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Reinventing New Orleans' Public Education System

David Osborne

If we were creating a public education system from scratch, would we organize it as most of our public systems are now organized? Would our classrooms look just as they did before the advent of personal computers and the internet? Would we give teachers lifetime jobs after their second or third years? Would we let schools survive if, year after year, half their students dropped out? Would we send children to school for only eight and a half months a year and six hours a day? Would we assign them to schools by neighborhood, reinforcing racial and economic segregation?

Few people would answer yes to such questions. But in real life we don't usually get to start over; instead, we have to change existing systems.

One city did get a chance to start over, however. In 2005, after the third deadliest hurricane in US history, state leaders wiped the slate clean in New Orleans. After Katrina, Louisiana handed all but seventeen of the city's public schools to the state's Recovery School District (RSD), created two years earlier to turn around failing schools. Over the next nine years, the RSD gradually turned them all into charter schools—a new form of public school that has emerged over the past quarter century. Charters are public schools operated by independent, mostly nonprofit organizations, free of most state and district rules but held accountable for performance by written charters, which function like performance contracts. Most, but not all, are schools of choice. In 2019, New Orleans' last traditional schools converted to charter status, and 100 percent of its public school students now attend charters.

The results should shake the very foundations of American education. Test scores, school performance scores, graduation and dropout rates, college-going rates, and independent studies all tell the same story. During the first decade of these reforms, New Orleans improved its schools faster than any other city in the United States.¹ This improvement would be impressive enough on its own, but it occurred in a district in which 85 percent of the students were African American and a similar percentage were low income.

This revolution occurred in large part through the efforts of one unlikely heroine.² Leslie Jacobs was born into New Orleans' small Jewish community in 1959. In 1992, seized with “passion and naïveté”—her words—she ran for a seat on the Orleans Parish School Board.³ In a district with a majority of African Americans, she went door to door, often in public housing projects. And she won.

It is hard to describe how bad the New Orleans schools were at the time. In crumbling buildings, teachers napped during class, students roamed the halls at will, and fights were common. Some principals' jobs went to the mistresses of top district officials or to those who bribed the right administrator. If someone failed as a principal, he or she was kicked upstairs, into the central office.⁴ A 2004 study showed that one in four adults in the city had not completed high school and four in ten were unable to read beyond an elementary school level.⁵

Jacobs pushed her colleagues on the board to “reconstitute” failing schools—replace their principals and teachers and start over. But they stonewalled her. After four years of frustration,

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Governor Mike Foster appointed her to the state Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE, like the cow). There she pushed through an accountability system: statewide standardized tests; school performance scores, based on test scores, attendance rates, and graduation rates; help for schools with low scores, in the form of money and consultants; and forced reconstitution of schools rated failing for four years in a row.

The new tests were given every year from third through eighth grades, and high school students took graduate exit exams (GEEs). Students had to achieve at least a “basic” (grade-level) score in English language arts or math and an “approaching basic” score in the other subject to move from fourth to fifth grade and eighth to ninth. To graduate, high school students had to pass the GEE. In 2000, only one in four public school students in New Orleans scored basic or above on the new tests.

Jacobs’s epiphany came in 2003 when the valedictorian at New Orleans’ Fortier High failed the GEE, despite making five attempts. “When she failed and couldn’t walk across that stage and get her diploma, there was no civil rights protest, there was no religious protest, business protest, civic leadership protest—there was a deafening silence,” Jacobs remembers. She decided it was time for something radical: a special school district to take over failed schools, a new idea in education reform circles.

Unfortunately, her brainchild required a constitutional amendment, which necessitated a two-thirds vote in the legislature, then a simple majority on a statewide ballot. The governor and his staff convinced the legislature, and Jacobs led the statewide campaign. The Orleans Parish School Board, the city council, and the teachers’ union all came out against the amendment. “But I had served an African American district,” Jacobs says. “I had walked the district; I answered my phone. I knew parents wanted good schools for their kids; I had no doubt about it.” The amendment passed by close to 60 percent—statewide and in the city.

