

**Louisiana's Turnaround Zone:  
Answering the**

**URGENCY**  
*of* **NOW**

***“ In places like this,  
there's phenomenal  
innovation going on.”***

**- Arne Duncan**  
U. S. Secretary of Education

# Recovery School District

## LOUISIANA'S TURNAROUND ZONE



### Overview

With its unique governance model designed to support autonomy, flexibility and innovation, the Recovery School District (RSD) is a leading reform model for educators around the country and even around the globe as they search for solutions to transform low-performing schools.

Established by the Legislature in 2003, the state-administered school district will provide direct or indirect support to 104 schools in 12 school districts across Louisiana during the 2010-2011 school year.

By focusing on recruiting and supporting highly effective teachers and school

leaders, the RSD has established a successful track record over the course of just a few years and is garnering national respect for its significant progress.

“In places like this, there’s phenomenal innovation going on. Not all of the answers are here, but a lot of answers are here,” U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan said while visiting schools in the RSD. “We now have a historic opportunity to take innovative ideas that are working and take them to scale across the country. Louisiana is uniquely positioned to lead the way in driving this innovation nationwide.”

Schools become eligible for transfer to the RSD if they fail to earn the state’s minimum School Performance Score (SPS) for four consecutive years. The current minimum SPS of 60 represents a school where more than 60 percent of the students are performing below grade level. Beginning in Fall 2011, schools receiving an SPS below 65 will be considered *Academically Unacceptable*.

Under the RSD, chronically under-performing schools are given access to the supports and interventions necessary to improve their programs, thus raising student achievement.

### Current RSD Oversight



### High Expectations

Many of Louisiana’s lowest-performing schools have been neglected for decades. In fact, the RSD, in its original conception, was born out of the frustration of policy makers who grew impatient waiting for progress to be made in the state’s lowest-performing schools. Since that time, the initial model has been shaped, molded and reconceived to respond to different events and circumstances. But the objective – transforming low-performing schools into successful models – has remained unchanged.

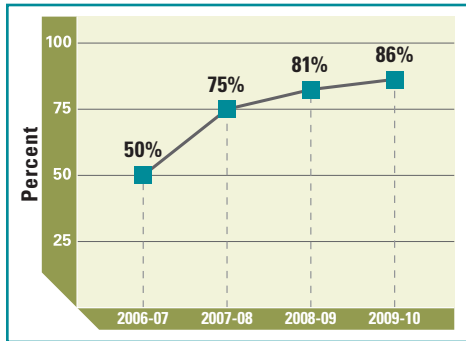
While conventional wisdom has often suggested that students in these schools are somehow less capable than their counterparts in academically successful schools, the RSD is grounded on the fundamental belief that all children can perform at grade level. Initial performance results reinforce this assertion, and state and national policy makers are recognizing the potential for replicating the success of the RSD model across Louisiana and even other parts of the country.



## PROGRESS IN THE RSD IS OUTPACING STATE GAINS

The Recovery School District was the state's most improved district for the 2009-2010 school year. Overall, the RSD's New Orleans schools posted a District Performance Score (DPS) of 60.6 in 2010, an 11.4% increase from the 2009 DPS of 54.4. At 6.2 percentage points, the RSD's growth in SPS was twice that of the state. The state's average SPS increased by 3.1 percentage points.

## Signs of Momentum



*Senior Graduation rates in charter and direct-run high schools in the RSD are on the rise. In the 2006-2007 school year, 544 of 1,081 eligible seniors graduated (50%). By the 2009-2010 school year, 1,139 of 1,319 eligible seniors (86%) received diplomas.*

RSD schools have shown measurable progress over the last few years. The following data demonstrate growth between 2007 -2010:

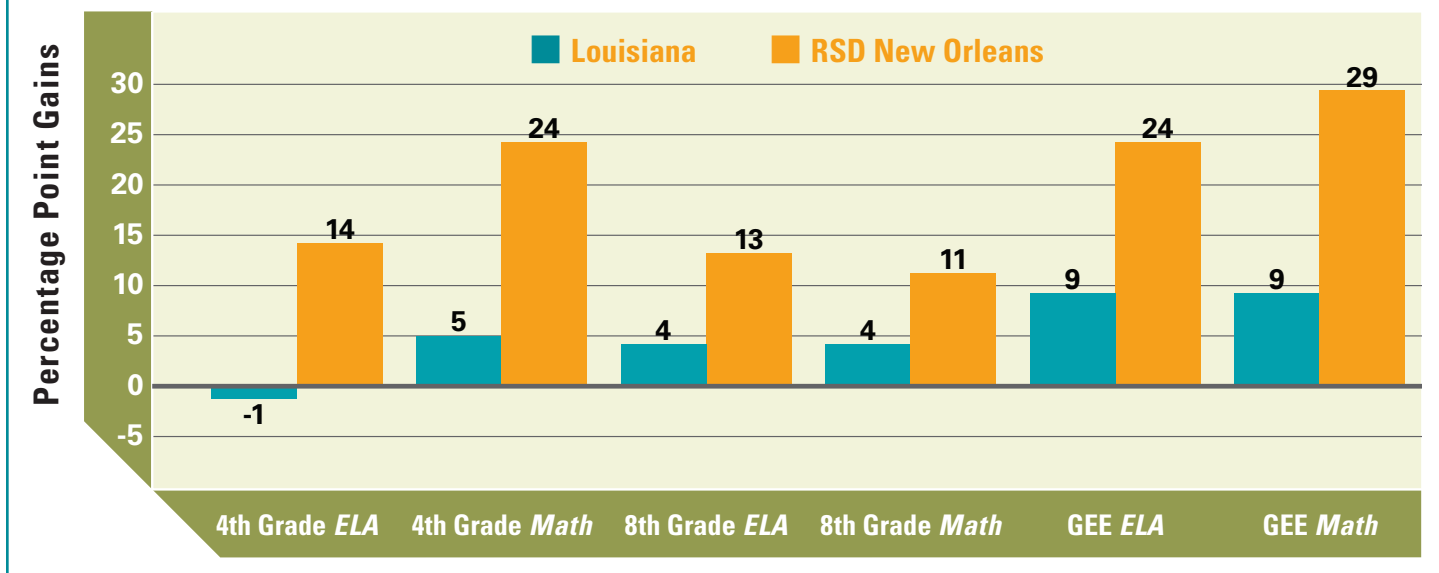
- » Since 2007, the RSD has increased the number of students who score *Basic* and above on state tests by 20 points, from 23 percent in 2007 to 43 percent in 2010.
- » Since 2007, the passing rate for first time 4th grade test-takers in the RSD grew from 36 percent to 58 percent in 2010. And, since 2007, the passing rate of first time 8th grade test-takers grew from 32 percent to 50 percent in 2010.

## BACKGROUND OF THE RSD

- Created by legislation in 2003 for the purpose of transforming chronically low-performing schools.
- Five schools transferred to the RSD during 2004 and 2005.
- In November 2005, the designation of a failed school was extended to include schools scoring below the state average if the school operates within a system in *academic crisis*. Thus, 95 schools in New Orleans were transferred to the RSD after the 2005 storms, although not all these schools reopened.
- By the 2007-2008 school year, the RSD was overseeing 70 schools in Orleans Parish.
- The geographic outreach of the RSD was extended in 2008, when five low-performing schools were placed under the direct oversight of the RSD, and five schools entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the RSD – all outside New Orleans. Currently, for the 2010-2011 school year, the oversight of the RSD extends statewide to 104 schools in 12 districts.

## Gains in Percentage of Students Scoring *Basic* and Above

2007 to 2010 (RSD New Orleans Charters and Direct-Run Schools)



# Recovery School District

## THE APPROACH

### Autonomy

The RSD model is based on the idea that top down management by state government or school districts will not result in school improvement, and the school itself must be at the center of change and innovation.

- » Principals in the RSD have the authority to staff their schools with the most qualified teachers and make retention decisions based on performance, not seniority.
- » Schools operate through the oversight of their own community governance boards, which results in a school model that fulfills the specific needs of their communities.
- » Schools are given access to quality supports that allow them to overcome historical challenges.
- » The empowerment afforded to local schools through the RSD has inspired national education entrepreneurs to engage in and contribute to Louisiana's turnaround efforts.
- » Through open-enrollment and by offering thematic school options, parents and students in the RSD have been given access to high-quality educational programs outside conventional public education offerings.

