay. Our schools are also eligible for \$20 million in Restart funding which will help pay to replace lost data, textbooks, computers and other classroom supplies necessary to the learning environment. Federal funding also made it possible for the Board of Regents for the State of Louisiana to create the Return to Learn Program which will provide \$1,000 financial aid awards to eligible high school seniors entering State colleges and universities in the fall as well as students returning to these institutions. These are just a few examples of the ways cooperation has benefited the archdiocese and the entire area's recovery.

We expect, and hope, to increase our student population in the fall with the opening of more schools, both elementary and secondary, throughout the area. We know that it is schools that bring back families and prepare children to become leaders. We are, as before Katrina and Rita, committed to providing a quality Catholic edu-

cation to anyone who wants it, for we do not educate children because they are Catholic, we educate children because we are Catholic.

Thank you for the time to speak with you and for all of your work on our behalf.

Senator ALEXANDER. Thank you, Father.

Ms. Wallin.

Ms. WALLIN. My name is Carole Wallin, the Deputy Superintendent of Education. Cecil Picard, the State Superintendent, was not able to come today, so on his behalf I want to thank you for allowing us to talk to you today.

I want to start out also by saying how much, how grateful we were and how thankful we were for our two Senators, Senator Vitter, Senator Landrieu, and our congressional delegation and their staffs who supported us. Senator Landrieu lived in our office day after day after the storms, meeting with us, trying to find out where we were, trying to help us. Her staff listened to us every single day on the telephone. That kind of support in the midst of the crisis that our State and our schools and our kids were going through will never be forgotten, and I just want to say publicly how much that really meant to us as we had a whole lot of work to do immediately.

I'd also like to say that, unsurprising to us—and I was asked to give the statewide view, so just quickly I'd like to say: Unsurprising to us was how the education community stepped up to take care of our kids and our children. Like Senator Alexander said, the first thing we asked was for people across the country to take in our kids and take in our teachers, and they never asked; they did. Our colleagues from Alabama and Texas, Mississippi and Florida called us up and said: "We're just going to take the kids." Our people across our State took our kids, never asked, "where am I going to get the money," "how am I going to open the schools," "when are the textbooks coming?" They welcomed our kids and they welcomed our families, and I have to say especially that the gentleman that is sitting next to me is a prime example of the way the community, whoever they were, the education people take care of their own, and if we didn't know it before we know it now, because every single day of those first awful weeks that is what we experienced. It really will tell you deep in the heart of people in this State how much education means and how much our kids mean to us, and we are absolutely committed to going forward and making this a better place.

I was also asked to talk just a bit about the numbers of our kids and also the money that we've received. Our estimates right after the storm as soon as we could get them showed that about 72,000 of our children were in 48 States across the Nation. We also found that 42,000 of our students were scattered across our Congress. Six months later, we still have 65,000 of our kids across the country and we have about 35,000 of our kids still scattered across the State. So that will tell you the impact of these storms and the difficulty that we have all had in getting a grip of what has happened to them and trying to figure out what will happen to them.

I'd like to talk just briefly about the money, as my time line is down. I know you have an interest in that. Let me say four things. We are tremendously grateful how quickly you got us the money. Two, the funds have been allocated. Funds are being spent. We

have challenges and will have ongoing challenges for a while getting this money spent. Many of the districts have. We will work through those challenges. But I will tell you, as good educators we will spend every penny appropriately and we will probably be back for more.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Butler-Wallin follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF CAROLE BUTLER-WALLIN

State Superintendent Cecil Picard is unable to meet with you today so on his behalf I want to thank you for this opportunity to talk with you today.

As all of us work frantically to get our schools repaired, our students accounted for and registered, principals, teachers, and support workers recruited and hired, it is difficult to think back 11 months ago to the destructive hurricanes that ravaged our districts, wiped out our neighborhoods and communities and changed forever the lives of many of our citizens.

The first few weeks and months after the storms we focused on finding schools for our displaced children, which we believed would provide much needed stability and structure to their lives, and helping our displaced teachers and educators find jobs.

Not surprising, the education community, in Louisiana and across the country opened their hearts and their arms to our children, their families and our educators.

They did not ask how they would pay for opening additional schools, hiring additional teachers, buying more books and desks, providing transportation and food . . . they just took our kids in and gave them a place that was safe and a place to learn, while adults worked out the other details.

I remember talking to the State superintendent from Alabama, Joe Morton, and the superintendents from Mississippi and Texas and Florida as soon as we had phone service and the first things they said to us was, "we are not concerned about records and information . . . we are taking in the kids."

Our first estimates showed us that 72,000 Louisiana students were displaced in 48 States, with the bulk of them in Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, and Texas. There were 42,000 students displaced to other districts within Louisiana. Six months later we still had 65,000 students displaced in other States. And 35,000 remain displaced throughout Louisiana.

The steadfast support we received from our two Senators: Senator Landrieu, Senator Vitter and their staffs along with the rest of our Louisiana Delegation has been crucial to the work that we are doing. They have remained in constant contact with us and helped us navigate through the uncharted waters of Federal agencies we are not accustomed to working with. They have never turned down a request for assistance and we have had many. We will never forget their assistance and advice and the time they have spent working for us.

We are accustomed to working with the Department of Education and we have received tremendous support through the leadership of Secretary Spellings and her staff.

Her appointment of Henry Johnson, a long time friend and colleague of the State Superintendent, as her personal liaison to our agency, her announcement in December awarding \$20 million dollars for the support and start up of charter schools, and the Department's support of the Hurricane Education Recovery Act funds have been so important to us.

I would like to give you a brief statewide overview of the impact of the Hurricane Education Recovery Act funds for Louisiana: as you know HERA funds are made up of three pots of money: Impact Aid for Displaced Students, The Assistance for Homeless Youth, and the Restart School Operations Program.

IMPACT AID FOR DISPLACED STUDENTS PROGRAM

- Louisiana has to date awarded to school districts and nonpublic schools a total of \$197 million.
- \$174.1 million to public school districts and \$22.9 million to nonpublic schools affected by the storms.
- Another \$15 million is currently being processed for release to increase the per pupil amounts to \$1,095 for regular education and \$1,369 for special education.
- On average, for each quarter of the year, public school districts reported approximately 41,658 regular education and special education students.
- All 68 public school systems had displaced students.

Funds to public school systems:

- Of the \$174.1 million dollars . . . \$73.6 million or 42 percent of the funds has been allocated to public schools in the New Orleans metropolitan area:
 - Recovery School district 1.7 million
 - Orleans 12.6 million
 - Jefferson 36 million
 - Plaquemines 3.1 million
 - St. Bernard 4.3 million
 - St. Tammany 15.9 million

Funds to nonpublic schools:

- Nonpublic schools reported an average of 6,611 regular and special education students per each quarter this year.
- A total of \$22.9 million has been awarded to nonpublic schools affected by the hurricanes.
- Approximately \$12.6 million or 55 percent of these funds are going to schools in the greater New Orleans area.

Use of funds:

- School districts and schools may use these funds for operational expenditures to support activities related to both displaced and nondisplaced students.
- Some examples of how these moneys are being used include salaries in schools enrolling displaced students, curricular material and classroom supplies, basic instructional services and reasonable transportation costs.

ASSISTANCE TO HOMELESS YOUTH PROGRAM

- Louisiana has awarded \$1.5 million to assist with homeless youth.
- All students displaced because of the storms were eligible for these funds.
- These moneys were allocated to 68 school systems and 13 charter and lab schools.
- These funds have just recently gone out and districts are writing plans on how funds will be expended.

Use of funds:

- These funds are being used for identification of displaced students, enrollment assistance, supplies, and assessment and school placement assistance.

RESTART SCHOOL OPERATIONS PROGRAM

- Louisiana was awarded a total of \$445 million in Restart funds.
- A total of \$245.6 million has been awarded to public and nonpublic school districts at this time.

Public school funds:

- \$186.4 million or 90 percent of these funds has been allocated to schools in the New Orleans metropolitan area:
 - Recovery School District 121.7 million
 - Orleans 12.5 million
 - Jefferson 13.3 million
 - Plaquemines 7.3 million
 - St. Bernard 20.6 million
 - St. Tammany 11 million

Nonpublic school funds:

- A total of 37.9 million has been awarded to nonpublic schools affected by the hurricanes.
- Approximately 34 million or 97 percent of these funds are being provided to schools in the greater New Orleans area.

Remaining Restart Funds:

- We are currently developing criteria to allocate the remaining \$193.5 million.
- Our goal is to gather data to ensure we identify and target those schools and districts that were hardest hit by the storms and will need the most help in recovery.

Challenges and solutions:

- We have been faced with a number of challenges in administering this program.
- Gathering detailed information on the devastation has delayed the allocation of these funds.
- School Districts and schools were struggling even 4 and 5 months after the storms to grasp the enormity of the devastation and quantify it.

- Assessments of the damages were slow and time consuming.
- Competing priorities added to the delays in identifying needs.
- Getting schools open and serving students were foremost on their minds.
- Providing services to the nonpublic schools has also been a challenge for us.
- The law requires that all services be provided by a public entity.
- Local school districts face their own struggles and taking on the task for the nonpublic schools would have been problematic and slowed down their progress as well.
- So we believed the solution was for the State to take on the administrative role for all nonpublic schools and their allocated funds.
- We took this on in the midst of State mid-year budget cuts and a loss of agency positions . . . but we felt it was the right thing to do.

Use of the funds:

- School Districts have primarily used these moneys for operating expenses that are allowable under the law, i.e., the local portion of salary and benefits, supplies and equipment, and purchased services.
- This has freed general funds dollars that can now be used for repairs and renovations.
- Nonpublic schools have primarily used these moneys to replace instructional supplies and equipment lost from the storms.

As you drive along our gulf coast or make your way through our cities and communities impacted by the storms you know we have miles to go and promises to keep.

But, we remain determined and focused on our efforts to assist our districts and schools across this State in recovery and rebuilding, in a manner that will provide our children with better opportunities for an education they need and deserve.

Senator ALEXANDER. Thank you very much.

Dr. Jarvis.

Dr. JARVIS. Good afternoon. I'm Robin Jarvis. I'm the Superintendent of the Recovery School District. I appreciate the opportunity to speak with you this afternoon about our efforts here in New Orleans.

As Senator Burr said, we have a unique opportunity here to build a world-class public education system that can be the model for urban education in this country. We've been very busy over the past few months in getting schools open, getting them restarted, and moving forward. The activities we've had to engage in have included repairing schools, restaffing schools, replacing the furniture, the equipment, the textbooks, and other curriculum materials, as well as planning and developing curriculum and professional development for the teachers and principals we are hiring.

The restart funds that you've provided have been critical in helping us get all of those tasks under way and moving forward as quickly as possible. As we're doing the short-term rebuilding work, we're also laying a foundation for the long-term transformation of public education in New Orleans by investing in developing talent and leadership at all levels, and we're doing that through our work with national consultants, people like Greg Richmond of the National Association of Charter School Authorizers, Michael Fullin of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, Dr. Alan Coulter with the National Center for Special Education Accountability Monitoring. We're finding the best and we're using them as our resource to build a better educational system here in New Orleans.

We are also working very hard to create collaborative relationships with our charter schools. As I've watched the charter school movement grow across this country over the last few years, we've really seen antagonistic and competitive relationships grow between charter schools and districts. We have an opportunity to

build a different model in New Orleans. We are relying heavily on charter schools, and to me it's about the children of New Orleans, not about who's operating their schools. It is critical that all of our schools be successful, the charter schools and the schools that we operate, and so we plan to work hand in hand with the charter schools to ensure their success and to provide them the support and assistance that they need to be successful. In doing that, we've worked with New Schools for New Orleans that provides support for them in order to provide them that assistance.

We also understand the fundamental role that public education plays in rebuilding the city and the State. So we are working collaboratively with the Orleans Parish School System and the citizens of Orleans in their rebuilding and neighborhood planning efforts. The schools are a critical part of each community and we need to be a part of the planning process.

I do want to say something about an issue that seems to come up periodically, and I may run a little over my time. But there's been a lot of issues, I guess, around the fact that Superintendent Picard did not go out and find a nationally recognized superintendent to lead these efforts and chose instead to bring in somebody who was on his own staff, who had worked in accountability, title I, and a number of other areas within State education.

What I would say to you is, when we started these efforts, I too believed that we needed to go out and seek a world-class superintendent who had proven themselves somewhere else. However, after 8 months of engaging in this work I now realize that really right now New Orleans needs somebody who understands the tragedy that we've all been through, who understands the work that has to be done, and who is a Louisianan. While I wasn't raised here in Louisiana, my family's roots go back to the 1700s here in this State and I was born here and came back here after college and after high school in North Carolina to really be part of my State. I'm committed to rebuilding this State. I'm committed to having my family remain here, and it's really about the rebuilding, not about me. So that's really critical right now. That's the short-term answer. It may not be the long-term answer for New Orleans, but it is an answer for us right now, and it's important that whoever's here doing this work really understands what needs to happen here and really understands the culture and the people of New Orleans and of Louisiana.

So I do want to end with another comment, a quote from Andy Hargraves and Michael Fullin. They say in one of their books that "Hope is rooted in the confidence that the direction one is taking makes sense, even if the obstacles seem insurmountable." As the Superintendent of the Recovery School District, I have confidence that the direction and actions we're taking to rebuild education in the city of New Orleans makes sense and are grounded in research on urban education and systemic reform. At times our challenges seem insurmountable. I sleep about 4 hours a night right now. I know the resiliency and determination of the people of Louisiana, of New Orleans, and so I have the hope and the confidence that we are going to rebuild a model urban education system in this city and we are going to show the country what can be done. With the bright people, the resources, and support, the Recovery School Dis-

trict will meet the challenges and ultimately we will help Orleans Parish rank among the best performing school districts in this country.

[The prepared statement of Dr. Jarvis follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF ROBIN JARVIS, PH.D.

INTRODUCTION

Almost 11 months after the devastating Hurricane Katrina ravaged New Orleans, there is still great uncertainty about how and when the city itself will recover. This uncertainty and many other circumstances impact our schools, particularly those in the custody of the State, the Recovery School District (RSD) schools. These ambiguities will affect how the RSD schools will be opened and operated.

The RSD's approach to responding to these uncertainties and changing circumstances will require vigilance by the RSD and a spirit of flexibility. However, the RSD must move forward with providing education immediately and with plotting a course for the future. A course that leads to improved outcomes for children and to sustainability of educational reforms enacted.

In the wake of Hurricane Katrina, there is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to create a fundamentally better public education system in New Orleans. As a result of legislation passed in 2005, authority for 107 of the lowest-performing public schools in Orleans Parish was transferred to the RSD. The RSD is focused on opening fundamentally better schools for the returning students, meeting the specific educational needs of every returning student, and laying the groundwork for the creation of a world-class public education system in Orleans Parish.

Furthermore, the RSD understands the fundamental role public education plays in the rebuilding of the city. Therefore, the RSD is also committed to working with the city of New Orleans, the Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB), and the citizens of Orleans Parish to collaboratively develop and implement a vision of public education that will create a public school system that produces graduates prepared and committed to helping with the rebuilding and revitalization of New Orleans.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Even before the devastation of Hurricane Katrina, the Orleans Parish School System had struggled for years with low academic performance and continuing financial and organizational struggles. As a result of the chronic low academic performance, the district had been identified by the State as a District in Academic Crisis and had failed to meet District AYP as required by the No Child Left Behind Act. Compared to the 100 largest school districts in the United States, New Orleans was among the worst performing and had the seventh-highest drop-out rate—despite having a better-than-average teacher/student ratio and comparable average spending per student. Financial mismanagement and a lack of internal controls had led to Federal investigations, indictments, and a Federal audit finding questioning the use of \$71 million in title I funds. These indicators and others clearly provided the signs of an urban school system in crisis even before Katrina's impact.

Measures of Performance

Poor Academic Performance

In 2004–2005, 63 percent of schools in the New Orleans Public School system (NOPS) were deemed academically unacceptable, whereas only 8 percent of schools across Louisiana were academically unacceptable. This fact illustrates that a substantial and disproportionate number of schools in New Orleans were failing to provide the quality education that the children of New Orleans deserved. The scores in the table below from the Louisiana Educational Assessment Program show that poor academic performance in New Orleans was systemic; students across various grades tested significantly below acceptable levels.

	2005 Percent Basic or Higher					
	LEAP Fourth Grade		LEAP Eighth Grade		Graduate Exit Exam (GEE)	
	Math	English	Math	English	Math	English
New Orleans	41%	44%	35%	29%	39%	32%
Rest of Louisiana	63%	66%	55%	54%	65%	65%

Beyond these statistics, the following startling facts illustrate the degree of the overall low academic performance in New Orleans:

- Only 15 to 25 percent of elementary public schools had 50 percent or more of students achieving above minimum basic proficiency in math and English.
- Only 1 out of 19 public high schools in NOPS had an average higher than the national average on the ACT.
- A three-point gap in average ACT scores existed between schools in NOPS and all schools in Louisiana.

Large Achievement Gap

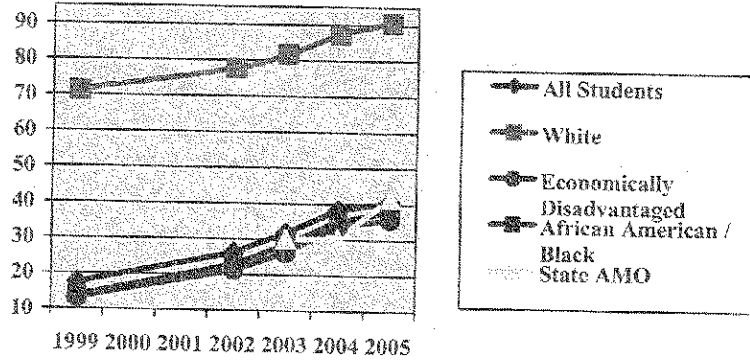
Pre-Hurricane Katrina, achievement gaps persisted among schools in the NOPS. The following statistics help illustrate the reality of the situation:¹

- Between African-American and Caucasian students, an achievement gap of 50.6 points existed in English and 52.8 points in math.
- The achievement gap between African-American and Caucasian students in New Orleans was twice as high as that for all of Louisiana.