The new district had a lot of New Orleans schools to choose from: Fifty-four of the state’s seventy-three failing schools were in the city.⁶ In its first two years, the RSD took control of five New Orleans schools, turning them over to charter operators.⁷

On August 29, 2005, Katrina roared in and the levees gave way. New Orleans Public Schools was already broke when Katrina hit; the board was searching for a \$50 million line of credit so it could meet payroll. On September 15 it put all employees on unpaid disaster leave.⁸ Soon afterward it announced it was not reopening any schools that academic year. Jacobs met with State Superintendent Cecil Picard and insisted that they do something. Her solution: a bill to require that the new RSD take over all New Orleans schools that had performance scores below the statewide average. The RSD would reopen them all as charter schools, she said.⁹

State legislators from both parties were so fed up with the Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB) that they passed the bill. In November, with one stroke of her pen, Democratic governor Kathleen Blanco swept more than a hundred empty schools into the RSD.¹⁰ With no plans to reopen schools and no money to rehire anyone, the OPSB voted in December to permanently lay off its seventy-five hundred employees.¹¹

Louisiana’s senior senator, Democrat Mary Landrieu, learned that the US Department of Education had almost \$30 million of unspent charter startup money, and she persuaded Secretary Margaret Spellings to make most of it available for new charters in New Orleans.¹² The new money enticed even the OPSB to begin chartering its schools.

When charter applications began to roll into the RSD, its leaders asked the National Association of Charter School Authorizers to vet them, to make sure those approved had a good chance of producing high-performing schools. To their chagrin, the association recommended only

six of forty-four applicants in the first round.¹³ But quality was important to Jacobs and her colleagues, so they swallowed hard and chartered only six schools. That meant the RSD somehow had to open its own schools—three of them that spring of 2006, more in the fall—with no fund balance to draw on, no principals lined up, and no teachers.

To top it off, State Superintendent Cecil Picard, who had been ill, passed away in February 2007. The state board appointed Paul Pastorek, a New Orleans attorney who had served with Jacobs on BESE, as state superintendent. He immediately hired Paul Vallas to run the RSD. Vallas had run school districts in Chicago and Philadelphia, where he managed a portfolio of some forty contracted schools, fifty-six charter schools, and more than two hundred district-run schools. He had learned the value of handing authority over budget and personnel to the schools but holding them accountable for results.¹⁴

“My game plan was to create a system of either charter or charter-like schools—traditional schools with charter-like autonomy,” Vallas told me.

“Rather than try to restore what was there, we would select school providers—and they didn’t have to be charters, they could be old schools—based on the quality of their application. And then give all the schools the independence and autonomy they would need so that the structure of the schools—how they hired, the length of the school day, length of year, the operational plans—would really be designed to benefit kids.” The central office would play a support role, providing the buildings, the materials, and the accountability.

“All the schools would be up for renewal every five years, including traditional schools”—and if they were not performing, they would be closed down. “You would be prequalifying or incubating new school providers or identifying top performing schools that were ready to take on other schools or expand their clusters, so you would turn the weak performing schools over to the strong performing schools.”

While BESE accepted every charter application its screeners approved, Vallas and his staff worked hard to make the schools the RSD operated succeed. They treated the “direct-run” schools as much like charters as possible, though teachers who survived three years automatically got tenure, under state law.

It was an uphill battle. When Vallas first arrived, in the spring of 2007, less than half the kids were showing up for school.¹⁵ More than 90 percent of the RSD’s students lived in poverty, the vast majority being raised by single parents or grandparents.¹⁶ “So you take deep poverty and then you compound that by . . . the physical, psychological, emotional damage inflicted by the hurricane,” he told the *New York Times*. “It’s like the straw that breaks the camel’s back.”¹⁷

After a couple of years, it became obvious that charters were outperforming RSD-run schools, especially at the high-school level. Motivated parents were flocking to the charters; the RSD-operated high schools became dumping grounds for those paying less attention and for students dropping in and out of school. Their average entrant was four years below grade level, and every year almost half their students were new.¹⁸ So Vallas and Pastorek embraced the obvious solution: turn all RSD schools in the city into charters.

