

**UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND THE WORKFORCE**

**TESTIMONY OF SCOTT S. COWEN
PRESIDENT, TULANE UNIVERSITY**

April 26, 2006

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 Aug. 29, 2005. We have made enormous progress despite almost overwhelming challenges, and 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 the Department of Education for its tireless efforts on behalf of our institutions and our students.

HIGHER EDUCATION: THE GOOD NEWS

When Tulane and the other 14 public and private colleges and universities in New Orleans reopened in January, it represented a significant step in our city’s recovery. Of the more than 84,000 college students that were enrolled in our institutions prior to Katrina, more than 55,000 of them returned. Tulane welcomed back 88 percent of our full-time students, including 85 percent of our freshman class—remarkable, considering these students spent only a few hours on campus before having to evacuate. The energy and enthusiasm these students brought with them instilled an almost instantaneous air of hope into a city still reeling from the devastation of Katrina.

Our colleges and universities also represent a significant part of the New Orleans post-Katrina employment picture. Approximately 20,000 jobs are associated with higher education in the city, and most of our universities struggled to continue paying our faculties and staffs during the evacuation and post-Katrina period—both because it was the right thing to do, and because we knew a mass exodus of educated professionals to other areas would deal another devastating blow to not only our own institutions but the city, state and region.

The return of our higher education workforces throughout November, December and January reinvigorated our neighborhoods and businesses. They are key cornerstones to rebuilding our city and region.

HIGHER EDUCATION: THE CHALLENGES

The future of higher education in New Orleans looks much brighter than we ever could have hoped for eight months ago following Katrina. But I would be remiss if I presented a picture of complete recovery, because that is simply not the case. Our higher education community, including Tulane University, still faces many challenges before it can say it has fully recovered from Katrina.

The price of our January return and reopening has been steep. I will speak primarily of Tulane University's experiences here because that is what I know best, but rest assured that each and every higher education institution in the New Orleans area is undergoing significant ongoing challenges in terms of finances and student retention.

As I stated previously, Tulane University felt it was crucial to continue paying employees during the four months we were closed so that we could retain critical faculty and staff members. We also faced more than \$150 million in physical damage to our campus. In order to reopen in January, we borrowed \$150 million and countless more in lost research and library assets, which maxed out our borrowing capacity. We have seen no money at all from FEMA and little relief from private insurance. In order to achieve financial stability, in December we announced a sweeping reorganization of Tulane University that represents the largest university restructuring of an American institution in more than a century. We were forced to lay off more than 400 full-time staff members and more than 160 faculty members, including a third of our medical school faculty, plus eliminate long-standing academic programs in engineering and reduce our Division I athletic programs by 50 percent. The reorganization will save us \$50 million, but we still face a \$100 million budget deficit this year as well as a \$25 million deficit next year. Attracting and retaining top-tier students and faculty to New Orleans remains difficult despite our best efforts because of the lingering doubts about the ability of the city itself to fully recover.

HIGHER EDUCATION: LOOKING FORWARD

Put simply, New Orleans and its surrounding region *cannot* recover without the survival of its colleges and universities. Higher education pumps approximately \$3 billion each year into the region's economy. Tulane University is a major part of that. Prior to Katrina, Tulane University was the largest private employer in Orleans Parish; now it is the single largest employer of any type. The university's economic impact on the New Orleans economy before Katrina totaled more than \$842 million a year; our impact on the state's economy totaled more than \$1.12 billion a year. The closing of Tulane University for four months following Hurricane Katrina had a devastating effect on not only the university, but the city and state.

We will continue to need your help in our ongoing efforts to revive higher education in the city and region. I understand that Congress faces many issues related to Gulf Coast recovery, and that spending must be done wisely and with an eye toward what

will offer the greatest benefit to the most people. As one of the few fully functioning industries in New Orleans, a healthy higher education community—with its influx of intellectual capital, its ability to conduct and attract high-quality research and educational programs to the region, and its economic development potential—is crucial not only to the region’s immediate recovery but to its future success.

