

NO EXPERIENCE NECESSARY:

How the New Orleans School Takeover Experiment Devalues Experienced Teachers

June 2007



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Executive Summary

I. The Problem

- *Throughout the 2006-07 school year, the state-run Recovery School District (RSD) reported difficulty finding teachers and space to accommodate growing enrollment in the New Orleans public schools. Yet it was the Jan. 23 decision by state officials to suspend admissions and “wait-list” at least 300 students that underscored the depths of the post-Katrina system’s problems.*
- *New Orleans’ public schools were deeply troubled before Hurricane Katrina. Changes were needed, as was a consistent commitment to proven programs. But denying admission to these students made a mockery of state officials’ post-Katrina promise that the city’s newly restructured school system would create a “new birth of excellence and opportunity” for children.*
- *Ample evidence suggests that the main reason for wait-listing students in January 2007 was not space limitations but, instead, the shortage of experienced teachers — “veterans” who had three or more years of experience on the front lines, teaching in pre-Katrina New Orleans or in another urban school system.*

II. The Roots of the Teacher Shortage

- *The firing of virtually all teachers and other school district staff in December 2005 prompted a mass exodus of experienced teachers. Before Katrina, well-credentialed veteran teachers already were in short supply in the city’s schools. However, the post-Katrina education decisions made by Louisiana officials turned a pre-existing challenge — retaining experienced teachers — into a full-blown crisis.*
- *The shortage of experienced teachers is acute. Veteran teachers have returned to the city’s public schools at only about half the rate of students. Veteran teachers make up only 48 percent of the teaching force in RSD’s regular schools and only 45 percent of teachers in RSD’s charter schools. In contrast, approximately three out of four teachers who work in noncharter schools of the Orleans Parish School Board are veterans (three or more years of experience).*
- *Teacher pay does not appear to be the most significant factor in the shortage of seasoned teachers. In fact, the RSD pays teachers more than any other parish, and RSD’s pay exceeds pay in Orleans Parish’s traditional schools by roughly \$4,000. Empirical evidence and extensive interviews of teachers suggest that the major issues driving the shortage are lack of respect, poor working conditions and having no real voice in decisions.*
- *Unlike teachers in the neighboring parishes of Jefferson and St. Tammany, and in a vast majority of other states, teachers in New Orleans have no collective bargaining rights — the ability to have a legally recognized organization represent them on key issues. The required workday for many teachers in New Orleans is as much as one hour longer than for those in neighboring parishes. Class sizes in many New Orleans schools have reached disturbingly high levels. Job security is also an issue.*

III. The Connection to Student Performance

- *The significant vacuum of veteran teachers in New Orleans is especially disturbing given the research demonstrating the connection between experienced teachers and higher student performance.*
- *This vacuum of experienced teachers also casts serious doubt on state officials' commitment to comply with the No Child Left Behind Act. NCLB requires states to create a plan to ensure that poor and minority children are not more likely to be taught by teachers who are inexperienced, unqualified or teaching outside of their field of certification. This NCLB standard reflects the consensus conclusion of researchers on teacher effectiveness that first-, second- or third-year teachers are consistently less effective at improving student achievement than more experienced teachers.*
- *In the case of New Orleans, the benefits of experience extend far beyond issues of classroom effectiveness and collegial support for new teachers. Unlike many newly hired teachers, veteran teachers had something in common with city students and parents: They too had experienced the unforgettable trauma of Katrina.*

IV. Sensible Changes Are Needed

- *The first step out of the crisis is to make seasoned, experienced teachers in New Orleans full partners in the rebuilding and revitalization effort, and to create an educational and working environment that retains those veterans who have returned to the schools and would attract many of those who have not returned.*
- *Recruiting and retaining teachers, especially experienced teachers, will remain difficult in RSD schools until state officials correct deficiencies of the current structure in which dual, unequal school systems are permitted to exist side by side. On the one hand, charter and other schools use enrollment caps, selective admission policies, class-size limits and other policies to cherry-pick students and evade the problems of mid-year enrollments. Meanwhile, RSD schools are assigned the role of "schools of last resort" and, in some cases, exceed class-size limits to admit additional students.*
- *The dual, unequal school systems undermine the state's stated commitment to providing a high-quality education to all students. Ironically, most of the New Orleans public schools that were transferred to state control under the RSD had been showing signs of improvement. In fact, of the 95 schools transferred by a post-Katrina law to the RSD, 27 of them had both met NCLB's standard of adequate yearly progress and been rated "academically acceptable" or higher by the state.*
- *The decisions by state officials to rapidly transfer the city's public schools to the RSD's control and waive previous requirements for conversion to charter school status were hastened by a well-organized and well-financed national network of charter school advocates. These individuals seized the opportunity to initiate a massive takeover experiment with the children of New Orleans at a time when most parents and students were widely dispersed in other parishes and states.*
- *The dual school systems in New Orleans also hinder the RSD's ability to accommodate mid-year enrollment growth. The RSD has authorized nine more charter schools to open in 2007-08, but these new schools will occupy parish facilities that the RSD could otherwise use to accommodate enrollment growth. Moreover, not all of the capacity*

in these soon-to-open charter school buildings will be utilized initially because many of the new charter schools will open one grade at a time, taking years to reach full capacity.

- *Until these issues are addressed, schools in New Orleans cannot effectively compete with other parishes for quality teachers and cannot attract teachers from other parts of the United States.*

Recommendations for providing classroom space for all children:

- Establish a centralized structure to coordinate, monitor and collect data on student enrollment, education personnel, special education and school facilities.
- Require all schools (including charter and discretionary-admissions schools) to open all vacant classroom space to students who seek admission. If it is necessary to temporarily increase class size to accommodate enrollment growth, the burden should be shared equally by all schools.
- Enforce Act 35 to ensure that all schools, including charters, give preference to children in the immediate neighborhood of the school. This will strengthen neighborhoods and lessen the obstacles created by the lack of transportation options for parents.