Partnering with New Schools for New Orleans—a nonprofit that helped charters get started—the RSD landed a federal Investing in Innovation grant for \$28 million, to replace failing schools with high-performing charters. As the city’s strongest charters took over failing RSD-run schools, a transition began from mostly single charters to charter management organizations, each with a handful of schools.

“Paul Vallas was our Gorbachev,” Jacobs says. “He came in and was willing to give up his power and control. He could have created a mini school district; instead, he wound down the RSD-

run schools, which was very hard to do. Every year he had to lay off people, downsize his budget, because he ran fewer schools. He deserves phenomenal credit for that.”

Another key player was Senator Landrieu. As a rule-bound bureaucracy, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) refused to fund anything but strict replacement of what had been there before the storm: a clock for a clock, a desk for a desk. Yet New Orleans’ schools had been woefully outdated. Senator Landrieu fought for two years to convince the Bush administration to agree instead to provide a lump sum payment of more than \$1.84 billion to rebuild all the city’s schools. Finally she had to push a change in the law through Congress, but she prevailed.¹⁹

The FEMA money, along with Community Development Block Grant funds, allowed the RSD and OPSB to finance their \$2 billion master plan, which should eventually reconstruct or renovate every public school in New Orleans, while reducing the number of permanent school facilities from 127 before Katrina to 87.²⁰ “The FEMA lump sum made the master plan possible,” Landrieu says, “and the master plan made the transformation of New Orleans’ schools possible, because charters finally had access to reliable capital funding for their facilities.”

The Results

Before Katrina, 62 percent of New Orleans students attended a school with a performance score in the bottom 10 percent of the state. By 2018, only 8 percent did.²¹

Before Katrina, roughly half of public school students in New Orleans dropped out, and fewer than one in five went on to college.²² In 2015, 76 percent graduated from high school within five years, a point above the state average.²³ In 2016, 64 percent of graduates entered college, six points higher than the state average.²⁴

The fastest progress took place in the RSD schools. Because the OPSB was allowed to keep only those schools that scored above the state average, the failing schools were all in the RSD. In the spring of 2007, only 23 percent of students in those schools tested at or above grade level. Seven years later, 57 percent did. RSD students in New Orleans improved almost four times faster than the state average.²⁵ (The state adopted a new standardized test in 2015, so scores are no longer comparable to those of the previous decade.)

Stanford University’s Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO) studied charter school results between 2005–2006 and 2011–2012. Charter students in New Orleans gained nearly half a year of additional learning in math and a third of a year in reading, every year, compared to demographically similar students, with similar past test scores, in the city’s nonchartered public schools.²⁶

Douglas Harris, an economist at Tulane University, created a research center to investigate education reform in New Orleans. He and his team have looked into every possible explanation for the improvements, and in the process have proven that they are just what they appear: the result of profound reforms. They examined whether demographic changes in the city could have contributed to the improved test scores and concluded that, at most, demographics accounted for only 10 percent of the difference between progress in New Orleans and progress in other districts hit by the storm. But because New Orleans students experienced more trauma and disruption than those in the other districts, they added, “The factors pushing student outcomes down were at least as large as the population changes pushing them up.”

“We are not aware of any other districts that have made such large improvements in such a short time,” Harris concluded.²⁷

Winning Political Battles

It is one thing to deliver results. It is quite another to win the hearts and minds of a majority of voters. Race is a wound that festers beneath the surface of virtually every issue in New Orleans.