Congress can play a major role in ensuring the health of our higher education community. As our institution members have discussed with your Committee, we are still in desperate need of additional institutional assistance. The establishment of an Education Relief Program, along the lines approved by the Senate Appropriations Committee in the pending Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Bill, would provide funds to assist us with the overwhelming task of compensating for lost tuition and revenue while we also rebuild and repair our facilities. I realize such a program may be difficult in these tight budgetary times, but we ask the Committee’s careful consideration of this proposal, or something similar, before making any final judgments. The Committee’s ultimate support for additional relief, along the lines of the Senate action thus far, is vital to our institutions. I would emphasize that the Senate’s Education Relief Program is a re-payable loan program for only those colleges and universities that were forced to suspend operations and were not able to re-open fully in existing facilities due to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. The Secretary of Education would administer the program and provide support directly to the institutions, something that is critical to get the relief to only those who need it and to ensure taxpayer’s dollars are spent wisely.

If the Senate Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Bill is sent to conference committee with the House, with the Education Relief Program intact, your Committee’s continued support and that of the House Appropriations Committee and House Leaders is critical to our short- and long-term survival and success in rebuilding New Orleans.

As I have said, Tulane has done surprisingly well in retaining our undergraduates in the wake of Katrina. Unfortunately, the picture is not as rosy with our graduate students. The consolidation of many of our graduate programs, required for financial viability, has made it difficult to attract these students back to New Orleans. If the region is to fully recover, we must address this problem. Not only do graduate students drive local economies through their participation in research, they fill highly skilled jobs and represent a potential resource for the reconstruction and revitalization of New Orleans. Graduate students aren’t just bright—they’re tireless, enthusiastic and engaged, and many would relish the opportunity to use their expertise in bringing New Orleans back through research, development, planning, engineering, and volunteerism. But this opportunity is not enough in and of itself—graduate students need financial support so they can devote their full attention to their academic and volunteer activities. Within the Department of Education, there are several graduate programs that could be helpful to us if the Committee would recommend temporary preference to institutions affected by the hurricanes and students applying to our institutions. These include:

- Graduate Assistance in Areas of Need (GANN);
- Javits Fellowships;
- Ronald E. McNair Postbaccalaureate Achievement Program.

Outside the Department of Education, programs for which your support would be very helpful include: the National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowships; NSF Integrative Graduate Education and Research Traineeships, National Institutes of Health Ruth L. Kirschstein National Research Service Award Research Training Grants and Fellowships, Department of Defense National Defense Science and Engineering Fellowship Program; and the Department of Homeland Security Fellowships and Scholarships Program.

K-12 EDUCATION: 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 eighth-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.
- Decades of neglect and mismanagement had created both a budget shortfall and serious debt load for the parish school board.

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.

Since schools began re-opening in November 2005, each school has reached their full capacity within one to two weeks of their opening. To date, 25 of the 117 schools have reopened, serving 12,000 students—which represents only 20 percent of the pre-Katrina student population. 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. The Department of Education has 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. 70 percent of public schools currently open are charter schools, managed by the Recovery School District, the Orleans Parish School Board, or the State Board of Education.

As one of 17 members of New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin’s Bring New Orleans Back Commission and chairman of its committee on public education, I was pleased to

have led a team in carefully envisioning what our troubled public school system could become if it were given enough planning, leadership and resources.

The Bring New Orleans Back Education Committee led a comprehensive process to develop a plan to transform 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 socioeconomic 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 a 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, socioeconomic class or where they live in New Orleans, with the goal of graduating all students ready for college and 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. That 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 rather than relying on a central oversight board.

- 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, or community groups to develop programs for learning enrichment and emotional and psychological well-being.

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.

K-12 EDUCATION: 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 be back, is to make sure that schools are reopened in accordance with that long-term plan.