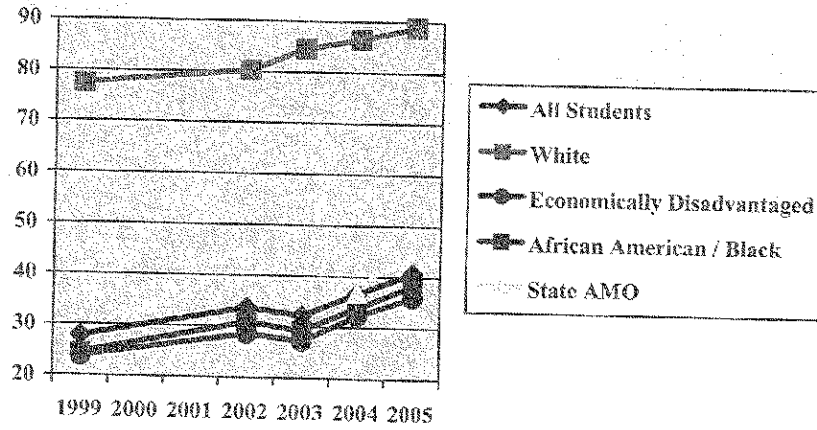
Furthermore, as the graphs below illustrate, the situation for those subgroups that make up the majority of the enrollment in Orleans Parish public schools was dire. While their performance was improving gradually, it was not improving at a rate rapid enough to stay ahead of the State's Annual Measurable Objective in either English/Language Arts or Math.

¹Orleans District Accountability Report, 2003–2006.

Mathematics Subgroup Performance



English/Language Arts Subgroup Performance



Low high-school graduation rates

In the pre-Hurricane Katrina education system, a select cluster of public, private, and parochial schools out-performed the vast majority of public schools. New Orleans's schools showed limited achievement on the graduate exit exam (GEE):

- Only 30 to 35 percent of schools achieved at least basic proficiency on the GEE English and math sections, and only four schools achieved basic proficiency or higher for at least 80 percent of students (of 19 high schools reporting results for both English and math).
- Student retention, that is, the percent of students who are required to repeat their grade level at the 12th-grade level was 15 percent in Orleans Parish, compared to only 5 percent across the State.²

History of Inequity

A pre-Hurricane Katrina assessment of Orleans Parish schools suggested that some inequity existed between the make-up of the student body in NOPS and that of other schools in the district:

- Pre-Hurricane Katrina city demographics indicated that 67 percent of the citizens of New Orleans were African-American and 28 percent were white.³ However, 93 percent of the students in NOPS schools were African-American and only 4 percent were white.⁴
- While only 40 percent of students attending schools across New Orleans were eligible for free/reduced lunch, 74 percent of the student body in NOPS schools were eligible.⁵
- These gaps between public and private/parochial schools did not appear to be closing. Enrollment in public schools in Orleans Parish had fallen by approximately 20 percent, while there was still a moderate increase in private and parochial school enrollment.⁶

*Disadvantaged Inputs: Demographic and Socioeconomic Factors**High Poverty Rates Among the Student Population*

Prior to Hurricane Katrina, 40 percent of children in Orleans Parish lived below the poverty line.⁷ Statistics on median household income further indicate that Orleans citizens earned 35 percent less per year than the average individual in the United States.

High Illiteracy Rates Among the General Population

Prior to Hurricane Katrina, one in four citizens in Orleans Parish had not completed high school, and 40 percent of adults could not read beyond a 5th-grade level.

*An ineffective school system**Ineffective Governance and Frequent Turnover in Leadership*

Even before Hurricane Katrina, a history of mismanagement and ineffective governance at NOPS led the school district to nearly go bankrupt:⁸

- NOPS had \$265 million in legacy debt and a severe revenue shortfall from which to fund all the schools. In an attempt to cut costs, seven schools were closed just before Hurricane Katrina.
- Up to 4,300 of the 7,000 checks issued in any given pay period were inaccurate.
- On December 16, 2004, the FBI issued indictments against 11 people for criminal offenses against the OPSB related to financial mismanagement.
- In 2003–2004, expenditures exceeded revenues by \$25 million—and the shortfalls had been an increasing trend since the late 1990s.⁹
- The budget that the OPSB approved before Hurricane Katrina had a \$48 million shortfall.
- The district underestimated salaries and benefits by \$11 million.

Frequent turnovers in leadership may have also made it difficult to maintain order in the school system.

²Orleans District Composite Report, 2003–2004.

³Orleans Parish quick facts from U.S. Bureau of the Census.

⁴Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, Small Learning Communities District Information.

⁵2005–2006 Free/Reduced Lunch Subgroup Performance Scores (GPS).

⁶Louisiana Annual Financial and Statistical Reports 1998–1999 to 2003–2004.

⁷U.S. Census and Orleans Parish District Composite Report.

⁸Alvarez and Marsal.

⁹Louisiana Department of Education annual statistical and financial reports, 1998 to 2004.

In July 2005, due to the lack of internal controls found in the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Inspector General's audit, management of the school district's finances was handed over to a financial management and turnaround company, Alvarez & Marsal. Alvarez & Marsal's analysis revealed a number of pre-existing financial circumstances, among them:

- An outstanding long-term debt of \$265 million.
- \$35 million in annual debt servicing.
- \$26 million in accrued liabilities payable.

Poorly Maintained Facilities

Years of neglect at NOPS facilities have created a huge backlog of deferred maintenance issues and unsafe conditions. In total, the estimated cost of bringing the buildings up to pre-Hurricane Katrina building codes is \$52 million. This figure does not include the cost of deferred maintenance items that may not be related to building code violations but are nonetheless necessary to create safe, healthy, and aesthetically pleasing educational environments for the children of Orleans Parish. Not only were the facilities in poor condition, but they were severely underinsured, requiring the OPSB to pay \$165 million in penalties (assuming that 100 percent of the facilities are rebuilt), under the FEMA reimbursement requirements.

The Direct Impact of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita

Hurricanes Katrina and Rita devastated a school system that was already in severe distress. The current estimates of the cost of physical damages to the school facilities and infrastructure is \$800 million. The FEMA match requirements will cost the OPSB \$55 million (assuming that 100 percent of the facilities are rebuilt).

THE RECOVERY SCHOOL DISTRICT

The RSD is an organization dedicated to helping struggling schools to turn around their performance. The district is operated by the Louisiana Department of Education (LDE).

Establishment of the RSD

Legislation passed during the 2003 Regular Legislative Session calls for the takeover of schools that are determined to have "failed" under the school and district accountability program. For the purpose of the original legislation, a failed school is one that has been identified as being "academically unacceptable" for at least 4 years. The law allows for the operation of a special State school district, called the Recovery School District, to be administered by the LDE and subject to the authority of the Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE).

Legislation (Act No. 35) passed in the November 2005 Special Session of the Louisiana Legislature expanded the definition of a failed school to include schools that scored below the State average and that operated in school systems which had been declared to be in "Academic Crisis"—that is, with at least one school labeled as failing for 4 or more years.

As a result of this legislation, 107 of Orleans Parish's struggling public schools were transferred to the authority of the RSD. The RSD is now working in partnership with the people of New Orleans to reopen these schools, to welcome students and families back, and to build a world-class public education system in Orleans Parish.

MISSION AND GOALS

Mission

The mission of the RSD is to create a world-class public education system in New Orleans, in which every decision focuses on the best interests of the children.

Main Objectives and Principles

Our overall objective is to make the most of this once-in-a-lifetime chance to reinvent public education in New Orleans. It is our hope that by creating a world-class public education system, we will attract students, families, and businesses back to New Orleans; rekindle our neighborhoods; and renew our culture.

The RSD will dedicate its time, money, and people to focus on the following principles:

Principle 1: Student Achievement—The RSD is Committed to Promoting Success for Every Student Through the Following Goals

a. Baseline School Performance Scores and Sub-group Performance levels (per the Louisiana accountability system) will be established for all RSD schools following

the 2006–2007 school year using data from the spring 2006 (if available) and spring 2007 assessments.

b. Schools in the RSD will, on average, grow at a rate faster than the State average.

c. Each school in the RSD and the RSD as a whole will grow a minimum of 20 points from the baseline set following the spring 2007 assessment to the spring 2011 assessment. Any school not meeting this goal will be recommended to the Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) for a change in management.

d. The RSD will increase the percent of students scoring basic or above by 10 percent per year based on the spring 2007 assessment baseline.

e. The RSD will close the achievement gap in RSD schools using the spring 2007 baseline data to set measurable goals for each year.

Principle 2: Quality Leadership—The RSD is Committed to Providing Quality Leadership at all Levels

a. Select high-quality school operators for any Type 5 charter school in the district.

b. Select, hire, and develop strong academic leaders for leadership positions in RSD-operated schools and district leadership positions. The RSD will seek to recruit the brightest and best academic leaders from within the ranks of former Orleans Parish employees, from within the State of Louisiana, and from across the country.

c. Select, hire, and develop qualified, competent, and skilled teachers and other staff for instructional positions in RSD-operated schools. The RSD will seek to recruit the brightest and best teachers and other staff for instructional personnel from within the ranks of former Orleans Parish employees, from within the State of Louisiana, and from across the country.

d. For RSD-operated schools, create a comprehensive professional-development program and professional learning communities at the school and system levels that will increase the number of teachers and staff members who meet highly qualified standards specified by the No Child Left Behind Act. Offer charter schools the opportunity to participate in this program if they desire.

e. Create a performance-based compensation structure that rewards school staff members in RSD-operated schools for meeting or exceeding school-performance targets.

f. Create and improve a method for effectively evaluating the quality of the leaders and teachers in RSD-operated schools before they are hired and during their performance. Support will be provided to improve performance, and successful staff members will be rewarded. If a teacher fails even after receiving support, he or she will not be allowed to continue teaching.

Principle 3: Parental and Community Collaboration—The RSD is Committed to Developing a Strong Model of Parental and Community Collaboration and to Creating a new Public Story for Education in Orleans Parish

a. Increase two-way communication with parents and the community.

b. Develop community and business partnerships with the RSD and its schools.

c. Increase parental engagement that results in higher performance by students.

d. Engage with community and key stakeholders in an inclusive planning process for the RSD.

e. Annually assess and report the perceptions (the satisfaction and dissatisfaction) of community stakeholders, parents, and certified support staff.

Principle 4: Transparency and Accountability—The RSD is Committed to Ensuring Transparency Regarding its Processes and Practices and Accountability (at all levels)

a. Implement the Louisiana School and District Accountability System in the RSD.

b. Implement an accountability system for charter schools in the RSD.

c. Annually report fiscal accountability at school and district levels.

d. Report regulation and compliance with local, State, and Federal laws.

e. Report on equity and responsiveness to key communities.

Principle 5: Equal Access and Equity—The RSD is Committed to Ensuring Equal Access to Resources for all Schools and Students as Well as Equity in Course Offerings, Programs, and Services

a. Create safe, student-centered learning environments.

b. Work to ensure that all schools have the funding, facilities, equipment, and resources required to meet the needs of their students.

- c. Perform and report annual audits of access to, and the success of, course offerings, programs, and services in the RSD and each of its schools.
- d. Deliver resources to ensure that schools possess the resources necessary to achieve equity in the provision of course offerings, programs, and services that will support and ensure higher achievement among students.
- e. Accommodate all the students who are eligible to attend RSD public schools.
- f. Give parents and students the opportunity to choose from among available school options.

Principle 6: Recovery School District Charter Schools—The RSD is Committed to Ensuring That Charter Schools in the District are of the Highest Possible Quality by Ensuring Both Support and Autonomy for the Schools

- a. Support the autonomy of charter schools, offering them the same support that other schools receive, assessing their progress, and rigorously holding them accountable.
- b. Make all RSD charter schools open-access schools.

Principle 7: Relationship with the New Orleans Public School System and the Orleans Parish School Board—The RSD is Committed to Developing a Collaborative Relationship With the OPSB to Ensure the Provision of High-Quality Educational Opportunities for all Students in Orleans Parish

- a. The State superintendent of education, RSD superintendent, and other staff will schedule regular meetings with the OPSB president and OPSS superintendent and staff. The purpose of these meetings will be to seek collaborative opportunities for the districts that are in the best interests of the children and families of Orleans Parish.
- b. The RSD will work with the OPSB to ensure clear communication with parents and the community.

Types of Public Schools in the RSD

In order to address the needs of all students and to allow the maximum choice for parents and students, the RSD will include three types of public schools.

RSD-Operated Schools

RSD-operated schools will be administered directly by the RSD and will operate under procedures that are developed by RSD staff and approved, as appropriate, by the BESE. All RSD-operated schools will be open-access schools—none will have selective admission policies. Staff members in these schools will be hired by the RSD and will be State employees within the district. The RSD will determine the process for selecting staff, salary schedules, and school calendars. In order to ensure their accountability for student achievement, staff members within these schools will be held to specific academic performance standards that will be outlined in their employment contracts.

To date, the RSD has opened three RSD-operated schools: Craig Elementary, Banneker Elementary, and Clark Senior High School.

Type 5 Charter Schools

These schools will be authorized by the BESE and will be overseen by the RSD. As with RSD-operated schools, Type 5 charter schools are public schools required to maintain open-admission policies. But unlike RSD-operated schools, these schools will have significant autonomy in their operations, as provided by the Louisiana Charter School Law. These schools will be empowered to develop their own staff-selection process, salary schedule, other staff benefits, curriculum, and other policies and procedures. Through contractual arrangements, Type 5 charter schools will be held to specific performance targets and benchmarks, and they may also be required to implement certain policies and procedures approved by the BESE for the operation of all RSD schools.

Type 5 charter schools will be authorized through a rigorous process developed by the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA). The authorization process includes reviewing all applications to assess compliance with State and Federal laws as well as to assess expertise in school governance, finance, curriculum, and other areas critical to the success of charter schools. National experts in school operation in general—and in charter school operation specifically—will be involved in reviewing charter school applications in Orleans Parish. This step will ensure that the only applications that are approved are those submitted by high-quality charter schools that have the capacity for long-term success.

PROGRESS TO DATE

So far, the RSD has made significant progress in creating the capacity and infrastructure to support students returning to public schools in New Orleans. Over the course of the spring 2006 semester and into this summer, in addition to opening and operating three schools, the RSD also worked on the following additional tasks necessary for the rebuilding of the school system:

- Coordinated the review of 43 charter applications with the National Association of Charter School Authorizers that resulted in the approval of an additional 10 charter schools to open in 2006–2007.
- Completed the process to transition an additional six operating charter schools from OPSB to the RSD.
- Worked with Alvarez and Marsal to coordinate the FEMA reimbursement, construction management, and content procurement processes to re-open an additional 33 schools in 2006–2007.
- Began work on a shared services model that will be available to all schools and will include:
 - Transportation,
 - Food services,
 - Custodial and maintenance services,
 - Security,
 - Pupil-appraisal services,
 - Some special-education services (including occupational therapy, physical therapy, and nursing),
 - Professional development,
 - Leadership development, and
 - Facilities planning and management.
- Conducted public outreach through the following activities:
 - Toll-free hotline with trained staff answering questions.
 - RSD Web site to inform RSD of returning students and to provide students with information on which schools are open.
 - Media channels including radio announcements and interviews with television, radio, and newspaper.
 - Communication to individuals residing in FEMA trailers through distribution of flyers in housing packets with information about the LDE Web site and toll free phone number.
 - School campus yard signs with contact information for student enrollment.
 - Involvement in neighborhood meetings, answering questions related to school openings and the RSD process.
 - National newspaper ads, radio and TV announcements to inform New Orleans residents across the country about the 2006–2007 school registration process.
 - RSD listserv newsletter to inform stakeholders in New Orleans, across the State, and around the Nation of the status and activities of the Recovery School District.
- Developed an online school registration process that will allow displaced New Orleans residents seeking to enroll their child in school for the beginning of the 2006–2007 school year to do so via the Internet, through a toll-free number with operators to complete the registration process for them, through three walk-in registration centers in the city of New Orleans.
 - Conducted on-going recruitment, advertising, and selection processes for school staff, including principals, assistant principals, and teachers, designed to ensure quality of instructional staff.
 - Developed curriculum for all grade levels based on the Louisiana Grade Level Expectations and the Louisiana Comprehensive Curriculum.

STRATEGIES TO ENSURE SUCCESS

Throughout these activities, the commitment of everyone involved has been to ensure that every child receives a quality education and that the schools of New Orleans are rebuilt in such a way as to re-engage the community in public education. To ensure success, certain key strategies have been identified and will be carefully designed for both RSD-Operated Schools and RSD Charter Schools.

Actions to Ensure Success in RSD-Operated Schools

- Maintain high standards for selection of all staff through a rigorous selection process including pre-interview screening and a rigorous interview process.

- Require all principals to be at work on-time and for the full day every day. Take appropriate disciplinary action against principals who do not meet these expectations.
- Require all teachers to be at work on-time and for the full day every day. Take appropriate disciplinary action against teachers who do not meet these expectations.
- Contact parents of any child who is absent on each day of absence. Conduct home visits with parents of any child who has missed 5 days of school. Make referrals to appropriate agencies for students with chronic absenteeism problems.
- Reduce number of staff in central office and increase number of school-based staff providing onsite curriculum, instruction, and social support at school sites. Instead of providing workspace in the RSD central office to curriculum facilitators and other staff intended to provide support and assistance to schools, these staff will be housed at school sites and be directly supervised by the school principals to ensure that they are providing the support and assistance needed at the schools. These staff will be required to spend 80 percent of their work time in classrooms and with teachers providing support and assistance in planning instruction, modeling lessons, coaching teachers, or providing counseling or instruction to individual or small groups of students based on the job title and responsibilities of the individual.
- Implement a standard curriculum in all schools that is based on an intervention model that assesses each student's progress at least monthly and provides for targeted instruction for any skill or concept with which the student is experiencing difficulty.
- Focus on reading and math at grades Pre-K–3 with integration of other content areas and fine arts as appropriate.
- Provide an Advisor/Advisee program in late elementary/middle grades that allows students to gain a full understanding of career options and planning as well as the educational requirements to successfully pursue their future interests. This program will include the designation of a single adult within the school who will serve as each student's point of contact for counseling, career planning, and course scheduling for middle and high school students. Research has shown that it is critical at this phase of the educational process for students to have a direct connection with a single adult in the school who knows them and is familiar with them to assist them in their course planning and provide counseling and assistance as needed.
- High School Design that includes Career Academies in each high school in which students can pursue Industry-Based Certifications and/or a college preparatory curriculum simultaneously.
- Develop Freshmen Academies at all high schools to provide specific support and instruction to 9th graders that will allow them to catch up to grade level proficiency if necessary. These will be designed with the assistance of Green Dot Schools which operates 5 high schools in the Los Angeles Unified School System that successfully provide 9th graders with instruction that takes them from a 3rd or 4th grade reading level at the beginning of 9th grade to on-grade level proficiency by the end of the year.
- Develop programs that allow for dual enrollment at community colleges and universities as well as Advanced Placement and Honors courses.
- Availability of alternative schools that will maintain students and return to traditional school settings if desired.
- Implement Schoolwide Positive Behavior Support (SWPBS) in every school in order to ensure that the appropriate and clear expectations, supports, and reinforcements are in place to increase the opportunities and rewards for appropriate behavior and reduce the opportunities and time lost on inappropriate behavior.
- Reduce the number of removals from classrooms or school due to in and out of school suspensions or expulsions through the appropriate implementation of SWPBS, the appropriate process for suspensions and expulsions according to State law, and the provision of strong alternative schools and programs. Schools will not be allowed to counsel students out of school without following the appropriate procedures and referring these students to an alternative school. All expulsion hearings will be handled by a hearing officer designated by the RSD Superintendent.
- RSD and LDE staff are currently working with Dr. Wayne Sailor of the University of Kansas, Dr. Alan Coulter of the National Center for Special Education Accountability Monitoring, and Dr. Phil Wilson with the LSUHSC Human Development Center on the implementation of the Schoolwide Applications Model and three tiered intervention which will support the implementation of both the academic and behavior programs described above. This model will allow for the integration of specialized services for students with disabilities and general education students in need of additional support into the general education curriculum and classrooms.