By the time Katrina hit, the black community still harbored deep distrust of the white power structure. When the school district laid off its seventy-five hundred employees—three-quarters of them black—it triggered enormous anger. The available data suggest that only a third of the former OPSB employees landed jobs with the OPSB, the RSD, or charters, though another 18 percent found jobs in other parishes.²⁸ The public school population had fallen dramatically, after all, and 30 percent of OPSB teachers who applied to the RSD failed its basic skills test.²⁹ To make matters worse, blacks had to watch white reformers at the state board and the RSD take over the schools and white charter operators and teachers flood the city. By 2015 African Americans still made up only 51 percent of school leaders and roughly half the teaching force, down from 71 percent of teachers before the storm.³⁰

Today, however, a solid majority of New Orleanians supports the reforms. The Cowen Institute for Public Education Initiatives does a poll every year. In 2009, only 31 percent of public school parents said the schools had improved since Katrina. Two years later 66 percent believed the schools had improved.³¹ In April 2016, 63 percent of voters surveyed in New Orleans agreed with the statement: “Public charter schools have improved public education in New Orleans.” Among African Americans, 57 percent agreed. Three-quarters of those surveyed supported public-school choice (72 percent of African Americans), and 62 percent thought it had had a positive impact on the quality of education (52 percent of African Americans).³²

In 2016, after a Democrat hostile to charters won the governorship, Jacobs and her allies decided it was time to move control over New Orleans’ charters back to the OPSB. They drafted a set of principles that most local leaders signed onto, then a bill that easily passed the state legislature. All RSD schools in the city returned to the locally elected school board on July 1, 2018.

Why the New Orleans Model Works

Traditional public-school systems centralize authority, organize in hierarchies, use rules to control behavior, avoid competition, treat those they serve as dependents not customers, and operate cookie-cutter schools for most children. In the Information Age, these bureaucracies are dinosaurs. They are too slow, too rigid, too inward-looking, and too indifferent to the quality of their performance.

What can these traditional school systems learn from New Orleans’ startling turnaround? Based on several decades of research on bureaucratic transformation in the public sector, I believe its success rests on several fundamental changes in organizational DNA.

Decentralizing Operational Control to the School Level

Most charters in New Orleans are either independent or part of a charter network with only a few schools. Even KIPP (the Knowledge Is Power Program), the largest with eight schools, lets its principals make most of the decisions, as long as they are faithful to a handful of philosophical tenets. So school leaders—not superintendents—make the key operational decisions in New Orleans.

Ask any charter principal why the new model works, and you will hear the same story: we can hire good teachers, fire mediocre ones, and spend our money in whatever way works best for our kids. In traditional districts, most hiring, budget, and curriculum decisions are made at central headquarters, and it is virtually impossible to fire a teacher who has tenure.

While controlling hiring and school budgets are the two greatest advantages, freedom from school districts' other rules is also important. Even seemingly insignificant rules can have a profound effect. At the RSD school where he had taught, one charter principal told me, "We couldn't keep kids after school for detention, because an RSD rule said all kids had to go home in a yellow bus." That one rule undermined the school's ability to enforce discipline. At the charter "we can do that, plus have Saturday school."

Creating Different Schools for Different Kids and Letting Families Choose

Children learn differently, they come from different backgrounds, they are interested in different things, and they thrive in different environments, so putting them all in cookie-cutter schools is profoundly unfair to most of them. We need different learning environments to meet the needs of different children, and in urban areas, that is very doable.

In New Orleans, there are now "no excuses" schools, with a laserlike focus on getting poor, minority children into college. There are schools with a special focus on science and math, technology, creative arts, and language immersion. There is a Montessori school. There are many schools that use blended learning and some that embrace project-based learning. There are two high schools that offer the demanding International Baccalaureate program, one military and maritime high school, and three alternative high schools for kids who are far behind or over-age or who have dropped out or been expelled. Several diverse-by-design schools have opened, with deliberately integrated student bodies. And a new career-tech high school opened in 2017, followed by a career-tech center available to students from any public high school.

In a system like this, it makes no sense to force a student to attend any particular school. Hence no one in New Orleans is assigned; every family chooses. All schools are required to provide transportation for their students.