Recommendations for attracting and retaining teachers, especially veterans:

- Enhance New Orleans' ability to compete with other school districts (both within and outside Louisiana), and strengthen recruitment and retention of teachers, by leveling the playing field between policies in the city's public schools and those in neighboring parishes, including application procedures, the length of the workday and restoration of collective bargaining rights, but allow New Orleans teachers to vote to extend or modify such rules.
- Ensure that teachers in the RSD and charter schools are covered under Louisiana's "just cause" dismissal statute.
- Provide appropriate incentives so that teachers who retired prematurely are encouraged to return to teaching.
- Reaffirm the vital importance of stakeholders by reinstating enforcement of the state law that requires parent and teacher approval for converting regular public schools to charter schools status.
- Develop and implement a major, nationwide recruitment and retention strategy, working with the United Teachers of New Orleans and its state and national affiliates:
 - To strengthen existing staff development programs to more effectively meet the needs of new teachers who have little or no knowledge of New Orleans' cultural heritage and neighborhood communities.
 - To actively target and recruit experienced teachers from other urban school districts who are laid off due to declining enrollment or budget cuts.

I. Introduction

Earlier this school year, when readers of New Orleans' largest newspaper awoke on the morning of Jan. 24, they were stunned to read that "hundreds of children seeking spots in the city's public schools have been turned away — "wait-listed" — and told that the campuses have no room."¹

Yet this was old news for Kathy Boisseau, a lifelong resident of New Orleans and a former cook in the French quarter. Days earlier, school officials had refused to admit Boisseau's youngest son, Benjamin. Boisseau had dodged Hurricane Katrina by evacuating with her mother and youngest son to Memphis, where one of her four children was studying to become a teacher. At the time, two of her other three children were also attending college. Her eldest son, a former Army medic in Iraq, would soon become a registered nurse. Another daughter was studying pharmacy at the University of New Orleans. All three had graduated from New Orleans public schools.

In light of school officials' decision to turn away her youngest son, Boisseau found a sad irony in her eldest son's service in Iraq. "His uniform had a shoulder patch of the American flag," she said in January. "That flag is supposed to mean something. I find myself asking if we still live in America because this isn't the America I know. The public schools are supposed to welcome every child, but my youngest son, Benjamin, couldn't find a school to take him. I couldn't even get them to provide me with any textbooks or materials to use until I can get him into a school. How can this be? Isn't education a child's right?"

After her mother passed away in Memphis, Boisseau returned to New Orleans in the fall of 2006 to literally rebuild the city. During the day, she was helping to gut buildings as a member of the federal AmeriCorps program. On weekends, she refurbished parts of the house she rented to help pay the rent. In January 2007, 15-year-old Benjamin rejoined his mother in New Orleans and they went shopping for a school. After being told by officials at several charter schools that they had no room for her son, she turned to the state-run Recovery School District (RSD). But she was informed that there was no room in the RSD either, and Benjamin joined hundreds of other children who were turned away and told they would be "wait-listed."

The parents and children of New Orleans endured three weeks of wait-listing — a practice that stood in stark contrast with neighboring parishes whose schools and infrastructure, like New Orleans, had been severely damaged by Katrina. As the New Orleans *Times-Picayune* reported, "Waiting lists are unheard of in the New Orleans area's suburban parishes, officials say, even in St. Bernard Parish, which is serving 43 percent of its pre-storm students at just three schools, compared to 14 before Katrina."²

All fall, the state-run RSD reported difficulty finding teachers and space to accommodate growing enrollment, but the decision to suspend admissions

and wait-list students in January brought widespread outrage. The NAACP Legal Defense Fund filed a lawsuit Feb. 1 on behalf of the parents of one wait-listed student.³

Was the denial of admission to at least 300 children in January merely an unavoidable shortage of classroom space? Although the RSD schools lacked sufficient space, thousands of empty seats and dozens of empty classrooms could be found in charter schools or in the city's selective or discretionary-admissions public schools. Unlike other storm-ravaged communities in the Gulf region, New Orleans was not utilizing other opportunities to accommodate all school-age students. The city was not widely using of mobile classrooms. No school in the Crescent City was running double shifts or operating on a year-round basis to accommodate additional students.

This report concludes that the main reason for wait-listing was not space, but the shortage of experienced or “veteran” teachers. These terms are used interchangeably in this report to describe teachers who are no longer novices — those who have more than two years of experience or who taught in pre-Katrina New Orleans.⁴ Like war veterans, they have been seasoned from experience on the front lines. Like veteran athletes, they have the wisdom they did not have as rookies, so that they can be leaders in the locker room and help turn today's rookies into tomorrow's veterans.

Although former New Orleans teachers have returned to New Orleans schools at about the same rate as the students, only about half of the teachers residing in New Orleans have chosen to teach in RSD or charter schools. The current shortage of experienced teachers in New Orleans may be the product of the disrespect that has been shown to veteran teachers, to their professional values and to their steadfast commitment to the children of New Orleans in the face of mismanagement, frequent turnover of superintendents and chronic resource disparities. Now, as schools are finishing their first full academic year of post-Katrina operation, even ardent charter school supporters are realizing the important role that veteran teachers play in helping brand-new teachers adapt to the fragile culture of urban schools.