This work is based on the work of the President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education and the expectations of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004. The plan being developed is a 3-year plan for the start-up and implementation of the model.

- Require principals and assistant principals to conduct a minimum number of classroom walkthrough observations weekly using an RSD designed checklist to ensure that all aspects of the instructional program are being implemented in every classroom and to determine whether teachers need additional support or assistance in implementation of the programs. In addition, principals and assistant principals will be required to maintain visibility around the school campuses through informal visits to classrooms and through maintaining a frequent presence in the hallways and other areas of the school.
- RSD curriculum staff and Superintendent will review classroom walkthrough results with school leadership teams to assist in designing additional supports or assistance needed by the school to ensure implementation of all programs.
- RSD Central office staff including the Superintendent will visit schools frequently and conduct formal walk-through observations using the RSD walk-through observation checklist to double check accuracy of observations by school administrative staff. In addition, RSD Central Office staff including the Superintendent will visit school sites frequently for informal walkthroughs and visits.
- Arrange class schedules so that every teacher will have 1½–2 hours each day for planning and professional development.
- Provide a pupil/teacher ratio appropriate for each grade level.
- Use research-based strategies such as starting school at times research tells us are most conducive for student learning.
- Increase time on task through decreasing transitions during and between classes and reducing interruptions in instructional time.
- Collaborate with Department of Health and Hospitals, Office of Public Health, and Charity Hospital to provide school-based health clinics that are available to all students for physical and mental health screening and care.
- Recognize and respect the culture of the community through the provision of fine arts and music instruction.

Actions to Ensure Success of Charter Schools

- Provide a Charter School Director and Coordinator within the Central Office staff reporting directly to the RSD Superintendent to provide ongoing support with the charter schools.
- Schedule monthly meetings with all charter schools to review and discuss topics of interest or need.
- Collaborate with the National Association for Charter School Authorizers to develop a set of checklists and other tools to monitor the compliance of charter schools with State and Federal requirements as well as their charter contracts. Require corrective action plans of charters that are determined to have areas of noncompliance.
- Collaborate with the National Association for Charter School Authorizers and New Schools for New Orleans to develop a set of checklists and other tools to periodically review the quality of charter school programs and to provide guidance and assistance to charter operators on improving program quality.
- Conduct regular visits to each charter school to monitor activities and to offer support and assistance. These visits will be both formal and informal and will be conducted not only by the Charter School Director and Coordinator, but also by the RSD Superintendent.
- Collaborate with New Schools for New Orleans to provide needed training and assistance to charter school operators.
- Include charter school representatives in planning for 5-year systemwide capacity building model and invite their participation in the professional development provided through the model.
- Invite charter schools to participate in professional development provided to RSD-operated schools.
- Create a Shared Service model by developing contracts for services such as transportation, food service, custodial/maintenance, human resources/financial management so that charter schools can participate in the contracts at cost thereby creating a shared services arrangement that will increase contract scale and reduce costs for all participants.
- Provide specific critical services such as Information Technology infrastructure and networking, student data management system, large scale grant management, and expulsion hearing processes to all charter schools.

SUSTAINABILITY

While the actions described here will result in improved outcomes for students and an improved educational system for the city of New Orleans if they are implemented in each school with integrity, the key issue in all education reform efforts is sustainability. Even after a decade of whole school reform models and 5 years after the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act, we find educators struggling to maintain gains made once a visionary leader or core team of teachers leave or when a shift in student demographics occurs. In order for the gains seen from these reforms to be sustainable, we must think now about the issue of sustainability. As defined by Fullan,¹⁰ “sustainability is the capacity of a system to engage in the complexities of continuous improvement consistent with deep values of human purpose.” Through research, we have learned that sustainability is only possible when there is capacity building throughout the system at all levels that is developed intentionally. To this end, the RSD and OPSB have jointly entered into a partnership with the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, headed by Dr. Michael Fullan, and the Center for Development and Learning in Covington, LA to develop and implement a 5-year plan for systemwide capacity building. This model will be based on the research on systemic reform-based capacity building and will address the 5 levels of each organization that research has shown are critical for success and sustainability of systemwide reform:

- Teachers
- School Leadership Teams
- Principals
- System Capacity Team
- System Leaders

This long-term capacity building effort will provide a common language for all stakeholders within the district regarding systemic cultural change, instruction, and leadership. It will address the following components for all groups above based on their role in the organization.

- Establish a culture of change
- Understand and manage change
- Focus on Quality Teaching and Learning Practices
- Build and Share Knowledge
- Develop Coherence through Planning

Quality teaching and learning practices addressed in the model will include strategies that will help teachers increase the rigor and relevancy of their lessons while engaging students in higher order thinking skills. Instructional practices that will be addressed include, but are not limited to those from the books, *Classroom Instruction That Works* by Robert Marzano, Debra Pickering, and Jane Pollock and *Beyond Monet: The Artful Science of Instructional Integration* by Barrie Bennett and Carol Rolheiser.

CONCLUSION

While Hurricanes Katrina and Rita brought tremendous and often overwhelming devastation to the people of Louisiana, they have also brought a unique and previously unheard of opportunity to rebuild an urban school system from the ground up. While there is much work to be done and the challenges at times seem insurmountable, the staffs of the Louisiana Recovery School District and the Louisiana Department of Education are committed to the vision of a world class public education system for New Orleans. We commit to this challenge not just with a focus on the short-term needs to re-open schools for the coming school year, but with a long-term vision of a successful and sustainable reform that can be used as a model for other school systems across the country.

Senator ALEXANDER. Thank you, Dr. Jarvis.

Mr. Richmond.

Mr. RICHMOND. Good afternoon. My name is Greg Richmond. I'm the President of the National Association of Charter School Authorizers. We're a Chicago-based nonprofit professional membership organization that supports charter school authorizers around the country.

¹⁰Fullan, M. (2005). *Leadership & sustainability*. Thousand Oaks, California: Corwin Press.

An authorizer is an agency that is entrusted to represent the public's interests in the contractual relationship with charter schools. Across the country they are mostly school districts, State education agencies, and universities. Authorizers evaluate applications from organizations wishing to start a school, decide who is approved to open, execute contracts, monitor schools' performance, and decide whether a school's charter is renewed.

Since February my association, NACSA, has been deeply engaged in Louisiana through a contract with the State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education. Today I would just like to comment on four things that I think are going very well in Louisiana's charter school development.

First, earlier this spring the State of Louisiana received applications to start 44 charter schools in New Orleans. My association managed the process for evaluating those applications and made recommendations to the State board. We ran a three-tier evaluation process involving dozens of experienced evaluators from across the country. We looked closely not just at educational plans, but also applicants' plans for school management, governance, community involvement, and finance.

While no application is perfect, we employ a philosophy that all aspects of an application should be strong. Years of experience have taught us that a charter school application is only as strong as its weakest point.

In the end, we recommended 10 applications to the State board, which in turn approved them. I must commend the State board for its steadfast adherence to our evaluation process. In other places around the country, politics sometimes enters into board decisions to approve charter schools. Not here. Although the board members received considerable pressure from some applicants, they stood by the process and only approved applications that were recommended.

Second, we also worked very closely with the board and the department to develop a new accountability framework for charter schools. Louisiana now has an excellent set of clear, objective student performance measures upon which to evaluate each charter school's performance. These performance measures are linked to the State's excellent preexisting accountability system and to the No Child Left Behind Act.

The third area we've been involved in is working closely with the State department's legal staff to develop a strong charter school contract that clearly spells out the school's and the State's rights and responsibilities. Among the highlights of that contract are strong provisions regarding governance, management, and finance. Charter school boards will be required to adopt conflict of interest policies, submit financial disclosure statements and quarterly financial reports, and conduct annual audits. Charter school boards that hire companies to manage their school are required to enter into contracts with those companies that safeguard the public interest.

Fourth and finally, I'll note that that contract also addresses several very important issues related to students. That includes the procedures for conducting open and fair student admissions, the minimum requirements for fair student discipline actions, includ-

ing suspension and expulsions, and the requirements for serving students with disabilities. It is essential that all schools treat students fairly and Louisiana's State-authorized charter schools will do that because of the provisions we have built into their contracts.

Those are just four things that I think are going very well with charter schools in Louisiana and we are very honored to be a part of the effort in this State, and personally the people with me seated at this table to assist in this very important effort which is off to a strong start.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Richmond follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF GREG A. RICHMOND

Good morning Chairman Alexander, Senators and fellow guests of the committee. I am Greg Richmond, the President of the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA). Thank you for inviting me to speak with you this morning.

New Orleans has embraced charter schools as a major component of its efforts to create a new public education system that meets the needs of all children in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. Charter schools are tuition-free public schools created on the basis of an agreement or "charter" between the school and the community. The charter gives the charter school a measure of expanded freedom relative to traditional public schools in return for a commitment to meet higher standards of accountability. Many people believe that these autonomous and accountable schools provide the best opportunity for transforming public education from a centralized, standardized system that has failed many children into a differentiated, entrepreneurial, high-performance system that meets the needs of all students. With bipartisan support, including both Presidents Clinton and Bush, the charter school movement continues to grow at a double-digit rate, adding 300 to 400 schools each year.

My organization is the National Association of Charter School Authorizers. Authorizers are the agencies that are entrusted to represent the public's interest in the contractual relationship with charter schools. Across the country, they are school districts, State education agencies, universities, independent chartering boards, municipalities and even a handful of major nonprofit organizations. Authorizers evaluate applications from organizations wishing to start a charter school, decide who is approved to open, execute contracts defining the school's rights and responsibilities, monitor and evaluate the school's performance and decide whether the school's charter should be renewed.

Our Association is a nonprofit, professional membership association based in Chicago serving the needs of the hundreds of authorizers across the country. Founded in July 2000, NACSA is the oldest national organization that is devoted exclusively to charter schooling. Our mission is to achieve quality charter schools through responsible oversight in the public interest. We do that by setting industry standards, called *Principles and Standards for Quality Charter School Authorizing*, by providing traditional member services, such as conferences and publications, and through direct consulting services to authorizers. Some of our recent clients have included the New York City Department of Education, California Department of Education, Colorado Charter Schools Institute, and the University of Missouri at Kansas City.

Since February, we have been deeply engaged in Louisiana through a contract with the State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education. In that time, I have been impressed by many people at the Department of Education, including State Superintendent Picard, Carole Wallin, Robin Jarvis, Weegie Peabody and Gary Wheat, to name a few. I have also been impressed by the dedication of the members of the State Board, particularly its Chairwoman, Ms. Linda Johnson and Vice Chair Leslie Jacobs.

Today, I would like to describe NACSA's work in Louisiana, tell you how that work is contributing to a system of quality charter schools, and tell you what I see as the major hurdles ahead.

NACSA's work in Louisiana can be divided into three categories: (1) evaluating and recommending proposals for charter schools to open this fall, (2) establishing a framework for the operation of those schools, and (3) preparing for the future.

EVALUATING PROPOSALS

On March 20 of this year, the State of Louisiana received applications to start 44 charter schools in New Orleans. NACSA managed the process for evaluating

those applications and making recommendations to the State Board. With a NACSA staff person, Ms. Shenita Johnson Garrard, assigned to Louisiana on a full-time basis, we ran a three-tier evaluation process, involving dozens of experienced evaluators from across the country. We looked closely, not just at educational plans, but also applicants' plans for school management, governance, community involvement and finance. We brought evaluators from across the country to New Orleans to participate in interviews with the strongest applicants. While no application is perfect, we employed the philosophy that all aspects of an application needed to be strong. Years of experience have taught us that a charter school application is only as strong as its weakest link and we were committed to not recommending schools with weak links.

In the end, we recommended 10 applications to the State Board, which in turn approved them. I must commend the State Board for its steadfast adherence to our evaluation process. In other places around the country, politics sometimes enters into board decisions to approve charter school applications. Not here. Although Board members received considerable pressure from some applicants seeking Board approval despite NACSA's recommendations to the contrary, the State Board stood by the process and only approved applications that we had recommended.

Does that mean I can guarantee the success of every one of the schools we recommended? No, I can't. Due to the extremely difficult conditions in Louisiana and very limited time, we did not know everything we wanted to know about every applicant. In order to get schools approved and open on a timely basis, we had to make decisions with less than perfect information. While that fact does concern me somewhat, it is not an overwhelming concern. For while the initial evaluation and selection process for a charter school is extremely important, it is not as important as the on-going support and monitoring systems that are subsequently put in place.

Here is what we have done since then to establish a framework for the operation of those schools.

ESTABLISHING AN OPERATING FRAMEWORK

First, we worked very closely with the Board and department staff to develop and implement an accountability framework for charter schools approved by the State. This framework was approved by the State Board in May. Louisiana now has an excellent set of objective student performance measures upon which to evaluate each charter school's performance. These performance measures are linked to the State's excellent pre-existing accountability system for all public schools and to the No Child Left Behind Act. Louisiana's prior system for holding charter schools accountable was characterized by subjective site visits, unclear academic expectations, and mystifying timelines and processes. Those problems have been eliminated and Louisiana now has a model accountability system for its charter schools that are authorized by the State.

Second, we worked closely with the State department of education's legal staff to develop a strong boilerplate contract for charter schools that clearly spells out both the school's and the State's rights and responsibilities. A comprehensive, detailed and fair contract is essential. Among the highlights of this new contract are strong provisions regarding charter school governance, management and finance. Charter school boards will be required to adopt conflict of interest policies, submit financial disclosure statements and quarterly financial reports and conduct annual audits. Charter school boards that hire companies to manage their school are required to enter into contracts with those companies that safeguard the public interest.

The contract also addresses several very important issues related to students: the procedures for conducting open and fair student admissions processes; minimum requirements for fair student disciplinary actions, including suspensions and expulsions; and requirements for serving students with disabilities. It is essential that all schools treat students fairly. Louisiana's State-authorized charter schools will do that because of the provisions built into their contracts.

The final piece of the operational framework is a set of requirements that each approved school must fulfill before it can open its doors this fall. These conditions will ensure that the school is operating professionally and responsibly. Some of the conditions include board bylaws, proof of nonprofit status, a formal student discipline code, balanced budget, evidence of highly qualified teachers under NCLB, evidence of criminal background checks on staff, school safety and emergency plans and evidence of insurance. By requiring schools to fulfill these basic requirements before opening, we can better protect the public's investment in these schools.

PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE

Everyone associated with these efforts has been working extremely hard for many months to open quality schools for New Orleans' children this fall. The people seated with me at this table have worked harder than any group of people I have ever encountered. But we have all been working within a system that was not designed to do what we're trying to do right now.

Louisiana's charter school laws, procedures and systems were designed to handle a small number of new schools each year throughout the entire State, not to transform an entire urban school system overnight. The State Board and department of education have realized this and have asked NACSA to develop a new charter school application process for schools to open in Fall 2007 and beyond. They have also asked us to make recommendations for improving charter school policies and procedures.

We have not presented our final recommendations to the State yet, but we do have observations in several areas. First, we have observed that New Orleans may not have enough trained, experienced educators to open and operate these new entrepreneurial schools. When these schools do open, we are concerned many will be operating in isolation, not part of a broader system or network of support. The Bring New Orleans Back Commission also recognized this and recommended the establishment of networks of charter schools. Also, the New Schools for New Orleans organization is offering services to schools to help bolster capacity. Both efforts are important.

Second, we are concerned that the State department of education's charter school work is operating under a pre-Katrina organizational structure. People working on charter schools are in different places within the organization and do not report up through a single chain of command. We believe that the Board and the State Superintendent should be able to hold a single office accountable for the oversight of all State-authorized charter schools. We are working with the Board and department to address this issue.

Third, we are concerned that Louisiana's current system of overseeing charter schools is splintered between local and State oversight and because it is splintered the system does not do enough to safeguard student rights, protect the public interest and promote high academic achievement at *all* charter schools.

Of the 33 charter schools expected to operate in New Orleans this fall, 21 will be schools that have been authorized by the State and 12 will be charter schools that have been authorized by the Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB). All of the actions I have mentioned in my testimony—the high-quality evaluation of proposals, the accountability framework, the monitoring of school finance and management, the protection of student rights and pre-opening requirements—have involved only charter schools authorized by the State, not the 12 charter schools that report to OPSB.

Under Louisiana's charter schools law, the State has almost no authority over charter schools approved by local school boards. Thus, the evaluation procedures, contract provisions, student safeguards and accountability framework we put in place for State-authorized charter schools do not apply to schools authorized by Orleans Parish.

As a result, New Orleans will be operating with two different systems of charter schools this fall: a system of State-authorized schools and a system of locally-authorized schools. Those systems will be considerably different, with different and lesser processes and procedures for evaluating applications to start schools, admitting students, serving special education students, disciplining students, monitoring school finances, ensuring professional conduct by board members, and holding schools accountable for high levels of academic achievement.