To make the choice process easier, the RSD in 2012 launched a computerized enrollment system, "OneApp," and the OPSB joined a year later. Families list up to twelve choices, in order, and a computer program matches students with available seats. Siblings get preference, and in K-8 schools half the seats are reserved for kids from fairly wide zones around the schools. The RSD set up three centers around the city to help parents trying to decide which schools to list.

Creating Consequences for Performance

When families choose, public dollars follow their children, so school operators are in direct competition for funds. The more students they attract, the more funds they have. But the consequence that motivates principals, teachers, and charter boards even more than losing students and funds is the threat of closure if students are not learning enough. Everyone knows their job is on the line if students aren't learning, so they usually pull together and do what it takes, no matter how difficult.

Nolan Grady taught math for more than forty years at O. Perry Walker High School. "You as an individual teacher, you can't be stagnant, not in this day of charters," he told me. "You have to constantly reflect, review, and improve. You don't have the job security you had with the old system. That's a hard pill, but it's a reality. It makes you work harder."

Elected school boards rarely close failing schools—in any district—unless they are in fiscal crisis and have no choice, because closing a school is often political suicide. Turnout in school board elections is typically around 10 percent, so when teachers and their unions get upset, their votes usually carry the day. Hence board members who anger them know they are risking defeat.

In a charter system, however, closures are easier, because usually only one school protests. Other school operators welcome the opportunity to compete to run a school in the vacated building. In New Orleans, parents, alumni, and staff at a few schools have protested closures, particularly when communities were invested in their local high school. But in most instances, there has been little resistance. By 2017, at least twenty-two charters had closed or changed hands.³³

In sum, no one has a right to operate or work at a school for life. Such rights are contestable: the steering body has the power—and the political independence—to award the school building to a competitor with a superior track record.

Closing failing schools accomplishes two things. It keeps all adults in a charter school on their toes, motivates them to solve whatever problems are undermining student performance. And it improves the mix of schools by weeding out the worst ones.

Closure works best when failing schools are replaced by stronger schools, as has been the norm in New Orleans. When Douglas Harris's group at Tulane studied the impact of closures, they found that students in failing schools had gained significant ground two years after their school was closed or taken over by a charter. "The positive effects of closure and takeover in New Orleans explain 25 percent to 40 percent of the total effect of the New Orleans post-Katrina school reforms on student achievement," they concluded. (On top of that, imagine the benefits for future students, who never have to attend the failing school.)³⁴

Jay Altman, co-founder of the city's first charter school, puts it well: "If we can keep an accountability system and say, 'Here's the bar, and it's set high, and if you can't meet it, someone else is going to run your school,' New Orleans could become the only city in the country where every kid goes to a good school."

Changing School Cultures

Children tend to meet the expectations of the adults in their lives, and for too long in New Orleans, those expectations were set woefully low. Charter schools have reset them. Most aim from day one at college as the goal for every student. They put college banners in the hallways and classrooms, name each homeroom after the teacher's college, and call each class by the year it will graduate from college. They also put tremendous stress on a series of school values. Signs about the values cover the walls, many with brief sayings from famous people.

Motivation is the key to learning. A motivated student can learn almost anything; an unmotivated student will learn almost nothing. Too often, the adults in public schools assume their students arrive with motivation; little effort goes into creating it. But that assumption is false in high-poverty communities, where many students see no reason to graduate from high school. Hence charter leaders often view motivating students as their first task. "It's huge," Gary Robichaux, another charter pioneer, says. "We won't hire someone who thinks our kids don't want to learn—that's their job, to create that motivation. Traditional teachers' colleges don't train their teachers to do that, but in high-poverty schools, it's everything."

Building a Talent Pipeline

Creating excellent public schools in a poor community is not easy. According to Leslie Jacobs, the RSD's biggest problem has been finding effective school leaders. Almost everyone in the charter

school world agrees that school leaders are a critical element of success. “The right leader is everything,” Robichaux says. “Even with good systems, the school will fail if the leader is not strong, not motivating, not good at discipline.”