---

***The Recovery School District is dedicated to providing the supports and interventions necessary to put academically struggling schools on a path toward success.***

---

### Innovative Instructional Practices

Cultural norms and statutory requirements often restrict the ability of districts and schools to implement proven and innovative instructional practices. The RSD offers school leaders the latitude they need to achieve academic success and holds them accountable for making necessary gains. Some of the components that have contributed to the successes of the RSD are:

- » A comprehensive data-driven curriculum and instructional management system that is based on proven models (general education, interventions and enrichment).
- » Increased instructional time on task in the form of a longer school day and year (schools operate from 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., adding the equivalent of 25 instructional days to the school year.) In addition, students performing below *Basic* attend school for an additional five weeks.
- » State of the art technology and virtual learning opportunities that enable students to meet the technological demands of the 21st Century. There are smart boards in all core classrooms and students enjoy a 1 to 1.5 laptop-to-student ratio. Even primary grades have access to laptops.
- » Universal work study is provided for 11th and 12th grade students.
- » Faculty groups collaborate to ensure data-driven instruction occurs.
- » The district offers alternative education programs to students up to age 21 years old who are troubled, have disciplinary problems or are performing significantly below grade level.



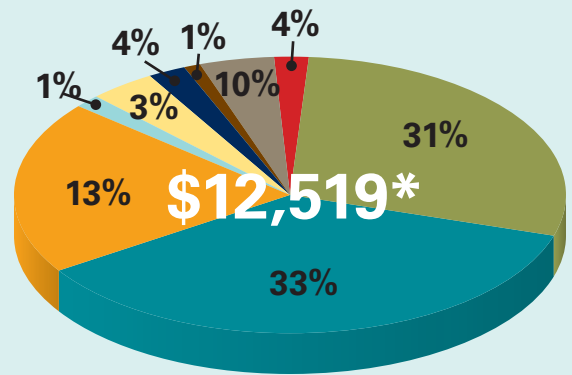
## RSD Funding

The RSD's 2009-2010 per student revenue, adjusted to exclude one-time federal funding, is \$12,519\*.

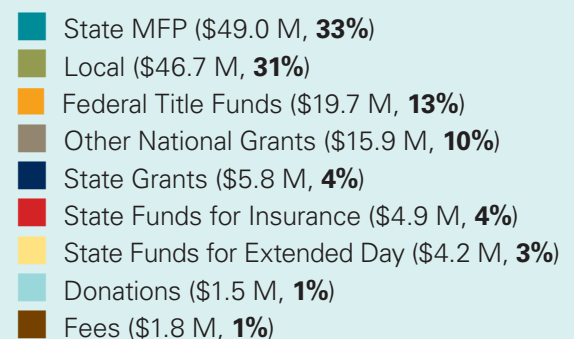
While the RSD ranked the most improved school district in the state, and has expanded its reach to more schools, the percentage of money directed from the State General Fund to the RSD has been reduced by nearly 30 percent from the 2009-2010 school year to the 2010-2011 school year. Thus, the RSD has decreased its reliance on State General Funds, while elevating the academic achievement of students who were enrolled in chronically low-performing schools and are, in many cases, performing two, three and four years below grade level.

*When controlling for one-time hurricane-related sources, the RSD's per pupil funding, \$12,519\*, ranks 20th among Louisiana's 70 school districts.*

### RSD 2009-2010 Per Pupil Revenue



### Funding Sources



\*Figures for RSD Direct-Run Schools

## The Aim

The Recovery School District is evolving to become a model:

- » Composed of autonomous schools, led by high-quality school leaders.
- » Focused on strong accountability measures and performance management.
- » Administered through flexible governance options that can be tailored to accommodate the unique conditions and needs of each school community.
- » Implemented without attendance boundaries, which allows parents to choose from more than 20 high schools and more than 40 elementary schools.
- » Centered on providing substantial human capital support through recruiting, professional development, and school recovery teams.
- » Designed to offer students a high-quality, rigorous curriculum based on best practices, with the aim of increasing the relevancy of high schools to better prepare students for colleges and careers.
- » Founded on a culture of high expectations for students and staff.

## The RSD Model and Impact

**Direct Run (25 schools)** Twenty-three of these schools are directly managed by the RSD in Orleans Parish. St. Helena and Caddo each have one school directly managed by the RSD.

**Charter (55 schools)** Forty-six of these schools are run by charter organizations in New Orleans. Nine Type 5 charter schools are in Caddo, East Baton Rouge, and Pointe Coupee Parishes.

**Management Agreements (4 schools)** East Baton Rouge Parish has four schools that have signed these agreements.

**Memorandum of Understanding (20 schools)** A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) is a binding agreement between a local school district and the Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE) that outlines necessary actions that must be implemented at a failing school in order for the school to avoid placement in the RSD. If the district fails to comply with the terms of the MOU or fails to make progress toward the implementation of the school recovery plan during the first year of the agreement, the Department may exercise the option of placing the school in the RSD.