Veteran teachers from New Orleans should be the linchpin of rebuilding efforts in New Orleans. They shared the experience of the disaster with their students and their students' families. Most have homes, friends and relatives in the city.

The next section of this report describes the research on teacher quality, and the struggle of urban schools and policymakers to place and keep experienced teachers in their low-income schools. This research exposes the state of Louisiana's folly in pursuing a one-dimensional, “no experience necessary” approach to teacher staffing in New Orleans.

II. Teacher Experience and Student Achievement: A Review of Policy and Research

Teacher recruitment and retention is not just a logistical exercise (i.e., finding a “warm body” for each classroom) — it’s about teacher quality and the link to student achievement. As the Education Commission of the States recently noted, “It is important not to lose sight of the fact that the issue of teacher recruitment and retention is related to the issue of teacher quality. It is not just about ensuring an adequate number of teachers for the U.S. classrooms are available, but about having the teachers in the profession who are as accomplished as possible.”⁵

Veteran teachers from New Orleans should be the linchpin of rebuilding efforts in New Orleans. They share the experience of the disaster with their students and their students’ families. Most have homes, friends and relatives in the city. In addition to their altruistic instincts, experienced teachers have a personal stake in their students, neighborhoods and city. Amy Waldman, an award-winning journalist, interviewed parents and educators in New Orleans and wrote earlier this year in the *Atlantic Monthly*, “For much of the city’s educational history, the teachers had been the heroes, stalwarts who soldiered on, underpaid, amid racial tugs-of-war.”⁶

Before the mass conversions to charter schools and the state takeover, New Orleans had a veteran teaching force. In 2004-05, only 18 percent of New Orleans teachers had three or fewer years of experience in the school district, and 8.2 percent of them were teaching for the first time. These new teacher figures are about the same as the national average.⁷

The premium placed on veteran teachers is reflected in national efforts to change the fact that minority children are taught disproportionately by teachers who are inexperienced, unqualified or teaching outside of their field of certification. One requirement of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law is that states must submit their data on how many inexperienced teachers they assign to schools with mostly poor and minority children to the U.S. Department of Education, along with their plans to improve those numbers. Louisiana’s plan focuses on increasing the percentage of veteran teachers in high-need schools, and identifies a number of policies and programs to recruit and retain qualified, experienced teachers willing to work in hard-to-staff schools.⁸

As Congress considers the reauthorization of NCLB, most proposals for upgrading teacher quality in low-achieving schools are aimed at equalizing access to quality teachers by equalizing disparities among schools in teacher salaries and average years of experience.⁹

It goes without saying that teachers play a critical role in schooling, particularly in inner-city school districts where children often have less stable and supportive home environments. But when districts have difficulty finding

qualified, experienced teachers, as in post-Katrina New Orleans, they often respond to such shortages by hiring teachers with no certification or experience, by using long-term substitutes or teachers who aren't fully qualified, or by increasing class sizes.¹⁰

A recent study of public schools in New York state concluded that teacher qualifications vary considerably across schools and are strongly correlated with student race and income — 21 percent of nonwhite students' teachers failed the state's certification exam, compared with 7 percent of white students' teachers.¹¹ Another report found that African-American students are more likely to be taught by novice teachers.¹² The same conclusion has been reached in studies too numerous to mention.

According to the research, many teacher characteristics — the college entrance test scores of teachers, state teacher test scores, certification, advanced degrees, subject-matter major and college selectivity — bear surprisingly little relationship to the improvement of student achievement. But two teacher characteristics appear to be exceptions:

- First-, second- and third-year teachers are consistently less effective than more experienced teachers.¹³
- Minority teachers are more effective than white teachers with students of their own race or ethnicity.

Exactly why a teacher's race or ethnicity matters is unclear, but observers suggest that both passive teacher effects, such as being a role model, and active teacher effects, such as communication styles and pedagogy, may play a role.¹⁴

Although it is commonly assumed that the best teachers leave urban school districts, several new, sophisticated research studies show just the opposite — namely, that veteran teachers staying in urban schools *are* the most effective teachers. A study of a large Texas school district found that the most effective teachers (as defined by improvements in student test scores attributable to a particular teacher) had stayed at their original schools. Teachers who had changed schools, had left the district or had left the profession produced less “value-added” than those who remained. As Eric Hanushek, a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution, explained, “In our sample of urban schools, teachers staying in the schools in which they currently teach tend to be as good or better than those who exit. Thus, the main cost of large turnover is the introduction of more first-year teachers.”¹⁵ Two other studies in New York City¹⁶ and one in the state of Washington¹⁷ have reached the same conclusion.

Research has shown that investing in experienced teachers has a greater impact on student performance than investing in reduced class sizes.

Schools that are overly reliant on new teachers tend to have disproportionately high percentages of teachers who are either uncertified or teaching

outside of their major or certification field. There are signs of this over-reliance at RSD schools. At the RSD's Rabouin High School, for example, the principal acknowledged a few months ago that roughly 40 percent of his teaching staff is uncertified. By March of this school year, one group of Rabouin students had received instruction from four different math teachers during this school year. These students' fourth math teacher complained, "I'm a political science major, and I'm teaching algebra."¹⁸ The high percentage of uncertified teachers at RSD schools like as Rabouin is particularly troubling considering that research has shown that high school students with certified math teachers performed significantly better than students with uncertified math teachers.¹⁹ Indeed, research has shown that investing in experienced teachers has a greater impact on student performance than investing in reduced class sizes.²⁰

The value of teaching experience has been established by a wide range of research, including a 2001 study by Teach For America, which found that students of experienced teachers performed at significantly higher levels than students of inexperienced teachers, including TFA's own recruits.²¹ It is noteworthy that just recently the school board in St. Louis, facing budget cuts, voted to explore terminating its contract with TFA rather than laying off experienced teachers.²²