New Schools for New Orleans and others have invested heavily in developing effective school leaders. They have also imported talented teachers, through Teach For America and the New Teacher Project (called TeachNOLA in the city). Both programs are selective, accepting only the brightest candidates, and studies have consistently shown that their teachers outperform graduates of the state’s teachers’ colleges.³⁵

Creating Clarity of Purpose by Separating Steering and Rowing

What truly sets New Orleans apart is the governance system. The RSD’s job—and now the OPSB’s—is simply to steer: to set direction, solve system-wide problems, enforce compliance with the few rules that govern the schools, and replace failing schools. The district rarely operates schools.

In a typical system, the district employs all principals, administrators, teachers, aides, nurses, custodians, and lunchroom workers—sometimes even bus drivers. The elected school board often becomes politically captive of its employees, many of whom belong to unions and almost all of whom vote in school board elections.

Before Katrina, everyone who worked in the New Orleans Public Schools would probably have agreed that the schools’ foremost purpose was to educate children. But other, more pressing purposes kept interfering—all related to the needs of adults. Board members needed patronage positions, so they could win votes by finding people jobs. They also needed campaign contributions from vendors, who needed contracts. The teachers’ union needed better pay and benefits for teachers. And teachers needed job security.

Today, doing what’s best for children is foremost. The districts’ core purpose is student achievement. If schools put adult interests first and student achievement suffers, they are replaced. Teachers are kept on if they can educate kids and let go if they can’t. Principals are kept on if their schools educate kids and let go if they don’t. The needs of administrators, teachers, unions, and school bus operators do not override the academic needs of children.

When districts operate many schools, they get sucked into rowing: leaders spend their time and energy worrying about hiring teachers, assigning them to schools, negotiating union contracts, making sure the buses run on time, and dealing with broken water mains or vacation schedules or even scandals in the schools. They often run from crisis to crisis, losing sight of their core purpose.

And few principals in traditional schools have the autonomy necessary to define clear missions, hire their own people, and get the job done. Most have little control over their budgets or personnel and no mission other than operating a traditional, cookie-cutter school. Too often their real purpose becomes self-preservation, which means not rocking the boat. They are governed by “the rule of the ringing telephone”—if they minimize complaints to the school board and superintendent, by minimizing change, everyone will do fine.

Everyone except the kids, that is.

Success is rare when a large school district tries to steer and row at the same time. “Any attempt to combine governing with ‘doing,’ on a large scale, paralyzes the decision-making capacity,” the management sage Peter Drucker wrote long ago. Successful organizations separate top management from operations, he taught, so top management can “concentrate on decision making and direction.” Operations are run by separate staffs, “each with its own mission and goals, and with its own sphere of action and autonomy.”³⁶ That is precisely the model New Orleans has

created: the school board and superintendent steer, but they use independent organizations, each driven by a clear mission and goals, to operate schools.

In this new paradigm, district administrators become skillful buyers of educational programs. They learn how to measure and evaluate schools. They conduct on-site reviews of each school every year and a high-stakes review when charters come up for renewal. They shift their supply to meet the needs of their students—replacing schools that fail, replicating schools that succeed, and opening new schools to meet new needs. And they spend their time addressing systemwide needs, such as special education and equity of access to quality schools.

In short, they *steer*.

Notes

¹ See Douglas N. Harris, “Good News for New Orleans,” *Education Next* 15, no. 4 (Fall 2015), <https://www.educationnext.org/good-news-new-orleans-evidence-reform-student-achievement/>.

² Leslie Jacobs’s background is from author interviews with her in March through September 2011, email communications in 2011 and 2015, and interviews with others in New Orleans.

³ All quotations without endnotes are from interviews with the author.

⁴ On New Orleans schools before Katrina: Sarah Carr, *Hope Against Hope: Three Schools, One City, and the Struggle to Educate America’s Children* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 120; Cowen Institute for Public Education Initiatives (hereafter cited as Cowen Institute), *The State of Public Education in New Orleans: Five Years after Hurricane Katrina* (New Orleans: Cowen Institute, Tulane University, 2010); “Board Games,” *Gambit* (July 23, 2013): 14, available at <https://issuu.com/gambitneworleans/docs/july2313/4?ff&e=1818998/4132284>; and interviews with Leslie Jacobs, Anthony Amato, and others.