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

First, the results of an extensive demographic study place fall student enrollment projections between 28,500 and 34,000. This projection, and the fact that each subsequent school fills to capacity shortly after opening, substantiate the need for more schools in New Orleans for the 2006-07 school year. The currently available facilities will not provide the necessary capacity to meet this demand; therefore, additional facilities are required.

Second, many decisions regarding short-term planning will have to take into consideration the repopulation of various areas of the parish, the student population in those areas, and the cost to rebuild schools that meet the flood mitigation requirements. There are multiple governing bodies responsible for making these decisions, including the Orleans Parish School Board, the Recovery School District, and the Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education. As they work towards re-building public education in the parish, immense coordination in the short and long terms and a shared vision are the only ways to ensure success.

Third, the Orleans Parish school system is facing a financial crisis. Without the help of one-time funds, loans and deferral of substantial unemployment compensation liabilities, the system faces an estimated \$111 million cash-flow shortfall through June 30 and \$275 million in legacy debt. Decreases in local revenue mean an estimated \$1,400 per child less in 2006-07 than before Katrina.

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.

K-12 EDUCATION: LOOKING FORWARD

Thanks to the federal funds that have been made available to the New Orleans education system, schools have been able to accommodate an increasing number of returning families. Unfortunately, as is the case with higher education, the K-12 system has received no assistance from FEMA in covering the considerable repair costs for its facilities. Katrina damaged 70 percent of the public school buildings in Orleans Parish, causing an estimated \$800-\$900 million in property damage and more than \$250 million in business interruption losses.

Currently, the school system is planning for the return of twice as many students this fall. It has been determined that the repair of existing facilities to be used as temporary facilities, as opposed to the installation of modular classrooms, is the most cost-effective and viable strategy. In addition, this approach is more educationally sound for the public school children of Orleans Parish. There have been neither funds nor a commitment of funds for temporary repairs that must be made before the next hurricane season begins on June 1—a deadline that is virtually impossible to achieve. Therefore, I

urge you to support the school system's request for approval from FEMA for the repairs to these facilities to be classified as Category B temporary work under the Stafford Act. The precedent has been set for consideration of this request based on temporary repair of existing applicant buildings in the California State/Northridge repairs in a previous disaster. The same consideration for this request is requested.

As I previously mentioned, the deadline for temporary repairs ends June 30. With less than a third of the necessary work complete, I am requesting that the Committee support the extension of temporary repairs until the end of the year. Without the assistance from FEMA for facilities and the extension of the repair completion deadline, we run the risk of not having enough classrooms ready to educate returning children in August.

HIGHER EDUCATION AND K-12: 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.

Both our higher education institutions and our K-12 public education system have 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, we will recover. And through our recovery will come the biggest-possible boost to the long-term revitalization of the city of New Orleans.

Tulane University

Pre-Katrina

- Enrollment: 13,000
- Faculty: 2,488
- Staff: 4,064
- Largest private employer in Orleans Parish
- Research - Tulane's growing research expertise fuels progress while creating a clean, high-tech industry for Louisiana and improving the quality of life for its citizens. Over \$137 million in research grants and contracts were awarded to Tulane in 2005, a 37% increase over five years ago. Each million-dollar increase in R&D funding leads to the creation, on average, of 30 new jobs.

Post-Katrina

- Enrollment: 11,307
- Faculty: 1,430
- Staff: 2,317
- Largest employer, public or private in Orleans Parish
- Research: Research remains strong at Tulane post-Katrina. It is anticipated that sponsored research awards will decrease somewhat in FY2006 as a result of the delays and setbacks from Katrina, but perhaps only 15%-20%. Tulane's major research strengths include health sciences and biomedical research, biodefense and emergency preparedness, materials science and international studies,

Faculty and Staff Retention Costs

Tulane incurred approximately \$150M in payroll costs from August through December in order to retain staff until operational facilities became available. Additional costs of \$21M are anticipated for provision of modular housing and cruise ship leasing needed to provide housing for faculty, staff and students.