In particular, I must draw attention to the fact that charter schools authorized by Orleans Parish will be allowed to use selective tests to determine who is admitted to their school, contradicting a cherished principle of open enrollment that is valued in the charter school movement throughout the country. Selective admissions will not only enable OPSB charters to cherry-pick the best and brightest students, these schools will almost certainly not serve their share of special education students nor their share of New Orleans' rapidly growing population of English Language Learners.

To be fair, I must commend several individual members of the Orleans Parish School Board for their support for charter schools. Phyllis Landrieu, Lourdes Moran and Una Anderson led the effort to re-open the first public schools in the city last fall by establishing the Algiers Charter School Association. Other board members, however, have not been as supportive. In addition, the greatly reduced size of the New Orleans school district has diminished its internal capacity to adequately au-

thorize charter schools and the district has not retained qualified, professional assistance to compensate for this weakness. All told, OPSB's different procedures, lack of capacity and lack of qualified assistance could mean that the children, parents and tax-paying public would not receive the schools they deserve.

There are three actions Louisiana can take to improve this situation. First, the legislature should amend Louisiana's charter law to give the State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education legal authority over all of its charter schools. Second, the State Board should establish and enforce minimum professional standards for local school boards' approval and oversight of charter schools. NACSA's *Principles and Standards* already exist and are being followed at the State level. They can be quickly applied to local school boards as well. Third, the legislature should take a serious look at the student admissions processes in New Orleans this fall and consider eliminating the ability of charter schools to use selective admissions processes.

At hearings such as these, it is often easy to focus on problems. Certainly there are problems facing Louisiana and New Orleans as they work to rebuild their public school system. But New Orleans would have experienced problems no matter what course of action it took to re-open its schools. Instead, let us recognize the great steps the State has taken to establish a quality charter school evaluation, oversight and accountability system. And let us recognize the opportunity before us all.

Louisiana has seized the opportunity to create a new, high-performance system of public schools. This has been a bold step. It would have been easier to re-open schools under the old system. Easier, but not better. There have been bumps in the road and there will be more bumps ahead. We must stay the course, work hard, learn from our mistakes and get better. If we do, we will be creating in New Orleans the model for a high quality public education system in the 21st Century.

Senator ALEXANDER. Thank you, Mr. Richmond.

Dr. Reidlinger.

Dr. REIDLINGER. Good afternoon. I'm Brian Reidlinger. I'm the CEO of the Algiers Charter Schools, the schools right over there across the river, and I'd like to thank you guys for waiting until the hood of the plane was put down before you came. We're glad to see you.

There really are two main issues about running schools and I'd like to highlight those. First is the management of the school, and the Bring Back New Orleans Commission talked about small associations of schools and we're mostly doing exactly what the Bring Back New Orleans Commission talked about. We're a small group of about eight schools next year and management—we'll do most of the management in house, human resources, IT, and those kinds of things, so that principals can focus on what they need to do in schools. That's really what I'd like to spend my time talking about.

Building capacity of the adults in the school is where we're putting all of our chips. We're doing most of that through the teacher advancement program that I know you all are somewhat familiar with, the Milken Family Foundation; and two, that means two master teachers at every school. We're also partnering with the Recovery School District and the Orleans Parish School Board, with the University of Toronto, and doing professional development through their group. We're also partnering with the School Leadership Center of Greater New Orleans to work with leadership and leadership team issues to improve student achievement, and we're partnering with Holy Cross College to present some future leaders, so that as our leaders roll off we'll have people to step into their place.

I guess all of that speaks to the literature on school improvement research for the last 10 or 15 years, and that is why we keep changing structures, but we don't necessarily change what happens in the classroom. We're putting all of our effort into what happens in the classroom so we can improve teacher instruction.

I'd like to thank the Senators and the Senate and the Congress for the money you sent to us. One piece of information I can give is that the regulations got to us pretty late and they shifted a couple of times, and it would be very helpful if we could get those in advance, know what we could spend the money on, so we could begin planning for that. But that's not to say we don't appreciate the money. We appreciate it very much.

An issue I think we'll always drum on here in New Orleans is facilities. I know FEMA is going to come with money for facilities, but our facility needs pre-storm were monumental.

I'd like to end with one statement: Opening schools in New Orleans post-Katrina was a monumental task, willingly accepted by a small group of very committed individuals. Opening better schools in New Orleans post-Katrina is a moral imperative that many of us sitting around this table are involved in, and that's something we just have to work on doing.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Dr. Riedlinger follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF BRIAN A. RIEDLINGER

HISTORY OF ACSA

Prior to Hurricane Katrina, a small group of Algiers community leaders began writing a proposal to charter all 13 schools in Algiers with the goal of opening these schools as an association of charter schools in the 2006–2007 school year. Then Hurricane Katrina struck. As a result, the Governor, Kathleen Blanco, and the Louisiana State legislature worked cooperatively with the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) and the Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB) to grant approval for the opening of five (5) charter schools. The Westbank of New Orleans, i.e., Algiers, had the least amount of damage to its community and school buildings in particular and was, therefore, the natural selection for this opening. Three (3) Pre-K–8 and two high schools were opened by mid-December as Type 4 charters, through the OPSB. In order to open these schools, a process that should have encompassed months was accomplished within weeks. Thirty-five individuals were interviewed to select five principals. Over 600 teachers were screened to select about 150. One additional K–8 school was opened in March to accommodate more returning families post-Katrina. When the school year was brought to an end in early June 2006, nearly 4,000 students were enrolled in the Algiers charter schools, representing 35 percent of public school students in Orleans Parish post-Katrina. The extraordinary efforts of teachers, principals, staff and parents all assisted in garnering a year of success from what began as a tumultuous and devastating natural occurrence in the city of New Orleans.

This initiative was made possible through the collaborative efforts of a small group of five individuals from the firm of Alvarez and Marsal. This firm created the ACSA business infrastructure and managed all day-to-day non-instructional activities for the schools, including human resources, technology, facilities, contracted school support services (custodial, cafeteria, transportation, etc.), finance, budget and accounting for ACSA schools. In November 2005, I was hired as Director to run the academic side of the association. Two other individuals were brought on to assist with instruction and special education. Alvarez and Marsal has, almost entirely selected and trained their full-time replacements and the transition is nearly complete. When all is said and done, the central staff of the association will be comprised of approximately 15 individuals allowing principals to focus on the work of student achievement.

In the spring of 2006, ACSA applied for six additional schools from the State Recovery School District (RSD). To date, two additional schools have been granted charters and will open in the fall of 2006, bringing the total to eight charter schools. Chronologically speaking, the first five schools opened by ACSA were chartered by the OPSB. In the spring of 2006, the State legislature began the State RSD into which over 100 of the 120 Orleans Parish schools fell. These schools were deemed as underperforming. Of the six schools ACSA had just recently opened, four were swept into the RSD while two remained under the control of the OPSB. The two new schools that will open in the fall under ACSA leadership are also RSD schools.

In short, six of the eight ACSA schools are now Type 5 charters, chartered by the RSD to ACSA and were categorized as underperforming prior to the storm. The two remaining schools are Type 4 charters, chartered by the OPSB to ACSA.

PROGRESS OF ACSA

In order to evaluate the success of Algiers schools in its shortened first year of operation, three tools were selected to determine progress:

1. pre and post testing,
2. a year-end parent survey, and
3. a persistence survey.

A nationally-normed standardized reading and mathematics test was selected from the Pearson Company, with the pre-test being given in January to all students K–12. The post-test was given in May to the same body of students. Preliminary results indicate progress at all grade levels with the exception of 7th and 8th grade, which reflects the national trend. We feel this demonstrates positive growth given a less-than-normal year. Parent surveys were sent to all parents. One question asked parents to respond to the statement, “Overall, my child’s school does a good job.” Seventy-five percent of the responses stated “almost always” or “always.” A persistence survey is simply how many students return to the school, and if they don’t, the reason why is asked. This survey will be administered in the fall when the new school year begins and the students return.

There are basically two ways schools can improve. The first is screening students so as to accept only the higher-performing students. The second is to increase the capacity of the adults who work with all types of students. ACSA has chosen the latter which is a longer but much more effective school improvement strategy and arguably better serves society as a whole. As a great move forward, the initial six ACSA schools will begin implementing the Teacher Advancement Program (TAP) in the fall of 2006 (the remaining two ACSA schools will begin this process in the fall of 2007). The TAP program is supported by the Milliken Foundation and is endorsed and supported by the State Department of Education (DOE). The TAP Program consists of two masters teachers and up to five mentor teachers in every school. The master teachers have no assigned teaching duties and spend their time helping teachers improve their instruction, and therefore student learning. Mentor teachers have regular teaching assignments but serve as cluster leaders of teachers to implement school improvement efforts. The TAP Program utilizes teacher evaluations and student data to determine incentive bonuses for teachers. We believe that the TAP Program will drive, or at the very least be the core of, our school improvement efforts.

Research tells us that professional development is most successful when it is job-embedded, supported in the classroom and continuous over time. Rarely does professional development hit this triad. ACSA, in collaboration with the RSD, has begun planning for professional development which will be delivered by representatives from the well-respected Ontario Institute for School Improvement (OISE) of the University of Toronto. Teachers will learn and/or improve teaching techniques such as cooperative learning and seeking relevance. It is then the Master Teachers’ job to act as helpers in making sure that these pedagogical techniques are implemented correctly in the classroom. School improvement literature indicates that, almost always, school structures change (e.g., regular public schools to charter schools) while teaching in the classroom remains the same. This produces little significant gain in student learning. We believe that the sound combination of improved pedagogy (OISE) with support from master teachers (TAP), combined with the freedom from bureaucracy that is the cornerstone of charter schools will produce the much-desired effective schools New Orleans needs and deserves.

Equally as important as teacher professional development is the personal and professional growth of the school leader. In conjunction with the School Leadership Center of Greater New Orleans’ Learning Initiatives Program (SLCLI), Algiers principals will be afforded the opportunity to participate in 2 years of professional development by way of the SLC Fellows’ Program. This research-based, proven program provides school teams with the ability to delve deeply into their school data and carefully plan school improvement. The SLC Fellows’ Program demonstrates that public schools which participate in the program show an average of 54 percent increase in school performance scores (SPS).

To insure a pool of highly qualified and competent future school leaders for Algiers’ schools, ACSA has entered into a partnership with Our Lady of Holy Cross College (OLHCC) also located in Algiers. The goal of this collaborative program is to provide a selected group of 20 future leaders a masters degree within 2 years at little or no cost to them. College professors, along with adjuncts who are practi-

tioners in the field, will provide instruction in the State-mandated, newly-redesigned 36-hour Educational Leadership program. The capstone experience for these masters' candidates will be an internship that is a combination of observation, participation and leadership that encompasses 250 hours which spans two internship semesters.

FUTURE OF ACSA

Much as proven, school improvement is driven by correctly implemented professional development, decisions made at the level greatly enhance the possibility of school improvement. For that reason, ACSA placed much of the decisionmaking authority into the hands of school leadership. For example, for the upcoming school year, all schools were provided with a budget made up of core staff (e.g., pupil teacher ration 25:1) and mandated spending (i.e. transportation, janitorial, etc.) but were also provided the opportunity to create their own spending plan with the remaining budget funds available. With this flexibility, the principal could assess the unique needs at their particular school and implement programs of their choosing to address those unique needs, such as lowering pupil teacher ratio, creating an arts program, providing specialized professional development to staff, among a plethora of opportunities as needed at the school site level. Because of the efforts of the central staff and their dogged pursuit of effective and efficient spending, schools were provided an opportunity unheard of previously. It is the principle of efficient shared services on a manageable scale (8 schools) that helps to provide this opportunity.

Mayor Ray Nagin's *Bring Back New Orleans Commission on Education* suggested, as a model for the city, small associations of schools that share services. To an overwhelming degree, ACSA is doing just that. In fact, when the entire teaching corps was asked to identify the thing they most liked about working with ACSA, over 60 percent stated they liked the other teachers they worked with. That is an important factor because creating a collegial atmosphere (building relationships) is an often forgotten element in creating strong teaching staffs—and strong teaching staffs created improved student achievement.

Given the uphill environment of ACSA's beginning and the start-up nature of the entire year, ACSA did not start schools with a particular focus (e.g., an arts focus, a communications school, technology) and therefore did not engage the community and parents in developing a program unique and designed for each school. The focus was to open well-run and academically successful, improved schools. For that reason, ACSA schools will spend the 2006-2007 school year engaging the school community and the larger community in looking at and deciding upon a focus for each school. This is important because if the research on charter school success is reduced to a single common denominator—parent and community involvement is the single most important predictor of success. We will backtrack and garner that input over the next year.

Finally, I would be remiss if I did not mention the financial support from Congress. The 20.9 million dollar charter school initiative helped insure that a year of financial stability will pay dividends in the future. Additional funding will assure that the local portion of our schools' Minimum Foundation Program funding is adequate and even allow us to create innovative and imaginative programs for our students. While the funding did not arrive until near schools end, we have been able to leverage it to enhance our future. I bring to you the gratitude of our entire association.

Margaret Meade has been quoted saying: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world, indeed, it is the only thing that ever has!"

Opening schools in New Orleans post-Katrina was a monumental task willingly accepted by a small group of very committed individuals. Opening better schools in New Orleans post-Katrina is the moral imperative that that committed group is dedicated to accomplishing.

Senator ALEXANDER. Thank you, sir.

Ms. Landrieu.

Ms. LANDRIEU. Thank you, Senator, and thank you all for coming.

I want to say how proud our family is of Mary and the wonderful service she's been rendering to this cause. It's just been phenomenal, and we love her and we really are grateful, Mary. Thank you.

Senator LANDRIEU. You can tell that's my aunt.

Ms. LANDRIEU. I'm President of the Orleans Parish School Board and I've given you quite a bit of detail in my written statement, but I want to say that our highest priority is preserving or reestablishing the financial stability of our school system. In my written comments you can understand some of the serious problems that we had. I'm convinced that until we straighten out our financial problems and then acquire substantially more financial investment in our school system we are never going to be able to change. There are resources that we need, in order to improve, that we don't have the money for right now. So that will be our first priority.

My second priority for our school board is preserving the high-performing schools that we inherited when the law was passed that set up the Recovery School District and left us with 16 schools. As you probably know, one of our schools was one of the leading schools in the entire country, and the rest of our schools led the State in their performance and their academic standards. In order to continue to provide critical thinkers and leaders in this community and to feed our universities and ensure that all of our population has the opportunity to have a free quality public education, our school board is focusing on making sure that we do everything that we can to preserve these high-performing schools so that they can continue to be an asset to our city.

The third thing that we feel the responsibility for is getting schools ready to open. We have assumed, our school board has assumed, overseeing the entire opening, repair, funding and opening of all of the schools in our district, and so that's been something that has really kept us busy, and we are determined to continue to do that. We're quite frankly running out of facilities that we can repair and get schools open, so we'll have to look at a longer range option as far as that's concerned.

Then our next responsibility that I'm focusing on is making sure that we have a unified school system, and I'm already naming it the Orleans Parish Unified School System, because until we have a seamless relationship between all of us and a seamless relationship between all of our schools, our children that will be moving around within the school system will not be able to access the various schools that they'll need to. Besides that, we need to maximize our investment and the only way we can do that is by not duplicating so many things around the system and making sure we're working together.

I must say that we've received enormous cooperation from Superintendent Picard and his staff and Dr. Jarvis, and we really look forward to a great relationship with the charter schools and with the school district as we go forward.

One of my newest interests is that I recognize that our children in New Orleans, because we are one of the highest poverty cities in the country, begin school with a gap, with disparities that put them in an unstable position in order to compete with the surrounding children in the parishes like St. Tammany, Jefferson, the rest of the State and the Nation, because they come to school from low-birth weight, poor nutrition, undiagnosed diseases and illnesses, child abuse, unstable families, and you know what the list is.

So I would like to and I have formed an organization to address that, that has the participation of many of the key early childhood experts in the State. We're going to start developing a plan to do that. It's going to take a lot of investment to diagnose what the children's conditions or status is, to bring the kinds of resources they need to solve the problems that they come to school with, in order to put them on an even playing field once they are able to have their problems resolved so that they can compete successfully with their peers. So I'll be focusing on that.

I think the highest priority in our school system is training our teachers. We had some very wonderful, wonderfully qualified and dedicated teachers in our last school system and many of them have returned and they are working very hard to establish quality classrooms. But our teachers are a whole—I don't know the word—generation below what the high-performing teachers in the rest of the country in the successful school systems are. So we have got to evaluate our school teachers, our teaching capabilities, and we've got to greatly elevate them through hard work, through training, through resources, through all kinds of things that will have to take place. But that's something that would be a high priority for our district in order to succeed.

I want to salute all of the people at this table and behind all of us who helped us open our schools. We do now have adequate schools to address the community's demand at this time in terms of numbers and by fall and spring we fully expect and we are fully determined to make sure that we can provide a school and a seat in a classroom for every child who returns to New Orleans.

It has taken the work of tremendous people, whose own personal sacrifice has been significant because in almost every occasion they've lost their homes or their own businesses and have suffered. But they've put that aside to work day and night to open our schools, and I think they really deserve a great recognition.

So again, thank you very much. Thanks to the Governor and the superintendent of education and his staff, and thank you for your interest in coming to New Orleans. Thank you for the resources you've provided. We'll use them well and we'll make sure that we use them to improve our education system.

Senator ALEXANDER. Thank you, Ms. Landrieu.

Senator ULLO.

Mr. ULLO. Thank you very much. Again I thank you for coming here. It's an honor to be here before you today. I represent a district adjacent to the city of New Orleans and I've long been aware of the difficulty and seemingly intractable struggles of the New Orleans public school system. Louisiana has been on the forefront of developing and institutionalizing a statewide school and school system by school system accountability system. Our accountability system is and always has been centered on students' performance and it has been in place long enough to provide us with a reliable view of the performance of our students in each of the schools and the systems.

The students' academic performance and the revealed lack of proper financial control combined in the early years of this decade to create, what the parents will try to address in State law, the need to do something about New Orleans schools. We could no

longer blame the poverty in which many of these students lived, although the poverty certainly was a factor. It was time to try to address the structure. Of course, at that time several significant and highly controversial politically difficult pieces of legislation were passed prior to Katrina that were attempts to get to the problem.

We passed approximately five, but I'd like to concentrate on one since I have all of them. We created the Recovery School District as an interim educational unit, run by our State Board of Education, and provided that failing schools under an existing accountability program anywhere in the State that were not turned around by their local school boards would be transferred to the Recovery School District to allow the State to provide for improvements in these schools before returning them back to their home district.