III. Research on Teacher Attrition and Retention

The main cost of high teacher turnover is the introduction of more novice teachers. Teacher attrition imposes costs, not only on the students of the novice teacher, but also on the school as a whole. Education researchers Gary Miron and Brooks Applegate just recently concluded: "High attrition consumes resources of schools that must regularly provide pre- and in-service training to new teachers; it impedes schools' efforts to build professional learning communities and positive and stable school cultures; and it is likely to undermine the legitimacy of the schools in the eyes of parents."²³

With high turnover, schools miss opportunities to enhance the instructional skills and understanding of experienced teachers. More generally, a teaching staff with high turnover loses the institutional memory that could strengthen the classroom practices of new teachers and help a school avoid "reinventing the wheel" and making or repeating costly mistakes.

One way to reduce teacher attrition is to hire teachers who graduate from nearby high school or colleges. Unlike many other professions, elementary and secondary education operates in a predominantly local labor market. Researchers in New York found that teachers prefer to teach close to where they grew up and in areas demographically similar to their hometown.²⁴ The high teacher turnover rate in urban schools generally reflects teachers' preference for living close to their suburban hometowns rather than a desire to avoid low-achieving or minority children.

Respect and working conditions are more important than wages for teacher retention, particularly for teachers in urban schools. Dissatisfaction with working conditions and the lack of administrative support contribute to especially high teacher attrition in urban schools, according to the national Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS). When asked by SASS why they transferred to different schools, teachers in urban high-poverty schools reported higher dissatisfaction with administrative support than teachers on average (43 percent versus 38 percent), as well as higher dissatisfaction with working conditions (45 percent versus 32 percent).²⁵ Teachers transferring out of high-poverty schools differed from other transfers primarily because they were more dissatisfied with conditions such as neighborhood and school safety, workload and community support.

A good urban teacher retention policy puts a high priority on recruiting minority teachers. Researchers often use race, ethnicity and poverty as indirect measures for working conditions. Many studies find that teachers who moved to another school district gained little in salary, but their new districts have higher student achievement and substantially smaller shares of poor and minority children than in their prior districts. African American and Hispanic teachers are less sensitive to student racial composition than are white teachers, so they are less likely to transfer or leave.²⁶

The significant number of charter schools in New Orleans should provide no solace to parents and policymakers, as the research shows that charter schools have especially high rates of teacher turnover — twice as high as in regular public schools (Table 1). Transfer rates out of urban charter schools (13 percent) are double those of urban schools with collective bargaining (6 percent). Perhaps even more striking, one in five charter school teachers left teaching — a rate nearly three times greater than the rate for urban schools with collective bargaining.

“The high attrition rates for teachers in charter schools constitute one of the greatest obstacles that will need to be overcome if the charter school reform is to deliver as promised.”

— Great Lakes Center, 2007

Table 1 In Typical Urban Charter School, Teacher Qualifications Are Lower and Turnover Is Higher		
	Charter	Public
First-Year Teachers	18%	6%
Three or Fewer Years of Experience	43%	17%
Regular Teacher Certification	69%	90%
Master's Degree	32%	49%
Teacher Turnover		
Moved to Another School	12%	7%
Left Teaching	17%	8%
Total	29%	15%

Source: National Center for Education Statistics, Schools and Staffing Survey 2003-04.

One reason for high charter school teacher turnover is that officials at these schools are unable or unwilling to hire teachers with even minimal experience. They are far more likely to hire less-qualified teachers. The SASS reveals that urban charter schools are more than three times as likely to hire first-year teachers (18 percent) than regular schools (6 percent). Additionally, 43 percent of teachers in charter schools had three or fewer years of experience, compared with 17 percent in regular schools. Only one-third of charter school teachers have a master’s degree, compared with one-half in public schools. Further, only 70 percent of charter school teachers have full certification, compared with 90 percent in public schools.²⁷

As many as 40 percent of newer charter school teachers end up leaving for other jobs, according to a new analysis of data collected in surveys of charter school employees from around the country.²⁸ This information is particularly revealing because the percentage of charter school teachers under 30 (37 percent) is more than three times that of traditional public schools (11 percent). Those most likely to leave were uncertified teachers and teachers who taught in upper grades.

“The high attrition rates for teachers in charter schools constitute one of the greatest obstacles that will need to be overcome if the charter school reform is to deliver as promised,” conclude Miron and Applegate in their recent analysis.

	Collective Bargaining	
	No	Yes
First-Year Teachers	10%	6%
Teacher Turnover		
Moved to Another School	13%	8%
Left Teaching	13%	12%
Total	26%	20%

Source: The Impact of Collective Bargaining on Teacher Transfer Rates in Urban High-Poverty Schools, American Federation of Teachers: Washington, DC.

In the vast majority of charter schools, teachers do not work under a collective bargaining agreement. This fact may contribute to the high turnover rates in these schools. Indeed, collective bargaining is associated with reduced teacher turnover and less reliance on first-year teachers (Table 2). A collective bargaining agreement is associated with reduced teacher transfers out of urban high-poverty schools — teachers with a collectively bargained agreement have a transfer rate of 8 percent compared with 13 percent in states that do not allow collective bargaining. In urban school districts with a collective bargaining agreement, high-poverty schools are less likely to hire first-year teachers than schools without a collective bargaining agreement (6 percent versus 10 percent).