Rebuilding Costs

Campus property damage has been billed at \$150 million, with loss of contents, research materials and assets, fine arts, etc, expected to reach \$150 million. Insurance recoveries have totaled \$100 million to date, but full recovery is not expected for many years, if at all. Hazard mitigation projects totaling approximately \$10 million are being undertaken designed to reduce future vulnerability in similar disasters. Examples include raising electrical and mechanical equipment, installing generators, and liquid nitrogen storage tanks.

Revenue Losses

- The university is estimating a loss of tuition revenues of approximately \$50 million. This assumes all payments made for both the fall and spring semesters.
- Total revenue losses for FY2006 could total \$130 million and the total operating loss (with some net reductions in expenses) could total \$100 million. The other revenues lost include medical related (\$40 million) and the loss of revenues from grants and auxiliaries like housing, athletics, food services.

Federal Relief legislation for Higher Education

- The Natural Disaster Student Aid Fairness Act (HR 3863): This legislation provided the Secretary of Education with waiver authority for the reallocation rules in campus-based aid programs. The legislation allowed the Secretary to send excess Federal Work Study, Perkins Loan, and Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants from non-affected institutions to those institutions affected by Hurricane Katrina in the Gulf Coast region, as well as institutions that enrolled displaced students for student financial aid. These funds are need based and provide assistance directly to students.
- The Student Grant Hurricane and Disaster Relief Act (HR 3668): Legislation that allowed the Department of Education to waive repayment requirements for students who received campus-based aid and were displaced from their institution because of a natural disaster.
- The Pell Grant Hurricane and Disaster Relief Act (HR 3169): Allowed the Department of Education to waive repayment requirements for students who received Pell Grants and were displaced from their institution because of a natural disaster.
- Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Act to Meet Immediate Needs Arising From the Consequences of Hurricane Katrina, 2005 (HR 3645): The Katrina supplemental legislation passed in December, 2005 provided \$95 million to the State of Louisiana to assist colleges and universities with operational losses.

Tulane University Health Sciences Center

Pre-Katrina

- New Orleans Population: 450,000
- Hospital Beds in Orleans Parish: 1,400
- Beds at Tulane University Hospital and Clinic (TUHC); 235
- Uncompensated Care patients: 3%
- Beds at Medical Center of Louisiana at New Orleans (MCLNO- Charity): 450

Post-Katrina

- New Orleans Population: 261,000 (day); 211,000 (night)
- Projected population within 3 years is 350,000, but city is already ahead of original population projections
- Hospital Beds in Orleans Parish: Approximately 400
- Beds at TUHC: 63; In-patient beds; full 2-3 days after 2/14/06 opening.
- Uncompensated Care Patients: 30%
- MCLNO is supporting patients in a tent “hospital” but plans are underway to open inpatient facilities in New Orleans. An interim trauma center recently opened at Elmwood (Jefferson Parish), and there are plans to open an inpatient unit at University Hospital (downtown) in July.
- VAMC: Currently operating outpatient services in New Orleans and negotiating with TUHC to lease space for an in-patient unit. A plan is expected in June that determines the feasibility of a common site, with shared services, for a new VA and Charity hospitals in downtown New Orleans.

Tulane School of Medicine

Full-time faculty and staff

- 122 full-time faculty were separated and an additional 89 have resigned. This represents a 33% reduction in the size of our full time faculty.
- 314 full-time staff or 27% have been separated or resigned

MD Training Program

- After classes were discontinued on August 29th, the South Texas Alliance of Academic Health Centers, consisting of Baylor College of Medicine, University of Texas-Houston, UTMB-Galveston and Texas A&M was created to provide the assistance necessary to move all medical student educational programs to Houston until Tulane could be reestablished in New Orleans.
- Classes resumed on October 1, 2005 in Houston. All first and second year student activities moved to Baylor College of Medicine and clinical activities were distributed throughout the Alliance institutions.