Ultimately, we enhanced the Recovery School District plan to re-define failing schools so that all schools performing below the State average that were in a system where the majority of the schools were unacceptable were moved into the Recovery School District. As a result, when Katrina washed away many of the facilities and the bulk of the students were forced to relocate to other parts of the State or the country, the largest portion of the responsibility for rebuilding the schools fell to the state-run Recovery School District.

It's an awesome responsibility and it provides the opportunity to rebuild a system that will be the very heart of the rebuilding of the city itself. Recognizing this historic opportunity, the legislature placed over \$40 million into the Recovery School District this fiscal year, and the fiscal year started July 1st.

The legislature together with the Board of Regents for Higher Education has successfully redesigned our teacher preparation programs to the point where 99 percent of college graduates are meeting all State certification requirements at the point of completion. We are proud that Louisiana's determined efforts have been recognized in recent years. We have been acknowledged in "Education Week" and by others as having first been ranked No. 1 in the Nation in efforts to improve teacher quality for 2005-2006. We were also ranked No. 1 in student standards and accountability in the same years. We were the first State in the Nation to institute high-stakes testing in elementary and middle schools.

But how we respond to the devastation of Katrina is a story that will define our State for the next generation. Certainly I've got to thank you all for being knowledgeable about what our problem is and wanting to find out more about it by coming here to know and see what's happening. This city and State will need the full cooperation of all the parties if we're going to rebuild.

But I believe that as we rebuild, providing a high quality education to all the city's children is the keystone to our success.

Again, I want to thank you for allowing me to make this presentation on behalf of the State legislature.

[The prepared statement of State Senator Ullo follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF STATE SENATOR ULLO

I have served in the legislature for over 30 years and, until 3 years ago when I became chair of Senate Education, I have never served on an education committee. But education has always been a matter of great interest and concern to me. I represent a district adjacent to the city of New Orleans and I have long been aware

of the difficult and seemingly intractable struggles of the New Orleans public schools.

For many years I served with my friend, Senator Cecil Picard. His leadership was important to my view of educational policy then as it is now. Cecil's leadership in his role as State superintendent has been the basis for much of the progress Louisiana has made in its public schools.

Louisiana has 69 local public school systems most of which are coterminous with the parish government. Four of these systems are city or community systems and this total includes the Recovery School District as well. These systems serve student populations ranging in size from barely 1,000 to 50,000+. The implementation of State law and State board regulation in these systems varies widely from one system to another yet all are monitored for compliance with State and Federal requirements. Some of these systems are providing outstanding educational opportunities to the students they serve; others don't do so well. Before Katrina, New Orleans Public Schools served approximately 10 percent of the public school students in the State and was one of the systems that was a matter of greatest concern both for the legislature and for the educational leadership structure.

Under Superintendent Picard, Louisiana has been on the forefront of developing and institutionalizing a statewide "school by school" and "school system by school system" accountability system. Our accountability system is and always has been centered on student performance and it has been in place long enough to provide us with a reliable view of the performance of our students and each of the schools and systems.

Our accountability results, particularly as adjusted to comply with the Federal "No Child Left Behind Act", starkly revealed to all what was long felt to be true by many, that the vast majority of schools in New Orleans were performing well below the standard needed for our children to succeed. In addition, there were legislative hearings concerning the financial structure of New Orleans and two or three other schools systems which were stimulated in part by Federal concern regarding the use of Federal title I money.

The students' academic performance and the revealed lack of proper financial controls combined in the early years of this decade to create the political will to try to address in State law the need to "do something about New Orleans schools." We could no longer blame the poverty in which many of these students lived, although the poverty certainly was a factor. It was time to try to address the structure.

Several significant, highly controversial, and politically difficult pieces of legislation, that were attempts to get at the problem, were passed prior to Katrina.

1. We tried to transfer most of the authority from a dysfunctional school board to the local superintendent. At the time, New Orleans had a superintendent that had an impressive turn-around track record. Ultimately, this effort didn't solve the problem.

2. We created the Recovery School District as an intermediate educational unit run by our State Board of Education and provided that failing schools under the existing accountability program anywhere in the State that were not turned around by their local school boards would be transferred into the Recovery School District to allow the State to provide for improvement in these schools before returning them to their "home" district.

3. We created auditing structures designed to assure that we got some control over the financial mess that had developed.

4. Ultimately, we enhanced the Recovery School District plan to redefine failing schools so that all schools performing below the State average that were in a system where the majority of the schools were unacceptable were moved into the Recovery School District.

5. The State superintendent negotiated with State, Federal and local New Orleans officials to bring in Alvarez and Marsal to manage the finances and get the school board back on a sound fiscal basis.

All of these things occurred before the storm.

As a result, when Katrina washed away many of the facilities and the bulk of the students were forced to relocate to other parts of the State or the country, the largest portion of the responsibility for rebuilding the school fell to the state-run Recovery School District.

It is an awesome responsibility and provides the opportunity to rebuild a system that will be the very heart of the rebuilding of the city itself. Recognizing this historic opportunity, the legislature placed over \$40 million dollars into the Recovery School District this fiscal year.

Dr. Robin Jarvis is here. She is the superintendent of the Recovery School District. She can tell you exactly what they are doing and how.

The legislature, together with our Board of Regents for Higher Education, has successfully redesigned our teacher preparation programs to the point where 99 percent of college-education graduates are meeting all State certification requirements at the point of completion.

We are proud that Louisiana's determined efforts in education have been recognized in recent years. We have been acknowledged in *Education Week* and by others as having:

1. Ranked No. 1 in the Nation in efforts to improve teacher quality for 2005 and 2006.
2. Ranked No. 1 in the Nation in student standards and accountability in 2005 and 2006.
3. First State in the Nation to institute "High Stakes" testing in elementary and middle school.

But how we respond to the devastation of Katrina is a story that will define our State for the next generation.

I am glad you are here and want to know what is happening. This city and State will need the full cooperation of all the partners to rebuild. But I believe that as we rebuild, providing a high quality education to all of the city's children is the keystone to our success.

Senator ALEXANDER. Thank you very much for terrific testimony. If the entire U.S. Senate could be as succinct as you have been, we'd probably have a much better Federal Government.

What we'd like to do now is ask you some questions. We'll take about 5 minutes each to ask questions and do some more listening of what you have to say.

Let me ask you, Mr. Richmond. You've seen charter school laws all around the country. We have seen across America that the ability of a charter school to succeed has depended a lot upon the quality of a State's charter school law. What amendments would you make in the Louisiana charter school law to give charter schools a better chance to succeed in Orleans Parish and other places in Louisiana?

Dr. RICHMOND. I think Louisiana does have a strong law that could use some refinements. In particular, the five types of charter schools that are written into Louisiana's law can provide some challenges on the oversight of those schools. Oversight of the schools is splintered. Some of the schools are overseen locally, some are overseen at the State level, and then even at the State level there are some types of charter schools overseen by one part of the State and another by another.

So providing some consistency or consolidating that oversight I think would be very valuable. We now have in place through our work with the State this spring some very strong policies and procedures on accountability and things that I mentioned. The next step I think for the State of Louisiana would be to make sure those strong policies are in place for all charter schools in the State, not just some of them.

Senator ALEXANDER. Dr. Reidlinger, do you have any suggestions about changes in the State law to make your operation easier?

Dr. REIDLINGER. A couple of things. From what we're seeing, as I understand it, from what we're seeing there seems to be a layer of bureaucracy that charter schools are not generally used to. Now, I understand that from the State point of view, because we have so many people charting, you just don't want to do it willy-nilly. But there also seems to be more control than I understand charter schools generally deal with.

One of the things Greg just mentioned, we will be answering to two different entities. We'll be answering to the Orleans Parish Board for two of our schools and the Recovery School District for six of our schools, and that means even our student data system will be different in both of those. So those present some challenges, and I don't think those are things that we can't work out, but certainly I think those are things that would help us.

Senator ALEXANDER. I would encourage you to be aggressive about trying to preserve your independence and autonomy for your schools, because the model I like to think of is our colleges and universities. They're the best in the world, everyone concedes, and one major reason is we don't try to micromanage them. Tulane or LSU, although subject to a lot of Federal regulations, are basically autonomous. Some colleges and universities are better than others, but on the whole our higher education system gives students lots of good choices.

Dr. Jarvis, let me ask you, and maybe Ms. Landrieu, about Federal funding. We appropriated a lot of money, 170 million new dollars, into restarting Orleans Parish schools. The first \$100 million in restart aid was sent to Louisiana in January of this year. Have the Federal dollars gotten to where they're supposed to go?

Dr. JARVIS. Yes, the Federal dollars have gotten to the Recovery School District. We've used them largely in our restart efforts, setting up an IT system, ensuring that we have contents, furniture, equipment, textbooks, new computers.

Senator ALEXANDER. Can you use them for training teachers?

Dr. JARVIS. We can use them for professional development. We'll use them in that way. We will use them to assist the charter schools further once we determine exactly—once we get the buildings up and ready, we'll have to determine what is remaining that FEMA's not—once we get FEMA reimbursement straight, what's not covered will have to be covered by restart in the area of contents, textbooks, those sorts of things. Then we'll be able to take what is remaining and determine how to allocate it across all of our schools in order to promote more equity and provide them great funding and also provide equity across the schools in that funding.

Senator ALEXANDER. What struck me about New Orleans' opportunity is that you have the conditions that most places don't have, which are, No. 1, you've got permission more than most; No. 2, you have as a result of a disaster a green field; and No. 3, you have some venture capital. Hopefully, as time goes on, as you create new charter schools, you will be able to make good use of these unique conditions. The idea would be like the Saturn plant that General Motors created years ago when they said: "Take a year off, and go figure out what to do. Here's some money; now then go do it."

I know you haven't been able to do that this quickly. We talked about this a little earlier.

Linda Johnson, all the testimonies I've read were very good, but your testimony was especially succinct and seemed to me to be a tremendous shorthand summary of a good framework for what we might try here. I want to just ask you to comment on it and answer this question. The idea of giving free market choice, as you call it, to the families of New Orleans and creating new schools for them

to choose primarily benefits low-income people, because people with money already have those choices. That's often not understood.

Charter schools are nothing more than schools that are freer of rules and regulations so teachers may give the children what they need. If they need to be there an extra hour a day or on Saturday or have smaller classes or larger groups or whatever they need, they can do it. Charter schools let teachers use their common sense to help children.

How do we help people understand that giving them choices and creating these more autonomous schools is actually an opportunity for low-income families to have more of the same opportunities for their children that rich people already have?

Ms. JOHNSON. Thank you very much, and you put that exactly the way that I look at it, that in creating the charter schools in an urban area where there was already choice—remember, we had a tremendous number of parochial schools in this area that you pay for if you had the dollars. So what this is doing for poor people is to allow them that same opportunity.

But first you have to make sure that they all understand that these are better schools. You have to almost believe that I can make a decision on where I'm going to send my child and that this decision is based on quality. Once I make that decision—this lady sitting next to me has a child in a Montessori program that has a French immersion in it, and if I were a parent living in Louisiana with a young child I really would want to have that opportunity.

So to know that I could do it with no strings attached, meaning I don't have to pay money, transportation would be provided, and I can do it for my child, then I would do it. I feel personally that the issue for us now is to make sure that the message is communicated adequately to low-income parents, because if we don't communicate it adequately then their concept will be: It is the same as it was. So you have to have a really good communication piece that reaches people and hits them so that they will understand: Hey, the Recovery School District is running this particular school and it has this set of expectations, and I want my child there, because they keep telling me that if my child completes it my child will be able to go to this particular middle school or this particular high school and this particular university. But we have to just communicate that message.

But I like the free market and I like to opportunity to have the choice, and I'm very much in favor, and what we've done with the Recovery School District is that it's open access and it's not selective. So you as a parent and a child can make that decision.

Senator ALEXANDER. Thank you.

Senator Landrieu.

Senator LANDRIEU. Thank you so much. Again, you have done tremendous work. This chart I look at weekly in my office, and of course it keeps changing. For those of us that are sort of organizational fanatics, we like to stay steady, but change is good.

I used to get really focused on it looking a little odd, but after reading the testimony I can really understand how—one of you used the words, to sort of camouflage the governance issue, but make it seamless for parents in the community, and I think that is a good consensus that you all have actually reached. As we go

semester by semester, this will straighten itself out. But I think staying focused on quality, kids, opening schools, keeping the momentum and excitement is what I can see from the testimony you've submitted.

Robin, I specifically want to ask you and Carol if you could state for the record how much money will the individual charter schools, based on their per-pupil allotment, how much can they depend on this September when they open? That's a very important question to be answered and I hope you can give us some idea. Is it \$4,000 per child, \$5,000, \$6,000, \$7,000, so these charter schools can start budgeting knowing that they're going to receive 200, 300, 400 children?

Dr. JARVIS. Well, let me just say that one of the innovative things we did in the Recovery School District, that I don't think was included in the testimony, was that we have gone to a differentiated funding formula on a per-pupil basis with the State funding that goes to the district or to the schools within the district. So what we've done is for a regular education student and I believe the number is right at \$5,000 per student. However, we then created three categories of students with disabilities and based upon the categories within those areas we have weighted additional funding, because we know that those children are more high cost to provide services to and to provide education to.

The MFP, the State's MFP, actually has a weighting for special education students in it, but it's spread across all students. So we pulled it out and now are using it to weight an additional. So for students in that highest cost category—which is your children, severe and profoundly disabled students, children with autism, some of your higher cost areas—they can expect to receive about \$17,000 per child should they take those students.

So they will have to look at the types of students they take and it will be based upon that. But for regular education students, just from State funding they can expect \$5,000 per student. We're still working—

Senator LANDRIEU. So we can say for the record that it's \$5,000 to \$17,000, \$5,000 for an average student to \$17,000 per child for special education children that need a lot of extra attention. Some of them are greatly challenged mentally and physically.

Dr. JARVIS. If I can just say, that's before you get into the Federal funds. So that's before they get the title I allocation or the additional IDA allocation that they'll receive for special education students. That is just looking at the State funding.

Senator LANDRIEU. That is very helpful to get out there, because we've been reading things in this testimony about \$1,000 per child or \$2,000 per child; I'm glad you clarified that, that it will be somewhere between \$5,000 and \$17,000.

What is your plan to get the rest of your recovery schools chartered? You have several network charter schools. I think one of the great innovations that you have come up with, and of course the Cowen plan I guess is mostly responsible for this, and it's outlined in most of your testimony, is not just the creation of independent public schools that not only give children more choices, but teachers more choices, parents more choices, neighborhoods more choices, everybody more choices, but the twist or the added value,

if you will, of the networking concept, which has the advantage of not having schools just out there alone by themselves, but they're also not trapped in a big system that sometimes is too impersonal.

It's sort of like the right size to just get the job done, not too little, not too big, not too hot, not too cold—a little cluster of schools that can really work as a team together. That's sort of what the Algiers model has been developing, why we're watching it so closely. But that's the concept that is very unique, it doesn't exist anywhere in the country, that we have the chance to do, and I can see it emerging from this.

So how are you moving these schools under the Recovery School District into that network model and what's your timeframe for that?

Dr. JARVIS. Well, that will be our next project, to be very honest. Right now it's very much focused on getting schools open for this fall. But I would say that many of our networks are emerging kind of naturally. You have the Algiers situation. You have KIPP who is now coming in with their second school and are looking to bring in up to five schools over the next few years. You have UNO who has two schools that they've chartered and an additional two to three that they provide support to.

As I see it and as Brian mentioned in his testimony—and we're both former school principals—it's really critical that the principal in the school be able to focus on instruction and that they not be so devoted to management. So having structures like the Algiers Charter School Association and these networks created that take some of that responsibility for them really assists them and helps them.

So what we really need to work toward is the ones that are independent, that don't have an association that they are working within that has multiple charter schools that can provide that kind of support, how do we bring them together into networks and into working together? And then how do we, with our own schools that we operate, put them into groupings that allow them to provide support and share ideas between themselves. And that's the next piece of our work. That's part of what we're doing with Michael Fullin and the people on his staff.

Senator LANDRIEU. Do you have a timeframe for that? You say that would take place in the next 6, 9, 12 months?

Dr. JARVIS. I really do not have a specific time line at this point for that.

Senator LANDRIEU. I think that's fine. I'll wait for my second round.

Senator ALEXANDER. Well, we may not have a second round.

Senator LANDRIEU. Well, then let me just, Greg, ask if you have anything to add based on that networking model and how these networks should come together? What's the next step that you see?

Mr. RICHMOND. On the network idea, no other city or State in the country has the opportunity to do something like New Orleans has right now on networks. You do see some scattered individual activities—the Aspire schools in California, High-Tech High also out of California. In Chicago there are a few groups.

We used to think 10 years ago that charter schools were just schools and they would replace the pre-existing normal district

school. Well, they are a school, but they also now have to take on the responsibilities that the central office does for the normal school. So that's actually an additional set of burdens that a traditional district school doesn't have.

What we have learned over the past 10 years is that the best way to do that is to create that right-sized network that can provide that kind of support to a school so the school leaders can focus on instruction and not on all the back office.

Senator LANDRIEU. Really quickly, do we think that network is between 4 and 8, 4 and 10, 5 and—what is it in the plan that we are shooting for?

Mr. RICHMOND. I don't recall what the Bring New Orleans Back plan figure was. But I'd say you're in the right ballpark there, 4 schools to 10, probably no more than 15.

Senator LANDRIEU. I'd almost think 15 would be almost a little system, which we want to try to just work this network model if we can.

Father Maestri, anything before we close that you want to add, and then I'll turn it over to the next person? Just a question about, I know the network model doesn't apply to the Catholic schools, but your facilities, you all are one big network, basically one big system.

Father MAESTRI. Well, I think that the important thing to keep in mind, if I could speak for the Catholic system, is that we believe very much in the principal of subsidiary, which means never do on a higher level of organization what is more effectively done on a lower, more intimate level of organization.

I have to say I'm so delighted to be here because never did I think I would hear such a celebration of the free market and choice. However, when it comes to the question of vouchers it seems that choice all of a sudden becomes a kind of political anthrax. My question is, why isn't that placed into the mix? Why isn't that part of it?

I simply would say to you that in the Archdiocese of New Orleans our average tuition for elementary school children is \$2,200, \$2,200 for elementary school children. Every child who attends a Catholic school receives a scholarship because there's a tremendous gap between the amount that is paid and the amount of the actual education.