IV. The Real Problem: A Teacher Shortage

Enrollment growth in New Orleans has been on the low side of predictions. On June 7, 2005, the Recovery School District (RSD) projected that by January 2007, enrollment would grow to between 27,000 and 30,000 students. Enrollment in January 2007, in fact, reached 27,426 students, having grown by about 2,500 students from October 2006 (Table 3). No additional schools opened until February 2007. Almost all of the growth was directed to RSD-operated schools. Charter schools and the Orleans Parish School Board’s discretionary-admissions schools admitted few new students once the 2006-07 school year got under way.

Almost 100 percent of the burden of finding teachers and space to accommodate students who returned mid-year has been on the shoulders of RSD-operated schools, which enroll less than half of the students. This fact effectively makes them the schools of last resort. In an article in February, two reporters at the New Orleans *Times-Picayune* openly acknowledged this sad reality, writing that the RSD “has become a sort of system-of-last-resort in a city with a newly Balkanized landscape of school management.”²⁹

The state-run Recovery School District “has become a sort of system-of-last-resort in a city with a newly Balkanized landscape of school management.”

— New Orleans Times-Picayune

	Enrollment		
	Orleans Parish School Board	RSD Schools	Total
August 25			22,000
October 4	8,968	15,902	24,870
November 17	8,969	16,930	25,899
December 8	9,002	17,480	26,482
December 22	9,002	18,064	27,066
January 19	9,035	18,390	27,425
Change from October	+67	+2,488	2,555

Source: Recovery School District Update listserv, various dates, Louisiana Dept. of Education.

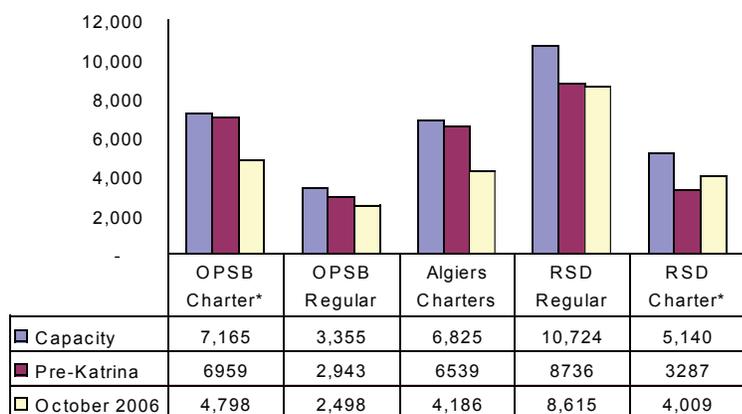
The expectation that only the regular RSD schools and their teachers should accommodate mid-year enrollment growth is not accidental. It is the official policy in New Orleans. TeachNOLA, a major teacher recruitment vehicle for both the RSD and charter schools, is not shy about identifying the standards that distinguish the RSD from the city’s charter and other discretionary-admissions schools. TeachNOLA warned prospective teacher applicants that “RSD schools have no admissions criteria, enabling students from any neighborhood in the city to attend. As more students return to the city and

other schools reach capacity, the RSD will absorb the swelling student population. The district is committed to accommodating these returnees, especially those with special needs.”

In opposing a proposal that would allow the RSD to steer mid-year applicants to charter schools that are under capacity, one state board of education member worried that the proposal would restrict the choices and autonomy of both parents and charter schools.³⁰

While the RSD schools were beyond their capacity to provide both buildings and teachers, there was additional seat capacity in charter and discretionary-admissions schools. As calculated by the consulting firm of Alvarez and Marcal, more than 32,000 potential “seats” existed in the schools opened for fall 2006 (Figure 1). This building capacity calculation applies to fully repaired schools with conventional pupil-teacher ratios.

Figure 1 - Building Capacity, Pre-Katrina Enrollment and Enrollment in October, 2006



Source: Alvarez and Marcal and BESE SIS Report on MFP and other funded membership October 4, 2006.
*Excludes schools operated by the Algiers Charter School Association.

In October 2006, there were 9,000 potential seats based on the Alvarez and Marcal estimates.³¹ Many buildings were underenrolled prior to Katrina, but the 54 schools enrolled 4,300 more students in fall 2004 than they did in fall 2006.

- Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB) charter schools had 2,400 potential seats in October 2006 (and enrolled 2,100 fewer students than enrolled in the same buildings in 2004-05). OPSB regular schools had 1,000 potential seats (Figure 1). Collectively, the OPSB schools did not admit a significant number of students after October (Table 3).
- The eight charter schools in Algiers, La., enrolled 4,200 students in October 2006 (up to just under 5,000 students in January 2007, according to Algiers Charter School Association officials), which is **2,350 fewer students** than enrolled in the eight buildings before Katrina.
- Regular RSD schools had **extra student seat capacity of about 1,500**

students in October 2006 if the empty 635-student Rosenwald school (a school on the city’s west bank that temporarily housed Drew Elementary in September 2006) is included.³² Many buildings used by RSD regular schools had been under-enrolled before Katrina, and fall 2007 enrollments were about the same as pre-Katrina levels.

The dual system of schools that frees charters and other discretionary-admissions schools from the responsibilities of accommodating mid-year enrollment growth hurts students in the regular RSD schools and tends to reinforce the disparities that existed in the pre-Katrina system. Class sizes have increased to 30, 35 and even 40 students in RSD schools. Because RSD teachers are overworked, they are more likely to quit. Recruiting new teachers to the RSD becomes even more difficult.

	Qualified Teachers		
	Hired	Needed	Total
August 25	292	191	483
October 4	491	59	550
November 3	491	52	543
December 15	491	74	565
January 19	530	63	593

Source: Recovery School District Update listserv, various dates, Louisiana Dept. of Education.

