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Written Testimony of Dr. Robin Jarvis
Acting Superintendent, Recovery School District

INTRODUCTION

Almost eleven 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 one 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

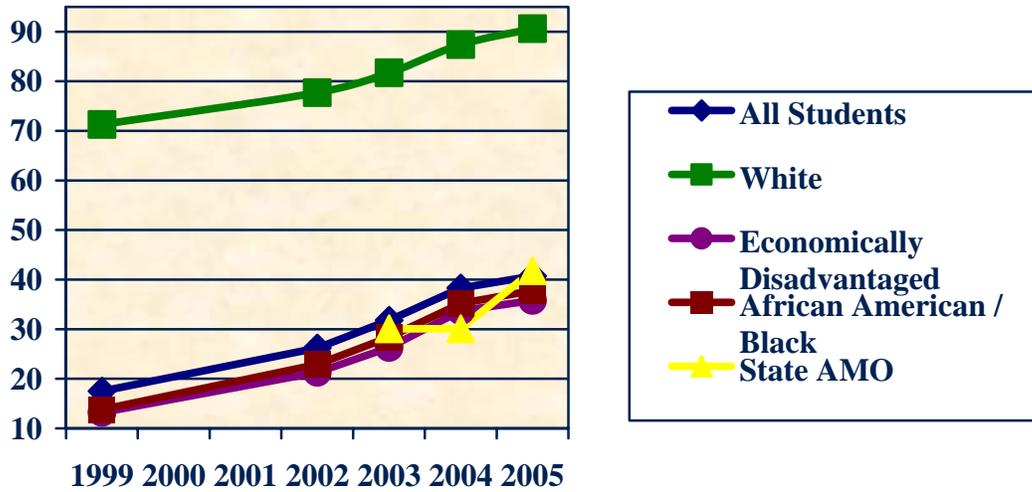
Pre-Hurricane Katrina, achievement gaps persisted among schools in the NOPS. The following statistics help illustrate the reality of the situation:¹

- 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.

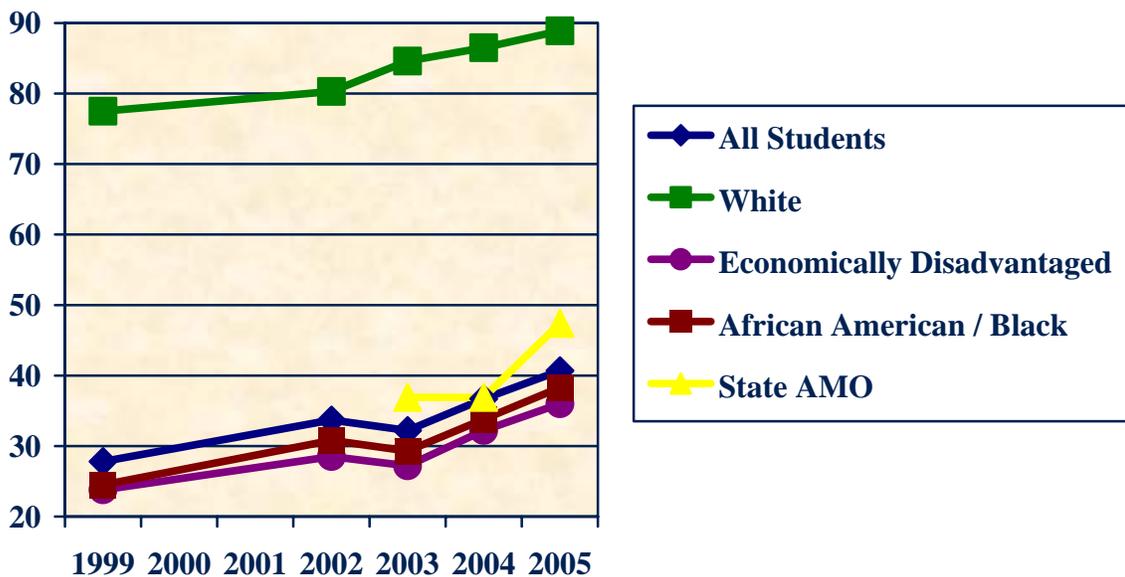
¹ Orleans District Accountability Report, 2005–2006.

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.

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 outperformed 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 twelfth-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.

² Orleans District Composite Report, 2003–2004.

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

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

⁵ 2005-2005 Free/Reduced Lunch Subgroup Performance Scores (GPS).

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

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

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 fifth-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.

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

⁸ Alvarez and Marsal

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

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 four 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 four 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 ten charter schools to open in 2006-07,
- 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 2006-07,
- 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
 - 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 2006-07 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 2006-07 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 reengage 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 on-site 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% 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 PreK-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 in the 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 three-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 walkthrough observations using the RSD walkthrough 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.
- Used 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 system wide 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 five 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 Fullan¹⁰, “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 five year plan for system wide 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.

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

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.