We have 60 percent of our children in our Catholic schools in Orleans Parish that are not Catholic, not Catholic. And people say to me: "Why do you educate non-Catholics?" Well, we don't educate children because they're Catholic. We educate children because we're Catholic; that's what we do. And the vast majority of our children in Orleans Parish are African-American, are children of color. The Archdiocese of New Orleans has never walked away from the city, continues not to walk away from the city, and has never abandoned the inner city school. That is one of the most important things in our Archdiocese.

So when we talk about the idea of choice and we talk about the idea of cost, I think that the Archdiocese's record in that particular area is quite significant. And I certainly am so glad to hear that we are for the free market and for choice, so that the next time I

go before Senator Ullo's committee in the State Senate I will certainly let all of you know and would welcome you there.

Senator LANDRIEU. I wouldn't go that far.

Senator ALEXANDER. Senator Burr, will have the last round of questions. But I think, Senator Landrieu, one of the interesting things that we can watch, hopefully in future hearings, is the development of this cluster idea and how it works in Algiers, and how Dr. Jarvis looks at it and thinks about expanding it as time goes on. In my way of thinking, I don't know of any reason, a support services office couldn't include Catholic schools. That doesn't get the vouchers, but it might be a way of saving money and helping children. I don't know any reason that might not work, and New Orleans might be a good place to think about it.

Finally, Father, next week I'll be introducing legislation in the Senate, that President Bush has recommended, that would provide \$100 million in scholarship vouchers to children who attend public schools that consistently underperform under the No Child Left Behind Act, so that they can attend the public or private school of their choice. As you may know, I've also proposed a sort of Pell grant for kids, for low-income children, to use new Federal dollars to attend any school of their choice.

Senator Burr, you'll have the last round of questions.

Senator BURR. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I will be brief.

The one thing that comes across, at least to me, and I think it does to my two colleagues, is just how passionate each one of you are at making education work; that even faced with this tremendous challenge of the dislocation and the destruction, that all of you look at this as a new day and a new opportunity. I think that that's refreshing and I think if every community had an opportunity to do that we would solve K through 12 in very short order.

Given that we can't approach it from that aspect, we look at it as a generational transition, and clearly No Child Left Behind is a great start.

Dr. Jarvis, if I pressed you for three things that you see that are going to be different in the post-Katrina school in the Recovery District from the pre-Katrina schools, what would that be?

Dr. JARVIS. Three things that will be different in the post-Katrina schools? I would say first of all quality of teaching staff and leadership in schools. I have to be very honest. In our failing schools in New Orleans, the ones that moved to the Recovery District, that is something that was clearly lacking.

The second piece that will be very different is the way that we work with and approach the parents and the community members. I have parents and community members contacting me on a daily basis to attend neighborhood meetings, to talk about forming neighborhood leadership groups to work with their schools, and we are embracing all of those opportunities.

It's my belief that the neighborhood and the community of New Orleans needs to re-engage with public education. They didn't feel like they could approach their superintendent in the past. I've heard it over and over again. It amazes me that they felt that way, even the teachers and the principals that I talked to, and they are just always surprised when I appear, when I come to a public meeting alone, without a security guard or a driver, and I attend

the meeting, I talk with them about their concerns, and I share with them in that. I think that's a critical piece of the work that we do.

The third thing I would say is we're going to have a strong curriculum aligned to our State contents standards and grade-level expectations and the assessment framework of the State. I've spent the past 7 years working in the State education agency and for 2½ years of that I was the director of accountability for the State as we went through the approval process for our accountability system for No Child Left Behind. I know what it takes, my staff knows what it takes, we know what needs to be taught. And we're ensuring that we're choosing the best materials, the materials that are aligned with the State contents standards and the grade-level expectations, that we're implementing a model that will ensure that the needs of every child are met at the point in time where they need additional assistance, that we're not looking at a remediation process. Children don't need to be remediated years after they've fallen behind. They need to be intervened with as soon as we know there's a problem.

Those are the critical things that we are doing that will be different from what was here in the past.

Senator BURR. Thank you for that.

Ms. Ottinger, I want to direct this question to you. In a lot of the testimony that we read, individuals described the various school rebuilding efforts that were going on in New Orleans. We all know that a school is not a school without children and students. My question is simple: How are the kids doing? What are the psychological and community supports, both short-term and long-term, that these children need? Are they being met?

Ms. OTTINGER. I'm not sure I'm the right person to address that. I can tell you what I know from my perspective. I think that there probably are tremendous communitywide needs for support for kids. I again come at it from a perspective of being in a community of folks who've returned to the same building. Our kids returned to the same school. We have a lot of the same parents, although a lot of different ones as well. But we have been really fortunate in being able to reopen in January with a good bit of what we had before, so I feel like our kids in our school have had a much higher level of stability than probably lots of other kids. And that's been good. I mean, that's been really important for our children and for our parents, because we've had something that we can count on.

I think that one of the difficulties that's facing certainly the Recovery School District and then the Orleans Parish schools is that these are new communities of people coming together that haven't been together. So there is a lot of change going on, and we're all living in a world of tremendous change right now. So that I would think that there's a lot of resources that are needed to work with the kids, to work with the families, and to begin to rebuild a sense of community within the new structures that are coming around.

I mean, we've just had an enormous advantage because we're in a familiar—I mean, it's been a lifeline for my family. We're in a familiar place, and I wish that every family could have that.

Senator BURR. Thank you very much.

I know we're short on time and clearly I want to personally thank all of you for your time and for your openness.

Senator LANDRIEU. The Chairman's being very gracious. I just want to ask one more question because I know this came up, and I thank you all. I don't know if the audience knows this, but in the 2, 3, or 4 hours that we were delayed this group worked through the morning in a workshop and we are very grateful. So they literally have been working all morning.

I understood from the briefing that I received that there was some discussion about the decisions about open enrollments and selective enrollments. But for the record—we don't have time to get into that—there are going to be, what, 53 schools in Orleans Parish opening, correct, not counting the parochial schools, right, Father?

Father MAESTRI. Right.

Senator LANDRIEU. So how many, counting the parochial schools? If you count the parochial schools, would it be—how many do you have in Orleans?

Father MAESTRI. In Orleans Parish, we will have opened 30 schools with approximately 15,000 children.

Senator LANDRIEU. So you'll have 30 schools, and the district will have 53. That's 83 schools. And as the president of the school board has testified earlier, there will be a selective enrollment in how many of those schools? Six, fifteen?

Ms. LANDRIEU. Yes, the high-performing schools.

Senator LANDRIEU. Is it 15?

Ms. LANDRIEU. Yes, more or less.

Senator LANDRIEU. Well, can you try to give us—

Ms. LANDRIEU. Two of our schools are Algiers charter schools, so that wouldn't be 15 that would have selective enrollment. Math and science doesn't have selective enrollment.

Senator LANDRIEU. I really need for the record how many it will be. Can anybody give us an accurate number? If not, you can submit it to us, Phyllis, if you could.

Ms. LANDRIEU. Yes.

Senator LANDRIEU. But we'd like a specific number of the proposal, the numbers of schools, because this is a little different. It's a little unusual. I just want the record to get that in.

[Editor's Note: The information requested was not available at print time.]

Senator ALEXANDER. What do you mean by "selective," Senator?

Ms. LANDRIEU. I think that's the other thing, that you have to have a definition on exactly what does that mean.

Senator LANDRIEU. Well, why don't you say what your definition is.

Ms. LANDRIEU. It means different things at each school, but there will be, for students who wish to apply for that, criteria that they have to meet in order to take a higher level of education.

Senator LANDRIEU. Is the intention for "selective" enrollment to be for a small number of schools in Orleans Parish?

Ms. LANDRIEU. Right.

Ms. OTTINGER. Can I? I think that the Orleans Parish, the type 3 charters—what is the total number of type 3 charters?

Ms. LANDRIEU. I don't know what the total number of type 3 charters is.

Senator LANDRIEU. Chris, do you know, or Carol? Are type 3 charters selective?

Ms. OTTINGER. My point is that my understanding right now is that only three of those type 3 charters are basically open enrollment. Others are using different criteria.

Senator LANDRIEU. Well, let's for the record—

Ms. LANDRIEU. Well, there are various criteria. For instance, in the French immersion plan they have to be able to speak French. There are certain things that are going on. So I think that that issue needs to be better understood.

Senator LANDRIEU. The chairman has been gracious, but let me say this. We have to go, but the point is a public school system needs to be open and accessible to all students. There are examples, though, in public systems where there are special opportunities. So we don't want to say no to any of that, but we want to make sure it's being done appropriately, reasonably, and within our constitutional framework. So we need to get that for the record, and you just submit it to us in writing.

Senator ALEXANDER. Thank you, Senator Landrieu.

Let me thank each of you for spending the day with us and with yourselves. We are very interested in what you're doing.

I hope that we can do this again. Let me ask this specifically: there was a mention of title I money and, Dr. Reidlinger, you mentioned regulations changing. If you have specific points that have to do with Federal law or regulation, let us know about them, because Margaret Spellings, the Secretary of Education, wants to fix those things.

For example, we had a problem with FEMA not treating charter schools like any other public schools and we got that fixed through Mary's efforts and David Vitter's and others of us. So if you'll let us know specifically, we can do these things one by one.

We're very proud of you. We appreciate your effort and we're in it with you for the long haul. Thank you very much for being here.

Senator ALEXANDER. This concludes the hearing.

[Additional material follows.]

ADDITIONAL MATERIAL

PREPARED STATEMENT OF SCOTT S. COWEN

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today regarding educational recovery in the city of New Orleans since Hurricane Katrina came ashore on August 29, 2005. We have made enormous progress despite almost overwhelming challenges, but we still have a long way to go before education in our city and region are back to anything that approaches what we used to deem “normal.”

First, I want to thank the committee for your actions in helping higher education recovery efforts in New Orleans—specifically, legislation that provided loan forgiveness to our students, the reallocation of campus-based aid, and the waiver authority given to the Department of Education. I would also like to thank you for visiting New Orleans and for taking the time to witness firsthand both the progress we have made and the challenges we still face.

THE GOOD NEWS

The damage from Hurricane Katrina and subsequent flooding in the city of New Orleans is still being tallied. But with disaster comes opportunity, and nowhere is that more evident than in K–12 public education in New Orleans. Prior to Katrina, New Orleans had one of the worst public school systems in the Nation. Katrina has given us a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to turn it into one of the best.

The Orleans Parish public school district, with roughly 60,000 students pre-Katrina, was the 49th-largest public school district in the United States. The numbers tell the story of the problems this school system faced:

- Of 117 public schools, 102 were academic “failures” by any number of measures and were struggling to improve academic performance to avoid State takeover.
- Seventy-five percent of 8th-graders scored below State averages and had failed to reach basic proficiency in English.
- Dropout rates were the seventh highest in the United States and four times the Louisiana average.
- With 10 superintendents in 10 years, the district lacked consistent leadership and direction.
- Decades of neglect and mismanagement had created both a budget shortfall and serious debt load for the parish school board.

For years, New Orleans had a two-tiered K–12 educational system: one for the haves and one for the have-nots. More often than not, students in the lower socioeconomic neighborhoods in the city were severely underserved and provided with a low-quality education. Before Katrina, the State of Louisiana developed a Recovery School District to take command of the five lowest-performing schools. After Katrina, the remainder of the 102 failing schools were put under the auspices of the state-run district.

When schools began re-opening in November 2005, each school reached its full capacity within 2 weeks of opening. Twenty-five of the 117 schools reopened, serving 12,500 students—which represents only 20 percent of the pre-Katrina student population. Of the 25 schools that opened in the spring 2006 semester, 18 were charters, three were run by the State and four were run by the local school board.

The U.S. Department of Education and Federal Government continue to provide assistance to help our city recover and get families back on their feet. In addition to restart aid, the Department of Education provided more than \$20 million through a special charter school grant to Louisiana, enabling numerous public schools in New Orleans to reopen as charter schools, expediting children’s education and the region’s recovery. Thanks to these resources, New Orleans has an unprecedented opportunity to transform its public education system.

Following Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin formed the Bring New Orleans Back (BNOB) Commission, a collection of seven committees charged with creating a master plan to rebuild New Orleans. A major piece of that work involves rebuilding New Orleans public schools, and I was asked to chair the committee leading the development of plans to not only rebuild but repair the long-troubled public school system.

The Education Committee’s mission was to create an educational system that distinguishes New Orleans in a positive way, attracting both families and businesses to the city. The members of the committee were dedicated to developing a plan for a school system that will serve as a model for schools in the 21st century. To accomplish this great task, it led a comprehensive process to develop a transformational plan for the New Orleans school system. We received input from a diverse group

of more than 1,500 students, parents, teachers, business leaders and community members from New Orleans to ensure the plan represented the voice of our city. Additionally, education experts from around the world provided insights into what has worked in high-performing schools with similar students and similar socio-economic factors. Using this extensive research, the Education Committee developed a plan to fundamentally change the way we run our schools. In January, the Education Committee presented a blueprint for reinventing New Orleans' public school system. There is great hope for this plan, and recognition by everyone involved that we have a rare opportunity to turn things around.

Among the plans and goals:

- Delivering learning and achievement for all students, regardless of race, socio-economic class or where they live in New Orleans, with the goal of graduating all students ready for college or the workplace. New Orleans public school students are 96 percent African-American, and three-quarters of them qualify for free or reduced-price lunch programs. These facts should have absolutely no bearing on the quality of the education they receive or the opportunities that education will afford them.
- Developing a new school-focused philosophy that empowers the schools to make more of their own financial and administrative decisions (including time, money and people) rather than relying on a central oversight board or central office.
- Establishing a new Educational Network Model that organizes schools into small groups, or networks, to provide support, foster collaboration and ensure accountability.
- Encouraging new partnerships with business, faith-based and community groups to develop programs for learning enrichment and emotional and psychological well-being.

The Education Committee's recommendations are designed around students and schools and provide more flexibility, options and accountability than ever before in order to drive student learning and achievement. We can take advantage of this opportunity to systemically transform the New Orleans public school system, which can be used as a model for other urban school districts.

THE CHALLENGES

We have a unified vision for what the New Orleans public school system should look like. Our challenge as we move into the fall, when we expect up to 50 percent of our pre-Katrina public school students to return, is to make sure that schools are reopened in accordance with that long-term plan.

There are two key challenges New Orleans faces as it reopens and rebuilds its public school system.

First, the results of an extensive demographic study places fall student enrollment projections between 28,500 and 34,000. These statistics, and the fact that each school opened in spring 2006 was filled to capacity shortly after opening, substantiate the need for more schools in New Orleans for the 2006–2007 school year. In the upcoming school year, the Recovery School District and Orleans Parish School Board plan to open a total of 56 schools, with a mix of charter, state-run, and district-run schools.

Roughly 60 percent of schools will be charters, with some operating independently and others forming groups (e.g., the Algiers Charter School Association). The charter schools have provided both the State and the school board with an expedient way to open schools and address a legacy of underperformance, while keeping operators free from past obstacles such as a bloated central office and the local school board's collective bargaining agreement. However, there are a number of drawbacks to having a large majority of charter schools, including the fact that it is difficult for individual schools to coordinate administrative activities and other shared services. Probably most concerning of all is that charter school performance is highly variable and there is not another school district in the United States where the majority of schools are charters. In addition, because of the highly fragmented governance structure, there is confusion over which entity has oversight for which schools and how that oversight will be achieved, which threatens to hamper recovery.

Other challenges must be overcome before being able to open this many schools in the fall:

- Of the schools that will be opening for the first time since Katrina, many have facilities in urgent need of repair but are without sufficient funding or time in which to do so. Ongoing discussions between the school oversight groups, FEMA representatives and insurance carriers have resulted in delays to the work that needs to be done in order to reopen the schools in September. Obviously, facility remediation must take place before students are allowed back into these damaged buildings.

- A major hurdle for reopening schools in the fall is teacher recruitment and retention. The State's attention to the quality of teachers in our public schools is a long-needed step. However, New Orleans must convince good teachers that we are seriously committed to public education in order to get them here. And we cannot attract high-caliber teachers—or any teachers at all—as long as the city's housing stock remains depleted. There is very little affordable housing in which our teachers can live.

- Students who were already from two to four grade levels behind their age groups pre-Katrina have experienced great trauma, and many did not attend school last year at all, indicating a need for mental health services and special programs to close achievement gaps.

- Since the majority of child care centers haven't reopened since Hurricane Katrina, I am advocating the design and implementation of a universal pre-kindergarten program (for newborns to 4-year-olds) based on best practices for early childhood. Research demonstrates that pre-K programs produce persistent gains on achievement test scores, along with fewer occurrences of being held back a grade. The benefits of early childhood education cross all economic and social lines, but the most significant gains are noted among children from families with the lowest income levels and the least amount of formal education.

So, getting more schools open (with remediated facilities, high-quality teachers and principals, and well-adjusted students) is the first key challenge for rebuilding New Orleans' public school system. While the Recovery School District's plan covers a number of these issues, it is critical that they are immediately addressed and adequately funded in all schools in the system.

The second challenge will be to form a coordinated response and oversight mechanism for the schools in Orleans Parish. I believe the lack of a single oversight body is one of the biggest hurdles to the recovery and transformation of our public school system. There are multiple governing bodies responsible for making decisions—what the repopulation rate is in different parts of the parish, for example, and what schools are needed in response to that repopulation. These governing bodies include the Orleans Parish School Board, the Recovery School District, and the Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education. We are also faced with the challenge of having individual charter school boards and authorizers. Immense coordination in the short- and long-terms and a shared vision are the only ways to ensure success as public education in Orleans Parish is rebuilt.

I strongly endorse the formation of a single oversight body, similar to Philadelphia's School Reform Commission, whose sole focus would be on educational transformation in Orleans Parish. Overseeing all Orleans Parish public schools, it would harness the power of the individual entities behind a unified effort to meet our short-term goals and long-term vision for better schools in New Orleans. Board members would operate at the governing and accountability level, not the execution level. A key emphasis should be on aligning focus on student achievement, not politics, and maintaining stability to consistently execute the plan over the next 5 to 10 years.

This organization could serve to:

- Coordinate the multiple governing bodies over New Orleans schools, providing direction and accountability;
- Streamline decisionmaking and prevent duplication of effort and cost;
- Ensure the credibility and legitimacy of the rebuilding process by providing an unbiased oversight function; and
- Represent the best interests of New Orleans and the State of Louisiana as a whole—and, by doing so, the best interests of our children.