One week before the 2006-07 school year started, the RSD was still short nearly 200 teachers, and the struggle to recruit and *retain* them continues. “When we try to move teachers [from school to school], they’re quitting on us,” one official told a national news magazine. “Our quitting ratio is higher than our hiring ratio.”³³ Indeed, the data suggest that the RSD has been short of teachers by 10-15 percent all school year (Table 4). According to the *Times-Picayune*, the RSD asked the Orleans Parish School Board to open up more student slots, but OPSB officials said that logistical realities prevented them from accepting more students. According to the article, the Algiers Charter Schools Association reported that it did not have enough furniture to open up their empty classrooms.³⁴

Soon after the storm, the state’s top-ranking education official said, “Keeping [New Orleans] educational staff is critical. We want them to return to Louisiana.” But just the opposite happened — veteran teachers were fired.

The state Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) made a few steps in the right direction by approving an “overcrowding” policy that allows the RSD, provided its schools are at capacity, to steer new applicants to any charter school outside the RSD that is: a) undercapacity, b) has concluded its enrollment or lottery period, and c) is in “proximity” to the student’s residence. Unfortunately, the state Depart-

ment of Education said the RSD cannot force any charter school to accept a student if its enrollment is at the capacity spelled out in the charter initially approved by the state. An earlier plan would have allowed the RSD to require charter schools to accept students until they reached 120 percent of their capacity.³⁵

V. New Orleans Takeover Experiment: Origin of the Teacher Shortage

As noted earlier, the prevailing research strongly suggests that, in order to improve student achievement, New Orleans needs to attract and retain veteran teachers. Research also suggests that drawing and retaining experienced teachers necessitates that officials improve the professional and working environments in their schools. Yet critical aspects of the New Orleans experiment run counter to the research and, instead, are at the root of the school system's shortage of veteran teachers. The situation was recently summed up this spring by prominent charter school advocate and BESE member Leslie Jacobs, who observed, "The kids are returning; teachers, social workers and principals are not."³⁶

The problem began when students, parents and teachers of New Orleans' neighborhood schools dispersed to other parishes and states. With almost no input from city residents, a well-organized and well-heeled national network of charter school advocates and educational entrepreneurs seized on the opportunity to experiment.³⁷ The prevailing local, state and national policy decisions facilitated the growth of charter schools and other discretionary-admissions schools in New Orleans. All key elements of the New Orleans takeover experiment were in place three months after the levees broke.

- **August 29:** Hurricane Katrina and breaches in the levees leave 80 percent of the city under water.
- **September 15:** While 80 percent of the city was still under water, the Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB) converts the first school to charter status.³⁸
- **September 30:** In sharp contrast to the Bush administration's notoriously slow response to the Katrina disaster, the U.S. Department of Education grants \$20.9 million to Louisiana to help schools reopen as charter schools.
- **October 7:** Louisiana Gov. Kathleen Blanco's executive order waives provisions of state law requiring faculty and parent approval for converting regular public schools to charter status.
- **October 7:** OPSB converts all 13 schools in the Algiers community to charter status (six of them open within weeks) without parent or teacher approval.³⁹

- **October 28:** OPSB grants charters to seven more schools with high scores and powerful parent groups.
- **November 30:** Act 35 expands RSD authority in a way that effectively applies a different standard to New Orleans schools. The state takes control of city schools except for 13 high-scoring regular and charter schools, which are left under OPSB control.⁴⁰
- **December 9:** OPSB fires virtually all teachers and other employees of the New Orleans Public Schools.

Only a few weeks after the hurricane, state education superintendent Cecil Picard said of New Orleans school employees, “Keeping educational staff is critical. We want them to return to Louisiana.”⁴¹ But just the opposite happened — veteran teachers were fired. Incredibly, at the same time that Picard was voicing his concern, the *Times-Picayune* reported that OPSB officials advised employees to look for new jobs elsewhere. Both the December 2005 mass firing of veteran teachers and the traditional overreliance by charter schools on new teachers (see Table 1) essentially planted the seeds that made a teacher shortage in New Orleans inevitable.

The law authorizing the state takeover (Act 35) did not create a system of charter schools, although that may have been the intention at one time. The mass conversion of regular and selective schools to charter status was completed in the three months prior to the legislation. Nearly 45 percent of all students in New Orleans in fall 2006 attended either pre-Katrina charter schools (6 percent) or those authorized by OPSB between the hurricane and the state takeover (38 percent).⁴² Charter schools authorized after Act 35 brought total charter school enrollment to just 53 percent of all students in New Orleans, a figure far short of the all-charter system that some had envisioned.

The initial impact of Act 35 has been to create a dual school system, regular public schools protecting the charter and discretionary-admissions schools from the complications of mid-year enrollment growth and other problems — such as special education — that challenge charter schools. As TeachNO-LA articulates, “As more students return to the city and other schools reach capacity, the RSD will absorb the swelling student population. The district is committed to accommodating these returnees, especially those with special needs.”⁴³

This dual school system — one privileged and one containing schools of last resort — is not the system envisioned by Paul Hill, an architect of the New Orleans experiment who imagined a charter school system in which “[c]hildren who turn up in New Orleans attend school as soon as they arrive.”⁴⁴ As it turned out, charter schools were *least* able or willing to accommodate the returning students. The dual school system has hurt children in RSD schools because the mid-year teacher shortage has caused class sizes to increase significantly. Moreover, the teacher shortage has forced

RSD officials into a never-ending recruitment mode that has drawn energy, resources and focus away from student achievement strategies.