### RSD Student Enrollment

2010-2011 School Year: **41,600 students** (104 schools statewide)

Percent of students participating in free/reduced-price meal programs: **91%**

Percent of minority students: **99%**



# Rebuilding New Orleans Schools

## The Master Plan

The Master Plan to rebuild New Orleans schools represents the largest public sector rebuilding program on the Gulf Coast since Hurricane Katrina.

The plan was approved in late 2008 by the Orleans Parish School Board and the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE). The master planning process, which began in 2007, included a comprehensive assessment of more than 400 public school buildings across 127 campuses in New Orleans. Public outreach to solicit input from New Orleans residents included nearly 300 meetings.

The Master Plan right-sizes public schools in New Orleans, reducing the number of permanent facilities from 127 pre-Katrina schools to 87 permanent schools. School building assignments are based on factors such as current school location, whether school programs are currently occupying a temporary facility, school grade configuration, public comment, and the stated preference of school programs. Following another round of public meetings to seek input on long-term building assignments for schools, the RSD superintendent will present final school assignments to BESE in early 2011.

The Master Plan is laid out in six phases and was developed through a planning process that included a study of population trends and projects, an assessment of building conditions, locations of currently open schools, and the identification of existing and potential rebuilding funds. The implementation of Phase 1 began in late 2007 with the Quickstart construction program, while Phase 6 is scheduled to continue through

2016. When fully executed, New Orleans' 87 public school campuses will be built or renovated to meet 21st Century standards.

The RSD is currently undergoing a process to review current projects within the Master Plan to ensure the plan aligns with the most recent demographic trends of the city. Additionally, an independent committee of building and educational experts is reviewing the RSD's educational design specifications to provide additional feedback to the RSD.

As of August 2010, five newly constructed or renovated schools had opened in the city – the only new public sector buildings to open in New Orleans since Katrina. Between January 2010 and December 2012, twelve schools are set to open in newly built or completely renovated facilities.

Through the Master Plan building program, students across New Orleans will attend school in world-class facilities. Each newly erected school will have a gymnasium, two science labs, two computer labs and a library media center. The school construction program taking place in New Orleans is a prime example

of government enriching the lives of students in post-Katrina New Orleans.

## The Construction Process and Funding

The estimated cost of the six-phase Master Plan exceeds \$2 billion. In 2010, the Federal Emergency Management Association (FEMA) awarded a settlement of more than \$1.84 billion to the RSD and Orleans Parish School Board to cover storm-related damages to the public school system.

The estimated cost of Phase 1 of the plan – currently in the implementation stage – is approximately \$850 million and will be funded through a combination of FEMA and Community Development Block Grant dollars. A primary goal of Phase 1 is to provide permanent facilities for the more than 6,000 RSD students currently attending school in FEMA-funded modular facilities.

The construction projects underway for the RSD are providing a significant boost to the New Orleans and Louisiana economies. Based on external metrics estimates, the FEMA-funded

construction projects will create more than 20,000 full-time, one-year jobs directly in the construction industry, with many additional jobs created indirectly. More than 85% of the RSD's architectural and design contractors are New Orleans companies, and more than 55% of the RSD's prime and sub-prime construction contractors are Louisiana companies.

Before the Recovery School District receives one dollar

### SCHOOL OPENINGS IN 2010-2012

Andrew Wilson  
*January 2010*

Joseph A. Craig  
*January 2010*

Lake Area  
*January 2010*

L.B. Landry  
*August 2010*

Mildred C. Osborne  
*August 2010*

Jean-Baptiste de Bienville  
*August 2012*

William Frantz  
*November 2012*

Carter G. Woodson  
*November 2012*

Parkview  
*December 2012*

Fannie C. Williams  
*December 2012*

Lawrence Crocker  
*December 2012*

Charles J. Colton  
*2012*



from FEMA, the expenditure must be reviewed and approved by the Louisiana Legislative Auditor and the Governor's Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness. The procurement of all RSD architectural, engineering and construction contracts abides by state and federal purchasing regulations. The RSD construction program has more oversight than any other school construction program in the nation.

In addition, the School Facilities Master Plan Oversight Committee was created to help ensure the construction of schools in New Orleans follows the schedule outlined within the adopted Master Plan.

Other communities are relying on the school construction program underway in New Orleans as a prime example of how to leverage disaster recovery funds to quickly and efficiently rebuild public infrastructure.

## Rebuilding Hope

The RSD approach has also been successful in terms of community expectations and satisfaction.