- Clinical experiences for third and fourth year students are being provided primarily through the Alliance institutions.
- All programs will transition back to New Orleans for the 2006-2007 Academic Year. First and second year classes will resume in August, and third and fourth year students resume in July.
- The School of Medicine has received 7,000 applications for 160 available slots. The average MCAT and GPA remains the same as previous applicant pools.

Graduate Medical Education

- Pre-Katrina Tulane GME had 521 residents and fellows in training. As of 2/15/06, residents with permanent transfers to other training programs 70; residents and fellows in the state of Louisiana 219; residents and fellows in the state of Texas 139; residents and fellows elsewhere in the United States 83, residents and fellows on unpaid leave of absence 8; total residents and fellows currently in Tulane training programs 449
- The National Resident Matching Program (NRMP) match quotas were voluntarily downsized because it seemed unlikely that the 232 funded slots at MCLNO would be available on July 1, 2006.
- It is anticipated that most if not all programs will be able to recruit a full quota in the 2007 NRMP.

**REBUILDING AND TRANSFORMING:
A PLAN FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION IN NEW
ORLEANS**

Executive Summary

**Bring New Orleans Back Commission
Education Committee**

A School System in Crisis

Prior to Katrina, the Orleans Parish public school system- with over 60,000 students- was the 49th largest school district in the United States. It ranked among the lowest performing of all large, urban school districts and was facing significant financial problems. Hurricane Katrina caused enormous physical devastation to schools that were already in poor condition. Even more damaging was interruption to thousands of children's education and the scattering of New Orleans families, teachers and principals.

Transforming Crisis into Opportunity

In the wake of Hurricane Katrina, Orleans Parish has the opportunity to build a new school system to meet the needs and interests of all its students. Now more than ever before, New Orleanians are united in their determination to work toward providing first-rate schools for all children. Mayor Ray Nagin appointed the Bring New Orleans Back Education Committee to develop a long term plan for re-building the public education system that would be bold, courageous and transformative.

A New Vision for Public Education in New Orleans

We can and must set ambitious goals and become a model for large urban school districts throughout the country. As a starting point, the Education Committee developed the following long-term vision for public education in New Orleans: deliver learning and achievement for all students, regardless of race, socioeconomic class or where they live in New Orleans with the goal of graduating all students ready for college and the workplace.

A Rigorous, Transparent and Inclusive Process

To craft this transformational plan for New Orleans Public Schools, we committed to a fact-based process that would enable all members of the community to participate and stay informed. The Education Committee reviewed the results of a diagnosis of the financial condition, physical condition and academic performance of New Orleans' schools both before Katrina and currently. The Committee heard from more than 1,500 New Orleanians, including principals, teachers, parents, and students presently scattered across the U.S., about their needs and hopes for the schools. In addition, the committee reviewed best practices from around the country and the world. We brought together leaders who have successfully reformed educational systems, and heard from the best researchers and thinkers on education. Taken together, the current situation, the desires of New Orleanians, and the best practices led to the development of the key design principles and in turn to the model laid out in this report.

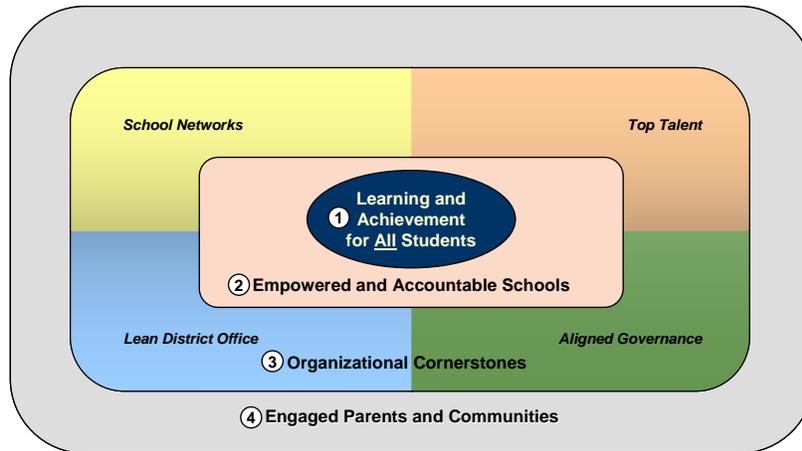
A Bold New Education System

The synthesis of the research, outreach and feedback led to a set of key design principles that guided the development of the final plan. These principles include, among others, superior standards, accountability, and top talent at every level. Building on these core principles, the Education Committee is proposing a bold new public education system, the Educational Network Model.