Many of the nearly 100 schools under RSD authority that have not been reopened are not repairable. OPSB has reopened all 13 schools under its authority, and actually had 18 schools open in fall 2006, of which 13 operated as charter schools.⁴⁵ Ironically, five OPSB schools are located in school buildings under RSD authority.⁴⁶ Even though the five OPSB schools are located in RSD facilities, they are not considered RSD schools. In exchange for the continued use of these buildings, OPSB agreed to provide 1,700 seats for the 2007-08 school year, which is presumably the vacant space identified in Figure 1. Instead, OPSB has offered to renovate and operate four more vacant RSD school buildings.⁴⁷

Most charter schools are pre-existing schools that were converted to charter status. After the mass charter school conversions in the three months following Katrina, the RSD — through the National Charter School Authorizers Associations (NACSA) as specified in Act 35 — authorized only three more charters, which opened in 2006-07. Only nine more charter schools are slated to open in the fall of 2007. Of the 12 schools, the operation of all but three has been given to providers who are based out of state. Many of the NACSA-approved charters will have the privilege of opening slowly, one grade at a time, taking years to reach full capacity and help meet the city's overarching enrollment needs.

Proponents of the New Orleans takeover experiment created the false impression that the hurricane forced the state takeover or that a fair and uniform accountability system led to the state's action. In fact, the state changed the rules and targeted New Orleans schools in an attempt to convert all schools to charter status, not just the failing ones. Most of the hyperbole and confusion over academic failure in New Orleans stems from the double standard for failure in

the state takeover law: one standard for New Orleans and another for the rest of the state. Actually, in the school year before Katrina, New Orleans schools showed encouraging signs of improvement, as only nine out of the city's 100 schools with growth data earned the label "school in decline."⁴⁸

Except in New Orleans, it's very difficult for the state to take over a school. In the other

parishes of Louisiana, a state takeover occurs only if a school does very poorly over a long period of time by scoring below the *state proficiency target* (a score of 60 in 2004-05) for *four consecutive years*. Had these rules still applied to New Orleans, the state would have added no more than five schools to the RSD. Under Louisiana's Act 35, however, New Orleans schools fall under state control the *first year* a school scores below the *state average* (a score of 87.4), which is a much higher score than the state proficiency target. In fact, of the 95 schools transferred to RSD authority after Katrina, 27 of them (28 percent) had both met NCLB's standard of adequate yearly progress and been rated "academically acceptable" or higher by the state.

The teacher shortage has forced RSD officials into a never-ending recruitment mode that has drawn energy, resources and focus away from student achievement strategies.

Figure 2 - Schools in Largest Districts Scoring Below State Average and Schools in RSD, 2004-05

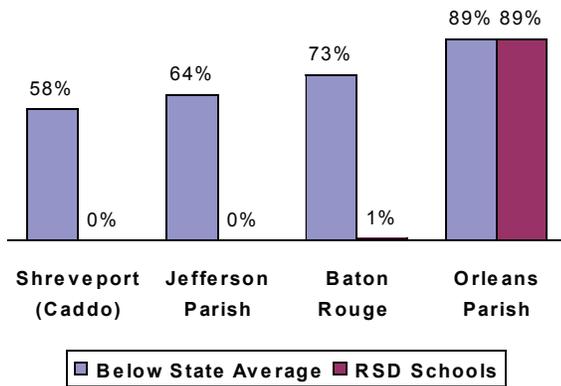
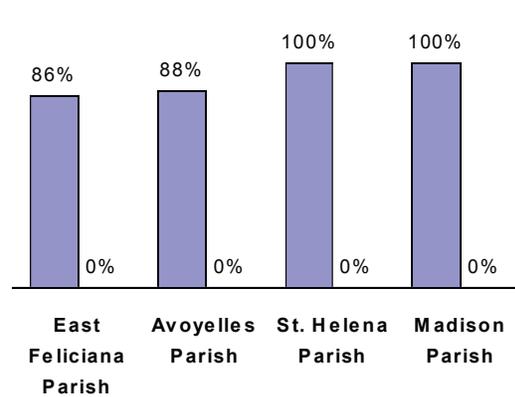


Figure 3 - Schools in Low-Achieving Districts Scoring Below State Average and Schools in RSD, 2004-05



Source: Louisiana Division of Standards, Assessments, and Accountability School Report Cards
<http://www.louisianaschools.net/lde/saa/1639.html>.

When schools in other parishes are held to the same achievement standards as schools in New Orleans, Orleans Parish was not the worst school district in Louisiana. Orleans Parish had about the same or a smaller percentage of schools scoring below the state average as Avoyelles, East Feliciana, Madison, and St. Helena parishes (Figure 3). No school in these parishes has been taken over by the state. Although the other three large parishes (Caddo, Jefferson and Baton Rouge) also had high percentages of schools scoring below the state average, only one school in these parishes qualified for the RSD (Figure 2). If those parishes were subjected to the same takeover criteria as New Orleans, another 149 below-average schools in these parishes would have been placed under RSD authority.

VI. Where Are the Veteran Teachers?

The teacher shortage often is blamed only on difficult living conditions and expensive housing in post-Katrina New Orleans, an explanation that ignores the many other reasons why teachers are discouraged from working in New Orleans. Legislation has been introduced in Congress aimed at curbing the teacher shortage by offering salary incentives, and assistance with relocation and housing expenses. Even though the legislation is well-intentioned, the data suggests that pouring more money into teacher salaries and expenses would not address the real problem: a working environment that is fundamentally hostile to teachers' personal and professional needs.