We have been given a rare opportunity by Hurricane Katrina to transform New Orleans schools for the benefit of our students and the entire State. To ensure that we do not squander this opportunity, we need to quickly hire—and fairly compensate—a world-class educational leader with the experience and energy to serve as superintendent for all of the public schools in our school system. This person should be charged with:

- Overseeing all New Orleans schools, including those run by the Recovery School District and the Orleans Parish School Board;
- Securing funds for rebuilding;
- Attracting and developing strong educators at every level, beginning immediately; and
- Defining instructional and performance standards, as well as accountability systems.

- Supporting charter schools by forming networks to facilitate communications between schools and launching a shared-service organization, to create economies of scale not available to individual charter schools.

Given sound financial management, dedicated leadership and a spirit of cooperation among all members of our community, the outlook for the Orleans Parish public school system is brighter than it has been in many, many years. It will require vigilance and diligence on everyone's part to ensure that we continue to make progress toward the long-term vision that has been developed.

CONCLUSION

Repaired levees and rebuilt homes and businesses are things New Orleans needs in order to survive in the short term. But it is through its system of education at all levels that the city can achieve the substantive change, success and energy that it needs to become a healthy and thriving urban center.

Our K-12 public education system has many challenges still to overcome. But with the support of the American people and through our public leaders such as those of you on this committee, it will recover. And through that recovery will come a major boost to the long-term revitalization of the city of New Orleans.

RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS OF SENATOR ALEXANDER AND SENATOR LANDRIEU BY SCOTT S. COWEN

Question 1. The Bring New Orleans Back Education Committee's plan was released before the new Recovery School District plan was adopted. What recommendations do you have as implementation of the RSD plan moves forward, and as the RSD develops a 5-year plan?

Answer 1. The Recovery School District (RSD) only controls a little over a third of the schools in the city. Sixty percent of the schools are charters and have a separate board and short- and long-term plan. At this time, there is not an integrated plan between the RSD, the Orleans Parish School Board, and the individual charter schools. In addition, there are huge gaps and inefficiencies in strategy and implementation. To assist, I highly suggest that the Louisiana State Legislature create a single body to coordinate the multiple governing bodies over New Orleans public schools to provide direction and accountability. This oversight board would hire a single, world-class superintendent to be the CEO for all public schools in the city.

It should be noted that charter schools provided us with an expedient and effective approach to restart public education in New Orleans; however, I believe that the current model will have to be reconfigured to realize economies of scale across charter schools and foster collaboration with State- and district-run schools. With this school year, New Orleans becomes the city with the highest percentage of chartered public schools in the Nation for a system its size or larger. I support the immediate formation of schools into small groups or networks to provide support, foster collaboration and ensure accountability. The Algiers Charter School Association is a great example of this concept, yet there are 17 independent charter schools that are missing the opportunity to collaborate and benefit from shared services.

Question 2. In your written testimony you strongly underscored the need for a single oversight body capable of coordinating the multiple governing bodies that currently exist. What challenges exist to creating such a body? How could such an oversight body function effectively?

Answer 2. Today, we have a highly fragmented governance system in New Orleans. I believe that we need to migrate toward a single, aligned and highly-effective governing board that provides a stable leadership team with the skills to oversee successful implementation of the plan. This lean, apolitical and courageous governing board should focus on driving transformation of the system and place student learning and achievement ahead of any other agenda. At this time, the challenges are with the State constitution and current legislation.

Question 3. How does the current operation of schools differ from what the Bring New Orleans Back Education Committee envisioned?

Answer 3. The main differences are as follows: composition, structure, and working philosophy of the networks of schools; lack of a universal Pre-K program for children from birth to 4-years old; a complex and disjointed governance structure; the system's continued reliance on selective-admissions schools; and lack of coordinated communications with the community.

Question 4. Before crafting its plan, the Bring New Orleans Back Education Committee conducted extensive research and outreach with students, parents, teachers,

business leaders, and other New Orleans residents. Based on their input, do you think these groups will be pleased with the way their schools are re-opening and operating? What changes do you think they would seek?

Answer 4. While I am pleased with the progress that has been made and am happy to see that most of it is in line with the recommendations presented by the Education Committee, I continue to have concerns. Due to the complex, multibody governance structure, there is a lack of clear and consistent communications among school leaders, parents, and the community. I highly recommend that school leaders manage communications with the community more effectively. In addition, the community should be allowed to actively participate in the planning process for their schools.

RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS OF SENATOR ALEXANDER AND SENATOR LANDRIEU
BY SARAH OTTINGER

Question 1. How has Audubon Charter School changed after becoming a charter school?

Answer 1. As a charter school, Audubon Charter School (ACS) is now far better able to offer an excellent education and more resources to children who attend the school.

The school essentially has two curricula: French and Montessori. With respect to the Montessori curriculum, prior to becoming a charter, we were constantly subject to systemwide curriculum requirements that failed to acknowledge the Montessori curriculum and actually threatened to destroy it; those systemwide requirements could not be accommodated without changing the Montessori curriculum to such a degree that it no longer complied with basic Montessori tenets. Furthermore, the Orleans Parish school system refused to offer ongoing Montessori training and certification to teachers in the school. We are now able to make both the curriculum and ongoing training a priority with the funding we receive. As a result, ACS will become a model public Montessori school.

With respect to the French curriculum, which is approved by the French government, we have been likewise able to make it conform 100 percent to the requirements of the French government. For instance, the French curriculum requires that schools maintain a motility room for pre-K and K students. The French government was able to donate money directly to ACS to get the motility rooms furnished and operational. The Orleans Parish school system had never supported creating the rooms and the French government previously was unable to donate money for a specific purpose to ACS because it could not count on the Orleans system to spend the money in the way the French government wished for it to be spent.

Our fundraising capabilities are great now, because donors trust our Board to spend money wisely.

With our fundraising, we have been able to add a full-time dance teacher, art teacher, music/band teacher, social worker, and nurse. We did not have any of these resources as part of the Orleans Parish school system.

We have been able to improve our facilities, so that they are welcoming and clean. This was not the case at all when we were part of the Orleans Parish system. We will soon be adding science labs and a computer lab—also not possible prior to becoming a charter school.

The main, huge difference as a charter is that we are able to spend Federal, State, and local money in the way we see fit, establishing priorities that make sense to our individual school with its unique curricula. We are also able to supplement our MFP and other government grants with private fundraising to meet specific goals outside our means. We have been very successful at fundraising.

I must mention, however, in this context that we have not yet received restart funds or displaced student funds for the 2005–2006 school year. None of the schools open in Orleans Parish for the 2005–2006 school year have received these funds—despite the fact that every other parish in the State has received them. In my opinion, the failure to distribute this funding borders on criminal; the parish most in need of this funding has yet to receive it from the State. Unpredictable payment from both the State and local governments of funds to which we are entitled threatens to undermine the existence of all charter schools.

Question 2. What advice would you give to other parents who are considering enrolling their children in charter schools?

Answer 2. The charter system is designed to foster schools with innovative curricula. I do not think it will work for schools that offer the same curriculum as parish-wide public schools. As a parent I would look to see if the charter school in question is taking an alternative or innovative approach to education and then I would

look to see whether the budget of the charter school supports ongoing training of teachers in the curriculum offered.

I would make sure the school is financially solvent and can weather times when payment of local, State, and Federal funding is delayed. I would look at whether the Board of Directors of the school has breadth and depth and can handle the financial, administrative, educational, and fundraising aspects of running a school.

I would look at whether the faculty and administrative staff likewise have depth in education, training and experience.

I would look to see whether the parent body of the school is strong and committed; it will go a long way toward preserving the existence of the school in hard times.

And of course I would want to make sure that the school philosophy and curriculum is a good fit with my child and me. The culture of the school is very important and really the only way to learn about that is to spend time in the school, talk to teachers and parents, and attend school functions.

Question 3. What would you recommend to other parents and community leaders who are considering seeking approval to open a charter school?

Answer 3. I recommend that parents and other community leaders considering seeking approval to open a charter school work together over a year or two to build a vision of the school as well as a strong core community of diverse individuals committed to the culture of the school. The core community should consist of educators, business/administrative experts and parents at a minimum. Additionally, there should be some funding available with which to open the school and cover costs, should there be a cash flow problem.

RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS OF SENATOR ALEXANDER AND SENATOR LANDRIEU
BY LINDA JOHNSON

Question 1. Do you believe there is a need for more formal coordination among the multiple entities with authority over New Orleans schools?

Answer 1. There should be formal coordination among the multiple entities because it provides more continuity and is easier to communicate to parents. There should be transparency among the various entities. Each entity should have its voice but the voice should be a better system for all students. This then allows parents to make a decision on where or which system they want to work with for the education of their children.

Question 2. What will the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education do to facilitate coordination between the Recovery School District and the Orleans Parish School Board?

Answer 2. The State Superintendent is charged with the coordination of services for students in Orleans. He is working with the Orleans Parish School Board administration to communicate educational opportunities.

Question 3. What is the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education's vision for the future of New Orleans schools? Might lessons from New Orleans be applied to schools in other parts of the State?

Answer 3. We are trying to create a model urban educational system that has the best practices and policies in place and serves all children in a manner that improves their quality of life. Therefore we envision a system that will have people from all over the world visiting to glean the reasons for the success. We also envision that we will build a system that changes the culture of New Orleans from a city with inherent poverty—as seen during the aftermath of Katrina—to a city of opportunities for all the citizens.

Question 4. The State has adopted a “follow the student” model for school financing in the Recovery School District. How does that compare to the traditional school funding formula?

Answer 4. The Recovery School District (RSD) receives its per-pupil allocation of MFP funding as other districts do. The Recovery School District will then allocate funds to each school using a differential funding formula calculating weighted funding for three levels of Special Education students in addition to the Regular Education allocation. This type of differentiated funding is used by other public school systems around the State.

Question 5. How does the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education envision expanding public school choice in New Orleans?

Answer 5. Public school choice is provided as the State implements its statutory authority over failing schools in New Orleans, modeling best practices of the State's

key education reform initiatives, establishing high expectations for students and faculty, and focusing on improved student performance articulated from pre-kindergarten through postsecondary levels.

RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS OF SENATOR ALEXANDER AND SENATOR LANDRIEU
BY FATHER WILLIAM F. MAESTRI

Question 1. How many schools does the Archdiocese expect to be able to open this fall?

Answer 1. Eighty-eight schools (elementary and secondary) will be open as of September 2, 2006 with an enrollment of approximately 42,000 children.

Question 2. You stated that the Archdiocese has made great efforts to locate displaced students around the country. How many students do you expect to return? How does the Archdiocese plan to meet returning students' special needs, and assure their academic progress?

Answer 2. We expect 42,000 children to return to Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of New Orleans this year. We were pleased that even in the midst of disaster and chaos, our students on the elementary and secondary school levels scored above average nationally, regionally and locally on the Stanford 10 (elementary) and ACT tests (secondary). It is our hope that through constant encouragement and the support of staff our children will continue to progress in all areas of their lives. Specifically to address the needs of our students post-Katrina and Rita, we have in a place a new program called *Project Fleur-de-lis*, a school-based, faith-based approach to mental health in our schools that works with teachers, students and families. We have also worked to make our schools a single point of access for families into the ministries of Catholic Charities that can assist those in need and support as they rebuild their homes and lives. You can find more information about *Project Fleur-de-Lis* at www.project-fleur-de-lis.org.

Question 3. How easy or difficult has it been for private schools in the Archdiocese to access the Hurricane Education Recovery Act funds Congress provided? How are those funds being used?

Answer 3. Once Congress made the funds available and the State created a process for distributing funding, accessing the funds has not been exceptionally difficult. We understand the system of accountability and the need for the appropriate applications and processes and timelines need to be followed. I think the most difficult and frustrating things to contend with were the length of time, especially for parents in need of tuition reimbursements and the lack of funding to replace infrastructure. If there was a way to streamline getting the money where it needs to go from the Feds and State that would have been helpful.

Question 4. How have the Archdiocese and the public schools been partnering to meet students' needs?

Answer 4. No Catholic school that I am aware of has rejected entry to a student from a public school or any school based on money. In fact, we took no tuition from those who could not pay. With the lack of schools open in New Orleans, we were happy to open our schools and take any children, for that is how we return families and commerce to the area.

Question 5. What is the Archdiocese's plan for teacher recruitment? Will the Archdiocese schools opening this fall be fully staffed?

Answer 5. I am happy to report that all of our schools are fully staffed and, as enrollment grows, we hire teachers to ensure quality education for our students. As for recruitment, we were sure to keep in contact with our teachers from pre-Katrina, we held job fairs for teachers looking for jobs and we continue to collect teacher resumes to fill spots that come up. The archdiocese has hired a number of teachers from the public school system as jobs became unavailable as schools were not reopened.

RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS OF SENATOR ALEXANDER AND SENATOR LANDRIEU
BY CAROLE BUTLER-WALLIN

Question 1. What is your vision for the future of schools in New Orleans? What are your plans for turning the Recovery School District Schools back over to the Orleans Parish School Board?

Answer 1. We envision a mixed model of schools operated by the local school system, as well as charter schools, which offers parents a choice of schools that will enable them to place their children in the school environment that best meets the needs of each individual child. Most schools will be community/neighborhood

schools, but there will also be specialty schools, especially at the high school level, tailored to meet the needs of a specific student population. Examples include Career Academies that offer industry-based certifications and Freshman Academies designed to help students transition to high school and correct any academic deficiencies that would negatively impact their academic success. The ultimate goal is to provide schools where every child has a choice of schools and will receive the excellent education to which he is entitled.

Louisiana law stipulates that low-performing schools in New Orleans that transfer to the Recovery School District shall remain there for at least 5 years. At this point, we are focused solely upon opening schools for 2006–2007 school year, in the midst of an area that is still significantly devastated from Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. After schools open in the fall, we will turn our attention to long-term planning, and the return of Recovery School District schools back to the local school board will be an item for consideration. A process and criteria for the eventual return of schools to the local school board will be developed.

Question 2. What innovative ideas do you have for use of the Hurricane Education Recovery Act Restart funding that has not yet been allocated?

Answer 2. We will assess the needs of the hurricane-impacted districts, focusing on the most severely impacted schools, and will work with them to develop innovative plans for these funds based on the needs that emerged over the last year. At this point, schools have been focused on basic and fundamental activities necessary to open schools for the 2006–2007 school year. This process has enabled us all to think of very different ways to use these funds, and I believe the knowledge gained from our experiences will be integrated into plans to spend the money.

Question 3. The Recovery School District will run more schools than it anticipated this fall because not enough high-quality charter school applications were approved. What is the State and city leadership doing to attract high-quality charter school applicants to New Orleans?

Answer 3. I cannot speak for the city, but the State has contracted with the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) to help us recruit high-quality charter providers and to oversee the chartering efforts in New Orleans. The State Department of Education has also contacted a number of charter providers that are nationally recognized for academic excellence encouraging them to apply to be charter school providers in New Orleans. This is an ongoing process.

Question 4. How does the Department plan to use the \$24 million it was recently awarded under the Federal Charter Schools Program? What support does the State offer to charter schools?

Answer 4. All new charter schools will receive a \$200,000 start-up grant. Each new charter school will also be eligible to receive an additional \$200,000 per year for their first and second year of operation.

Unlike in other States, where charter schools have to procure their own funding and facilities, Louisiana is providing charter schools in New Orleans with school buildings, funding through the State's Minimum Foundation Formula, a share of local education moneys, and their appropriate share of all Federal moneys. The Recovery School District is also providing shared services for charters that wish to participate including food services, transportation, building maintenance, accounting, janitorial, and security. The Recovery School District is also including charter school teachers and administrators in professional development activities.

RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS OF SENATOR ALEXANDER AND SENATOR LANDRIEU
BY ROBIN JARVIS

Question 1. Congress intended for Hurricane Education Recovery Act aid to be distributed quickly and efficiently, with flexibility in use of funds for States and districts. How would you assess that process?

Answer 1. Despite the best intentions of the Congress and our full understanding of the necessity for documentation and accountability, the process of working out the nuts and bolts of distributing this aid with the U.S. Department of Education made the process longer and more encumbered with details than hoped for. However, I want to emphasize how much I appreciate the work of the USDOE staff who worked diligently to get this funding flowing to the hurricane impacted States as quickly as possible so, in turn, we could get this money distributed to schools and local school systems as expeditiously as possible.

Question 2. The Bring New Orleans Back Education Committee's plan was released early this year, but is not mentioned in the Recovery School District plan.

To what extent did you consider the principles and recommendations in that plan when crafting the RSD plan? Will you incorporate some of those ideas into the 5-year plan that you are developing?

Answer 2. The plan presented by the Bring New Orleans Back Education Committee (BNOB) was one of many resources used in developing the Recovery School District's plan. Much of the BNOB plan was incorporated into the final plan adopted by BESE, i.e., the need for meaningful professional development, universal early childhood education, the need for good leaders, and the importance of collaboration with the Orleans Parish School Board.

Question 3. How does the Recovery School District plan to work with the Orleans Parish School Board to ensure a seamless system?

Answer 3. Although Louisiana law clearly provides for separate systems for schools in New Orleans, Recovery School District staff and the Orleans Parish School Board have been working closely together for the past 6 months to provide information to parents to help them navigate the new school configurations offered in New Orleans and make informed choices about their children's education. They have collaborated on professional development activities for leaders, teachers, and jointly held a citywide open house in the New Orleans Arena to give parents information about school openings and registration procedures, and worked on financial issues of concern to both systems. The Recovery School District and the Orleans Parish School Board have agreed that an ongoing partnership is in the best interests of the students and the community.

Question 4. What is your vision for the future of schools in New Orleans? Do you hope to be able to turn the Recovery School District schools back over to the Orleans Parish School Board? What criteria would be used to enable another entity to take over charter schools authorized by the Recovery School district, if the RSD releases control of its schools?

Answer 4. My vision is to provide schools that give all parents a choice in acquiring an excellent education for their children, without regard to race, economic status, or disability. Our ultimate goal is to return the schools to an entity in New Orleans with proven capacity and to oversee the schools, and we will continue and maintain the academic progress made by these schools during their tenure in the RSD. The criteria that will govern the return of these schools is yet to be developed, and will be guided by the experience and knowledge gained during the time the transferred schools are under the jurisdiction of the RSD.

Question 5. What is the Recovery School District doing to ensure the success of its authorized charter schools? Do you plan to encourage charter schools to form networks?