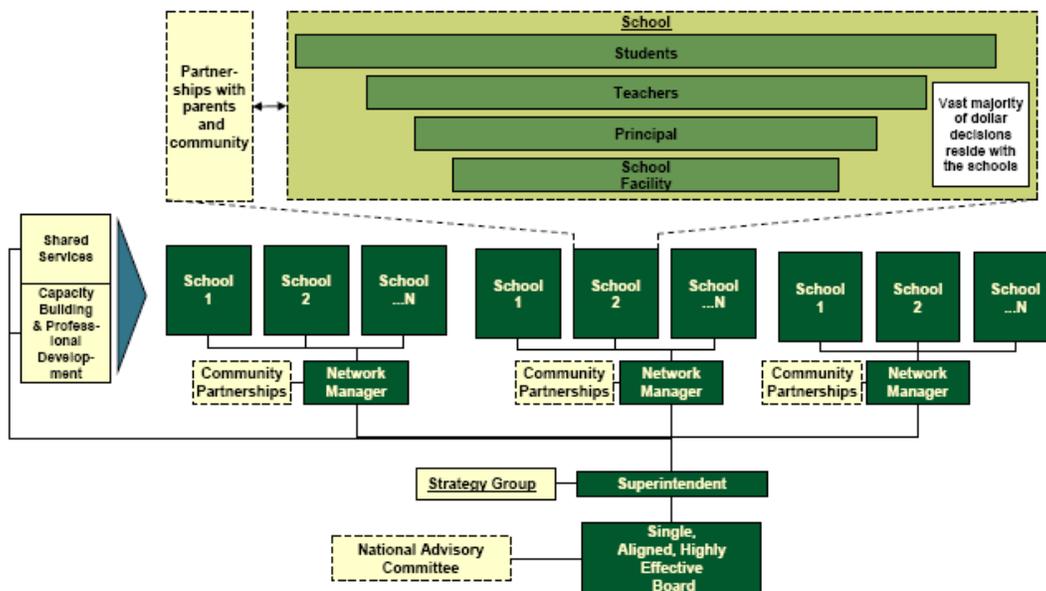
The Educational Network Model we propose is a new vision designed with the sole mission of enabling and ensuring achievement for all students. The model empowers schools and holds stakeholders accountable for student achievement, from the board to teachers. In the model, there are small networks of charter, contract, and system-run schools. The system center is lean and

strategic in the way it designs and manages school networks. The system center sets district-wide strategy and provides support systems for the schools.

The Educational Network Model is supported by four organizational cornerstones: school networks, top talent at all levels, a lean district office, and aligned governance. The following diagram illustrates the full Educational Network Model.



The structure of the Educational Network model is markedly different from a traditional school system. It is based on empowerment, flexibility, and accountability. The organizational diagram found below details how the new model would be structured. Rather than having all schools report to a single central district, this system is made up of a set of educational networks. Each educational network will eventually consist of a group of 8-15 schools. The schools in each network will have similar characteristics, so that they can benefit from sharing each others' experience and resources.



Key Recommendations

In order to achieve the goals of the new Educational Network Model, there are a number of key actions that the committee recommends. Each recommendation is associated with one of the four foundational principles of the model.