⁵ “A Brief Overview of Public Education in New Orleans, 1995–2009,” New Schools for New Orleans, 2009.

⁶ Nelson Smith, *The Louisiana Recovery School District: Lessons for the Buckeye State* (Washington, DC: Thomas Fordham Institute, January 2012), 4.

⁷ Jaime Sarrio, “Georgia Looks to New Orleans Model for Rescuing Schools,” *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, February 17, 2015.

⁸ Supreme Court of Louisiana, ruling “*Eddy Oliver, Oscarlene Nixon and Mildred Goodwin v. Orleans Parish School Board* on Writ of Certiorari to the Court of Appeal, Fourth Circuit, Parish of Orleans, 2014-C-0329 Consolidated With 2014-C-0330,” October 31, 2014, www.lasc.org/opinions/2014/14C0329cw14C0330.opn.pdf.

⁹ Interviews with Leslie Jacobs and Paul Pastorek, 2011.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Supreme Court of Louisiana, *Eddy Oliver*.

¹² Interviews with Leslie Jacobs, 2011.

¹³ Interview with Leslie Jacobs, March 2011.

¹⁴ Interviews with Paul Vallas, 2011.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Adam Nossiter, “A Tamer of Schools Has Plan in New Orleans,” *New York Times*, September 24, 2007.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Interviews with Paul Vallas, 2011.

¹⁹ Interview with Mary Landrieu, June 2017.

²⁰ “Louisiana’s Turnaround Zone: Answering the Urgency of Now,” Recovery School District, January 2011, 6.

²¹ “New Orleans by the Numbers,” New Schools for New Orleans, 2019, <http://www.newschoolsforneworleans.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/NSNO-New-Orleans-by-the-Numbers-Spring-2019.pdf>.

²² The high school graduation rate in 2005 was 56 percent, according to “Brief Overview of Public Education in New Orleans.” New Schools for New Orleans, 2009. But another 4.5 percent of students dropped out in grades seven and eight in 2004–2005, according to Educate Now! (“Orleans Parish Public Schools Drop Outs: 2004–05 Compared to 2008–09, 2009–10 and 2010–11,” https://educatenow.net/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/Dropouts_Summary_All_Orleans_04-10.xls.pdf). Hence, about half of all students graduated at the time. Only 37 percent of graduates went on to college, according to Leslie Jacobs, “By the Numbers: Student and School Performance,” EducateNow!.net, August 22, 2015,

<https://educatenow.net/2015/08/22/by-the-numbers-student-and-school-performance-3/#more-6135/>. This means less than 20 percent of all students went on to college.

²³ Leslie Jacobs, “Reflection on 2015,” Educate Now!.net, January 3, 2016,

<http://educatenow.net/2016/01/03/reflecting-on-2015/>.

²⁴ Louisiana Department of Education, 2015–2016 report card for “Orleans All” (Orleans Parish + RSD New Orleans Schools), *Louisiana Believes* (website), www.louisianabelieves.com/data/reportcards/2016/.

²⁵ Data from Louisiana Department of Education, *Louisiana Believes* website.

²⁶ CREDO, “Urban Charter School Study: Report on 41 Regions 2015” (Stanford, CA: Center for Research on Education Outcomes, 2015).

²⁷ Harris, “Good News for New Orleans.”

²⁸ Jane Arnold Lincove, Nathan Barrett, and Katherine O. Strunk, “Did the Teachers Dismissed after Hurricane Katrina Return to Public Education?” Education Research Alliance, May 31, 2017.

²⁹ Erik W. Robelen, “Desperately Seeking Educators,” *Education Week*, February 21, 2007,

<https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2007/02/21/24orleans.h26.html>.

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