A survey conducted by the Council for a Better Louisiana shows that a majority of New Orleans residents, 68 percent, would prefer to keep public schools under the umbrella of the Recovery School District indefinitely or at least another three to five years (Council for a Better Louisiana, New Orleans Voter Poll on post-Katrina and Public Education, August 2009).

- » When asked what was better after the storm than before (civic pride, government, economy, health care, or education), the largest percentage of respondents (25 percent) cited education.
- » 74 percent of respondents said they would prefer to continue with the changes in public education since Katrina, rather than return to the way schools operated pre-Katrina.

Tulane University's Scott S. Cowen Institute for Public Education Initiatives commissioned a poll to assess New Orleans voters' opinions about public education reform and the future direction of public education in the city. (Cowen Institute, Public Education through the Public Eye, Fall 2010) The survey found:

- » More than half, 54 percent, of voters surveyed believe public schools in New Orleans are better after Katrina. This is up significantly from a previous survey (32% in 2009).
- » The majority of voters, nearly 60 percent, felt that the state made the right decision in taking over most schools in the aftermath of Katrina.

The mission of the Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE) is to ensure equal access to education and to promote equal excellence throughout the state. The LDOE is committed to providing Equal Employment Opportunities and is committed to ensuring that all of its programs and facilities are accessible to all members of the public. The LDOE does not discriminate on the basis of age, color, disability, national origin, race, religion, sex, or genetic information. Inquiries concerning the LDOE's compliance with Title IX and other civil rights laws may be directed to the Deputy Undersecretary, LDOE, Exec. Office of the Supt., PO Box 94064, Baton Rouge, LA 70804-9064; 877.453.2721 or [customerservice@la.gov](mailto:customerservice@la.gov). Information about the federal civil rights laws that apply to the LDOE and other educational institutions is available on the website for the Office of Civil Rights, USDOE, at <http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/>.

One hundred fifty (150) copies of this public document were published at this first printing of \$240.00. There have been no additional printings of this document. This document was printed by the Office of Public Affairs; Louisiana Department of Education; P.O. Box 94095, Baton Rouge, LA 70804-9095. This material was printed in accordance with the standards for printing by State agencies established pursuant to R.S. 43.31.

## BOARD OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

**MS. PENNY DASTUGUE**  
President  
Member-at-Large

**Mr. James D. Garvey, Jr.**  
Vice President  
1st BESE District

**Ms. Glenny Lee Buquet**  
Secretary-Treasurer  
3rd BESE District

**Ms. Louella Givens**  
2nd BESE District

**Mr. Walter Lee**  
4th BESE District

**Mr. Keith Guice**  
5th BESE District

**Mr. Charles E. Roemer**  
6th BESE District

**Mr. Dale Bayard**  
7th BESE District

**Ms. Linda Johnson**  
8th BESE District

**Mr. John L. Bennett**  
Member-at-Large

**Ms. Connie Bradford**  
Member-at-Large

# Louisiana Students Need Your Help

Public education in Louisiana is improving, and your involvement is paramount to our continued progress. Our gains over the last decade clearly demonstrate our capacity to dramatically improve our schools. If we are willing to push forward, foster a culture of high expectations and provide our educators, schools, districts and students with the tools and resources necessary to thrive, Louisiana can effectively transform our public education system, and thus significantly advance the quality of life in our state.

Since 1999, academic achievement has improved incrementally in some schools and districts, and our State Performance Score has increased from 69.4 in 1999 to 91.8 today. But a score of 91.8 means that approximately one-third of our students are still performing below grade level. That's unacceptable. And we are determined to remedy this deficiency in a matter of years — not decades.

We are hopeful that through the collaboration and commitment of capable educators, policy-makers and communities, the application of effective strategies, and the efficient use of resources, we can ensure every child in Louisiana has the opportunity to reach his or her full potential and thrive in his or her academic and career pursuits. But to do so, Louisiana must remain firmly committed to the programs and initiatives that have contributed to our success – through strong leadership, progressive policies and the appropriation of adequate resources.

Studies of successful education models demonstrate that we will only be able to achieve a lasting impact through a sustained and aggressive effort. We hope that we can count on your support and advocacy as we seek to guide improvements in our state's most challenging schools.

If we are truly committed to creating a world-class education system for every student in Louisiana, we cannot allow complacency, tradition, fear or design to impede our progress. Instead, we must approach this work with courage, innovation and a sense of urgency.



Louisiana Department of  
**EDUCATION**

**Louisiana Department of Education**

1201 North Third Street

Baton Rouge, LA 70802-5243

877.453.2721 | [www.louisianaschools.net](http://www.louisianaschools.net)