Deliver learning and achievement for all students, regardless of race, socioeconomic class or where they live in New Orleans with the goal of graduating all students ready for college and the workplace

1. Design and implement a universal early education program based on best practices for early childhood
2. Define explicit, detailed and rigorous instructional standards by grade and subject that are aligned with student achievement and college/workforce readiness objectives
3. Support schools to best meet the needs of their students who have exceptional needs, including special education
4. Ensure safe school environments through effective discipline policies and safe, secure facilities
5. Provide before and after school programs to enrich student learning
6. Ensure that schools are equipped to address student's emotional and psychological well being, especially with respect to trauma resulting from Hurricane Katrina
7. Design school facilities to support student achievement
8. Ensure teacher to student ratios are consistent with the learning needs of students and best practice
9. Provide all students with the ability to choose a school that best meets their needs
10. Create a fair, rules-based system for placing students in their school of choice
11. Allocate resources to schools using an equitable funding model where dollars follow students with appropriate weighted adjustments based on the educational needs of the student population at each school

Develop a new school-focused philosophy that empowers schools as the centerpiece for transformation and holds them accountable for student performance

12. Empower schools by shifting primary budgetary control and decision-making authority to the principals. Train principals to handle this new authority and hold them accountable for delivering school results.
13. Give principals the authority to select and retain the staff that best supports the vision for their school.
14. Hold networks, schools and teachers accountable for student learning and achievement using transparent, multiple data-driven measurement and assessment systems
15. Align assessment systems with Louisiana and national norms, as well as college admission standards
16. Design a comprehensive scorecard to assess school and network performance and make scorecard results publicly available
17. Align compensation with performance at all levels

Create a new Educational Network Model, with that provides flexibility, options and accountability in order to drive student learning and achievement.

18. Design and build multiple networks of schools, grouping "like" schools together to facilitate coordination and best practice sharing. There are multiple 'themes' to organize networks around, e.g., neighborhoods and type of schools. In addition, there are multiple ways to manage networks, e.g., chartered, contract managed and district-run.

19. Hire and retain a world-class superintendent
20. Attract, develop and retain the best leadership team, network managers and principals
21. Create a Skill Building / Professional Development organization that is tightly aligned with student needs and school achievement goals.
22. Form a small leadership group at the district level focused on a core set of strategic and coordinating functions (e.g. academic standards, data analysis).
23. Create a Shared Services Organization that delivers high quality and efficient service options and treats schools as customers.
24. Create a single, aligned and highly effective governing board with the stability and collective skill set to ensure transformation occurs.
25. Focus efforts of governing board on driving transformation and ensuring accountability, not on operating schools.
26. Create a national advisory board, comprised of educational transformation leaders, to serve as trusted advisors over next 5 to 10 years

Develop new partnerships to engage parents and the community to support student learning

27. Empower schools with authority and resources to design partnering strategies that best meet their students needs
28. Provide support to schools' partnering efforts through network managers
29. Assign clear roles and responsibilities to parents, e.g., parents required to pledge involvement in their children's education
30. Develop innovative outreach approaches to communicate with and engage parents
31. Partner with organizations to offer family literacy and other programs that empower parents to better help their children
32. Encourage co-location of community facilities with schools (e.g., libraries, recreation facilities, health and social services)
33. Partner with key community groups to offer programs that will support student needs and enrich their learning, e.g. social service organizations, post secondary education institutions, faith-based, and arts and cultural organizations

Looking forward

Any effective education plan must also account for the current reality in New Orleans. The number of students and teachers returning to the school system in the near term will be limited. The school district faces significant debt and there are multiple systems of governance to deal with. To be successful, any education plan must be flexible yet robust enough to meet these unique challenges. For instance, uncertainty about the size of the returning student population may mean that it would not be economically viable to establish a large central office running a traditional school system. On the other hand, uncertainty about the number of available teachers calls into question the efficacy of an all-charter model. Present circumstances reinforce the appropriateness of the educational network model to respond most effectively to the current situation.

This plan represents a material departure from the way New Orleans' school system has functioned in the past. Adopting this plan will take significant courage, resolve, and a great deal of hard work on the part of our community and our leaders. But we are convinced that it holds the best and brightest hope for our children. Implementation of the Educational Network model will fundamentally transform the look and feel of New Orleans Public Schools.