Answer 5. The RSD has provided the charter schools with buildings and given them the opportunity to participate in shared services provided through the RSD. The RSD has also hired staff to respond to questions and issues. As stated earlier, Louisiana seems to be unique in the amount and level of aid and support given the charter schools.

Networks are forming naturally through the charter management companies and the charter boards approved to operate multiple schools. Some schools prefer to be independent, and we respect that preference.

Question 6. The Recovery School District Plan calls for additional performance pay for teachers who increase student achievement. If you receive the Federal Teacher Incentive Fund grant for which you have applied, how will you implement a plan to fairly reward teachers for teaching well?

Answer 6. All schools operated by the Recovery School District will participate in the Teacher Advancement Program (TAP), a model that the State has modeled and promoted for a number of years. The TAP program was initially started by the Milken Family Foundation and is now the leading national teacher quality program in the country.

Under the TAP system, good teachers can advance professionally without leaving the classroom, where they are needed most. TAP provides an opportunity for classroom teachers to earn higher salaries. At the same time, TAP facilitates and supports the professional development of teachers, provides opportunities to learn the most effective teaching strategies and holds them accountable for their classroom performance.

RSD charter schools will also have the option of participating in the TAP model, as the Algiers Charter Schools have done. Some charters may choose other performance-based pay options or may choose not to participate at all in such a model.

Question 7. Have all of the principals been hired for the Recovery School District for the upcoming school year? What percentages of teachers have been hired, and how do you plan to expedite this process?

Answer 7. All but two principals and four assistant principals have been hired. Approximately two-thirds of the teachers have been hired.

The RSD has an ongoing process in place to recruit, screen, interview, and offer jobs to qualified applicants. Our recruitment efforts are focused on hiring quality educators, and we are at a point in the hiring process for the 2006–2007 school year where we are targeting specific subject matter areas where we still have shortages, such as special education and high school math, science, and foreign languages.

Question 8. How is the community reacting to the schools that are being reopened? What types of outreach efforts has the Louisiana Department of Education taken to make sure that the community is aware of which schools are being opened in their neighborhoods?

Answer 8. Naturally, residents of New Orleans would like to have all of their neighborhood schools open and their communities back as they were prior to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Unfortunately, this is not possible at this time as many schools are irreparably damaged and the city has many fewer students. However, the RSD has worked diligently to ensure that schools are available, across the city, in locations where there are utilities and safe, usable buildings. We have taken every opportunity to open neighborhood schools, and the people we meet in the community are grateful we are making these efforts.

The Department of Education and the Recovery School District mounted a comprehensive outreach program utilizing radio and television media, and public service announcements. Fliers were distributed throughout the community and RSD staff attended countless community meetings, working with community planning groups. Community outreach efforts are ongoing and are considered an integral part of the operation of the Recovery School District.

RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS OF SENATOR ALEXANDER AND SENATOR LANDRIEU
BY GREG A. RICHMOND

Question 1. What do Louisiana leaders need to do to attract more high-quality charter school operators to New Orleans?

Answer 1. To be attracted to open schools in New Orleans, potential school operators need sufficient information, time and predictability. High quality operators throughout the Nation typically make decisions conservatively and grow slowly. They are already committed in other cities. They were implementing their own growth plans before Hurricane Katrina and will not serve New Orleans unless they receive thorough information that persuades them to change their plans. Louisiana's charter school development process must proactively disseminate the information operators need. This information must thoroughly address issues such as funding, facilities, student demographics, staffing, operations, accountability and timing. If operators do not understand how to operate in New Orleans, they will not come.

Furthermore, Louisiana must persuade them that the risks of doing business in New Orleans are manageable. In fact, the risks must be low enough to persuade the operator to forego opportunities elsewhere in favor of New Orleans. This will be difficult because operators have often spent years planning to conduct business elsewhere. If the risks and rewards between New Orleans and another location are perceived to be *equal*, the operator will likely stick with its plans in the other city. Therefore, New Orleans must be perceived to be a *superior* location for operations. New Orleans must offer a better arrangement than other cities.

Fortunately, because of the availability of school facilities, New Orleans already has an advantage over many cities. It must now capitalize on that advantage by offering a comprehensive package of conditions that attract operators to New Orleans.

Local operators may not have opportunities elsewhere in the Nation, but they have the same need for thorough, accurate information about funding, facilities, student demographics, staffing, operations, accountability and timing.

The information that is provided to potential operators, both local and national, must remain accurate and constant. Across the country, operators can deal with a wide range of educational circumstances, but in each locality they need a level of predictability in order to function.

Finally, operators need adequate time—6 to 9 months—between approval and the first day of school. Therefore, Louisiana's application process should lead to State decisions in roughly January or February.

Question 2. What supports do the city's newly chartered schools need to ensure their students achieve academically?

Answer 2. Charter school operators are a notoriously independent group of people and providing support to them as a group is not easy. The first form of support that is needed is thorough, accurate information from the State, as described above. The arrangement between authorizer and school should be positive and stable, empowering the school to grow and improve. Schools that have to fight against their authorizers have little time to work to improve instruction.

The quality of a school's governing board is also critical. A high quality, diverse, dedicated supportive board serves as a foundation for school success. If such a board is in place, the school will be able to continuously learn, make adjustments and improve. Without such a board, the school will stagnate or, worse, board conflict will drag down the entire school. New Schools for New Orleans has appropriately identified governance as a key issue.

School leadership support is also essential for success. The job of a charter school principal is more demanding than that of a traditional principal because the charter school does not have a central office that provides a huge array of instructional and administrative support. The charter school principal is responsible for *everything*. Unfortunately, our traditional school leadership development programs at universities usually prepare leaders to serve within a school system, not outside of one. Thus, great teachers can be cast into roles as a charter school principal without the skills and training needed to survive. New Schools for New Orleans is addressing part of this challenge through its work on teacher recruitment and back-office administration. More can be done by working with local universities to enhance leadership development programs.

Question 3. What changes should be made to Louisiana's charter school law to ensure optimal conditions for the growth of high-quality charter schools, not only in the Recovery School District, but also in Orleans Parish? Should the 5 types of charter schools set forth in current law be simplified?

Answer 3. The five types of charter schools in Louisiana may be confusing at first, but the typologies themselves are not the cause of any problems. In fact, almost all States have different types of charter schools (e.g. new starts, appeals, conversions); they simply are not labeled by type.

Rather, the greatest threat to charter schools in New Orleans is the fractured system of oversight between the Recovery School District and Orleans Parish. While the Recovery School District has put in place thoughtful systems to evaluate new charter applications, execute thorough charter contracts, and establish an accountability framework, Orleans Parish has not. Many believe that Orleans Parish has mostly re-labeled a set of traditional schools as "charter schools," without requiring adequate school plans upfront or creating adequate monitoring systems for the future.

New Orleans's charter schools now have separate systems—or sometimes no systems—for ensuring fair student enrollment procedures, appropriate special education services, lawful student disciplinary actions, adequate financial monitoring and proper health and safety plans, to name only a few important issues.

These separate systems have been created by State law. Types 1 and 3 charter schools report only to Orleans Parish with no State involvement or quality control. Types 2, 4 and 5 report only to the State with no local involvement, planning or communication. The typology is not the problem; the separate oversight systems are.

Because BESE/LDE/RSD has demonstrated a greater commitment and capacity for charter school authorizing than Orleans Parish, NACSA recommends that State law be amended to provide BESE and the LDE with oversight powers related to all types of charter schools in Louisiana. Types 1 and 3 charter schools could still be initiated locally but would need to be reviewed and approved by BESE. BESE should ensure two things: (1) that Type 1 and 3 charters schools that are forwarded to the State are of adequate quality and (2) that the local school district has adequate authorizing and oversight systems in place.

A word of caution, while BESE and LDE have performed their charter school duties reasonably well over the past year, there is still room for improvement. In addition, in many other States, State education departments have been bastions of bureaucracy and resistance to charter schools. While this has not been the case in Louisiana, if the State is given a greater role overseeing charter schools, the legislature should also put safeguards in place to ensure that BESE and LDE do not slip into negative, bureaucratic practices. Such safeguards could include external annual reports and/or sunset procedures.

Question 4. Is anything being done to help strengthen the applications of charter proposals you recommended that the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education reject, to help meet the demand for new schools?

Answer 4. NACSA continued to work with “the best of the rejected” applicants over the summer and they re-submitted in late August. If they are of high quality, they may be able to open in mid-year. NACSA is also proposing to conduct a series of technical assistance workshops this fall for organizations developing applications for charter schools to start next fall.

Question 5. What additional steps should be taken to ensure that the charter school movement can grow and succeed in New Orleans?

Answer 5. This fall, New Orleans families are encountering an unintended accidental system of public schools. The number of schools, types of schools (OPSB-operated, RSD-operated, and charter), school sizes, school locations, educational programs and services, and systems of public oversight have been implemented under stress, without benefit of long-term analysis or planning.

While the reasons for this may be understandable given the past year’s unprecedented challenges, this situation should not continue indefinitely. Many long-term issues remain. Thus, the greatest challenge facing the charter school movement in New Orleans is the same challenge that is facing the city’s entire system of public education—a fractured array of governing bodies and schools operating without an overall plan.

A long range, comprehensive plan would answer:

- How many schools will be needed? Where? Over what time period? How will future facility planning decisions be made and by whom?
- Will New Orleans and Louisiana make a determined effort to increase the number of charter schools or are they indifferent to the type of schools that will open in the future?
- How will New Orleans develop an adequate pipeline of high quality teachers and school leaders?
- How will families learn about and choose among the schools available to them?
- How will school choice be preserved while ensuring fair student admissions, transfers and disciplinary actions?
- How will special populations of students be served, such as students with disabilities, English Language Learners and the homeless?
- Is adequate data being collected to monitor school performance, not just on State tests, but also on attendance, graduation and demographic characteristics?
- What forms of communication and collaboration should exist between Orleans Parish and the Recovery School District?
- How will funding be provided equitably among all schools (both OPSB and RSD)?
- Will common performance expectations be applied to all schools?
- In the future, under what circumstances will schools shift from the RSD to OPSB?
- What is the role of the public in the overall governance of New Orleans schools?
- Should school system governance continue to be split between OPSB and the RSD indefinitely, or should the city and State develop and move toward a new model of governance?

It is essential that these questions be asked and answered regarding New Orleans’s long-term educational future. The work of thousands of people will be affected by the answers: teachers, principals, current charter school boards, potential future charter schools, universities, community organizations, the Orleans Parish School Board and administration, and the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education and its staff, to name a few. More importantly, the answers to these questions will determine the quality of education received by tens of thousands of New Orleans children.

RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS OF SENATOR ALEXANDER AND SENATOR LANDRIEU
BY BRIAN A. RIEDLINGER

Question 1. Given your experience in quickly establishing the Algiers Charter Schools Association, what guidance can you offer to others who may be interested in applying to open charter schools in New Orleans?

Answer 1. The process is strictly defined by the State in the RSD guidelines. I’d suggest they first check with the State and follow the guidelines. Chartering in New Orleans now is much more about taking failing schools from the State than any other method—in fact, that may be the only method.

Question 2. What supports do you believe are necessary to establish and maintain healthy, high-performing charter schools?

Answer 2. Some sort of startup funding even before the school opens. We had a \$500 per student startup and it solved most of our cash flow problems and I know that was/is a problem for many charters here.

Ongoing, job embedded professional over years. Financial support connected with a viable school plan that must receive approval before funding is the best way to ensure ongoing success. Ongoing means years.

Something that promotes networking; stand alone charters miss the opportunity for collegial support and the sharing of craft knowledge which is how good schools become great. This is at the teacher level (first grade teachers from different schools working together) and school leaders.

Question 3. The Bring New Orleans Back plan recommends establishing small networks of schools that share services, much as the Algiers Charter Schools Association is already doing. The Recovery School District plan also supports a greater role for charter schools. As a charter school operator, what is your reaction to these two plans? What actions would you recommend to State and local leaders?

Answer 3. The Bring New Orleans Back Commission suggested what many have suggested the last few years—that is, since the large Orleans School Board was ineffective, perhaps smaller “districts” would work better. Algiers was on that path before Katrina. I believe we are an example that the smaller associations really can work. It is important to realize though that just making smaller networks alone does NOT ensure success. The history of school improvement is filled with improvement plans that changed the structure and never changed what happened in the classroom. Before granting networks a charter—I would require a detailed answer to the question . . . How will you improve the instruction of every teacher and what happens if they do not improve? That is the key.

The RSD plan frankly is about maintaining some control over what is happening—massive chartering. That is probably good in most cases, but not for ACSA. The RSD control eliminates some of the freedom that makes chartering such a positive. I understand why; I just would wish there could be levels of control that lessen as trust is built. (Examples include mandates regarding a student information system, constant reporting of things like waiting lists, etc.)

Question 4. What is the reaction of Algiers Charter Schools Association teachers toward the plan to implement the Teacher Advancement Program this fall? Do you think the opportunity to earn a higher salary and take on additional responsibility will help recruit talented teachers in the future?

Answer 4. Even though it was not required, we had each school staff vote to accept or reject TAP. The votes were overwhelmingly in favor of the plan. I think the money is only a small part of what the teachers like about TAP. Most teachers want to improve their skills, but until TAP no one in this area showed them a plan to do just that. I believe our teachers saw the wisdom in having master teachers and therefore supported the effort.

RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS OF SENATOR ALEXANDER AND SENATOR LANDRIEU
BY PHYLLIS LANDRIEU

Question 1. How does the Orleans Parish School Board plan to work with the Recovery School District to ensure a seamless system?

Answer 1. We have an unwritten partnership that has been working very well. However, there are a number of unresolved issues—like the Recovery School District shouldering their share of the \$250 million bond debt, the \$60 million unemployment debt, insurance on the properties, and what will happen with those school properties they choose not to open. We want them back now so they can be sold.

Question 2. What is your vision for the future of schooling in New Orleans? After the Recovery School District’s initial 5-year authorization has expired, what should happen to schools under its authority?

Answer 2. Now and in the future: “The Unified Orleans Parish School System.”

Question 3. The schools Orleans Parish School Board currently oversees have selective enrollment, and were considered among the higher-performing schools before Hurricane Katrina. Do you envision opening more schools with open access?

Answer 3. No response.

Question 4. The State has made efforts to strengthen its authorizing and oversight procedures for charter schools. What efforts has Orleans Parish School Board made

to do the same? Should charter schools authorized by the State and by the local board be under the control of one entity?

Answer 4. We have adopted similar criteria. Basically all schools are under the ultimate control of the State. Our system differs in that some charters are located in school buildings controlled by the State and some controlled by the OPSB.

Question 5. What challenges has students' mobility presented to the district? What efforts is the district making to help meet mobile students' unique needs?

Answer 5. There is some unrest in the RSD schools due to mixed localities of students and inexperience of the RSD.

RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS OF SENATOR ALEXANDER AND SENATOR LANDRIEU
BY STATE SENATOR ULLO

Question 1. The State has adopted a "follow the student" model for school financing in the Recovery School District. Is this under consideration for the traditional school financing formulas?

Answer 1. The State has used different weights for different types of students to determine costs for educating students and allocating money to local school districts, since 1992. This allocation then goes to local school districts in a block grant for them to distribute to individual schools as best meets the needs of the schools and the district. The Louisiana Constitution (Article VIII, Section 3) prohibits BESE from interfering in the business affairs of a local public school board and the State is restrained from specifying how the districts allocate their MFP dollars.

Since BESE functions as the school board for the Recovery School District, this constitutional prohibition does not apply, thereby allowing the use of weighted funding down to the school level. This innovative approach to school funding has been used in a number of cities, including Seattle and Houston.

Question 2. What are the legislature's primary oversight responsibilities for education?

Answer 2. With respect to pre-K-12 Public Education, the Louisiana Constitution of 1974 provides:

Article VIII, Section 1:

The Legislature shall provide for the education of the people of the State and shall establish and maintain a public educational system.

Article VIII, Section 13:

- The Legislature must approve the Minimum Foundation Formula developed by the State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) to establish the amount of the funds to be appropriated by the legislature to support the cost of a minimum foundation program of education (MFP).
- The legislature may not amend the formula, but may return it to BESE and recommend an amended formula to the BESE for their approval and resubmission to the Legislature for approval.
- The Legislature shall annually appropriate funds sufficient to fully fund the current cost of the MFP in accordance with the formula adopted by BESE and approved by the Legislature.

Senate Rule 13.4. Referral to standing committees; jurisdiction.—Each legislative instrument or other matter to be referred to committee shall be referred, on the basis of the subject matter contained therein, to the committee having jurisdiction thereof as provided in the following enumeration of subject matter jurisdiction for the committees of the Senate:

Education Committee, all matters relating to:

- Adult education
- College or university agricultural extension service
- Colleges and universities
- Cultural affairs
- Education generally
- Educational television
- Employees of colleges and universities, including pay, except where an appropriation of State funds is required
- Employees of vocational-technical education schools, including pay, except where an appropriation of State funds is required
- Museums
- Preservation of historic landmarks and objects
- School employees, administrators, teachers, bus drivers, and others

- School employees' and teachers' pay, except where an appropriation of State funds is required
- School lunch program
- Schools and secondary education
- Schools for the blind
- Schools for the deaf
- State and public libraries
- Vocational-technical education

Question 3. What criteria will the legislature use to determine whether to transfer authority over schools back to the Orleans Parish School Board once the Recovery School District's initial 5-year authorization ends?

Answer 3. The responsibility to make this determination lies with the Recovery School District and the State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Louisiana Revised Statutes—R.S. 17:10.7 provides that low-performing schools in a district in "academic crisis" that are transferred to the Recovery School District (RSD) shall remain in the RSD for a minimum of 5 years. The RSD is charged with making recommendations to BESE prior to the end of the 5-year period as to whether the school should remain in the RSD or be returned to the local school district, along with any stipulations or conditions for the return to local control. BESE must act on the RSD recommendations within 6 months of the end of the 5-year period.

Question 4. In light of the rapid growth of charter schools in New Orleans, is the legislature considering amending the State's charter school law to improve accountability and uniformity of procedures among authorizers?

Answer 4. State law already provides for a statewide system of educational accountability. The State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education is currently in the process of establishing an accountability system for charter schools that is in line with our State standards. The Legislature's role in this effort is primarily through its oversight authority over the rules established by BESE.

[Whereupon, at 4:35 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]