Data Collection. The teacher/employee information in this report is based on data collected during the last week of August 2006 in a sophisticated, city-wide door-to-door census of pre-Katrina school employees. More than 60 volunteers combed Orleans Parish for five days looking for former OPSB employees. These volunteers relied on a comprehensive list of pre-Katrina employees, supplemented by address updates obtained from the American Federation of Teachers' Katrina relief activities, and a database search of credit applications. Addresses were classified as either: a) destroyed/unoccupied, b) some signs

that a resident had returned to repair or clean up Katrina-related damage or c) occupied. By knocking on doors or speaking with neighbors, volunteers determined if the former employee lived at that address. Multiple attempts were made to reach and interview these former employees. Sometimes, spouses

or relatives provided partial information about the former employees' whereabouts. Approximately 25 percent of pre-Katrina employees were contacted and they are presumed to be reasonably representative of the pre-Katrina employees who had returned to New Orleans by September 2006. In addition to a structured interview, employees were encouraged to talk about their challenges or losses stemming from the hurricane.

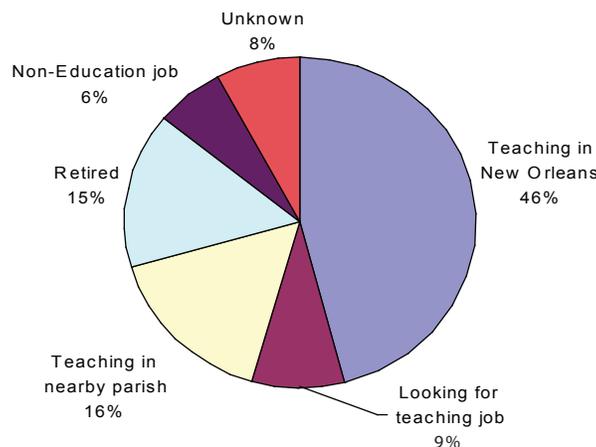
Pouring more money into teacher salaries would not address the real problem: a working environment that is fundamentally hostile to teachers' personal and professional needs.

Employment Status of Pre-Katrina Teachers Living in New Orleans.

The main challenge in the post-Katrina system is not so much attracting former teachers to return to New Orleans as it is a problem of getting them to work for charter and RSD schools. Data collected on pre-Katrina OPSB employees suggest that in August 2006 approximately 1,230 teachers were actually *living* in New Orleans, but that less than half of them were *teaching* in the city's regular or charter schools (Figure 4). Veteran teachers already living in New Orleans fled to nearby parishes (16 percent), retired early (15 percent) and sought non-education employment (8 percent).

These figures are vastly different from national norms. According to the Federal Schools and Staffing Survey, 92 percent of teachers return to the same school district each year. The national average retirement rate is about 2 percent per year, a far cry from the rate of 15 percent among pre-Katrina teachers who had returned to New Orleans. Only about 3 percent to 4 percent of teachers nationally switch to another school district in a given year, not the 16 percent departure rate among New Orleans' teachers who had returned to live in New Orleans.⁴⁹

Figure 4 - Employment Status of Pre-Katrina Teachers Who Have Returned to New Orleans, August 2006

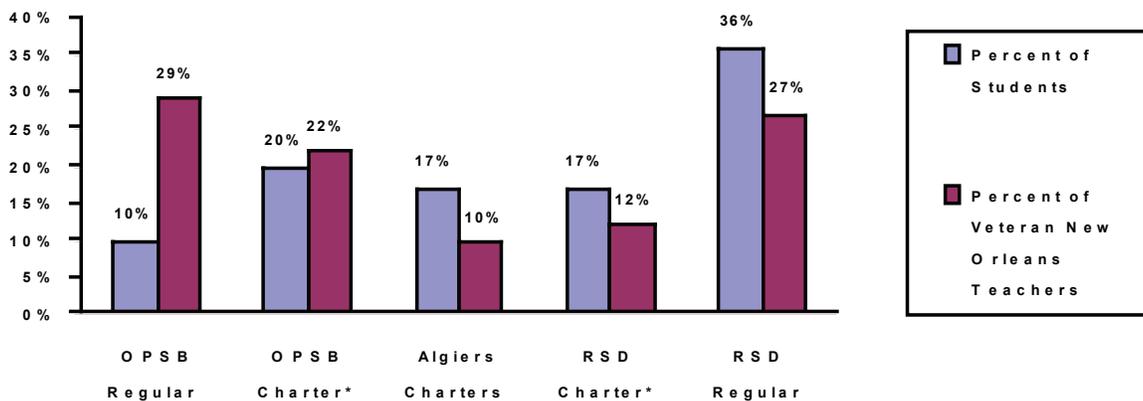


Source: Membership census, August 2006, UTNO/AFT,/AFL-CIO organizing campaign.

Only about 46 percent of pre-Katrina teachers had jobs in a New Orleans school the week before schools opened for the RSD (Figure 4). Even in the midst of a significant back-to-school teacher shortage, more than 100 (9 percent) of pre-Katrina teachers (who had returned to live in the New Orleans area following the storm) were still looking for a job. This suggests that the local labor market was not efficiently matching supply with demand.

Distribution of Veteran Teachers by School Sector. Many veteran New Orleans teachers have been hired by all kinds of schools including the city’s charter schools (Figure 5). Veteran teachers are concentrated in OPSB schools, which enrolled only 10 percent of students but employed 29 percent of the veteran teachers living in New Orleans. Even though OPSB schools pay salaries below those of the RSD (see Table 5 for pay schedules), published news reports and numerous interviews with teachers indicate that the professional working conditions in OPSB are the best in the city, making it easier to attract and retain veteran teachers. Under state law, for example, non-probationary teachers in OPSB schools are covered by Louisiana’s just cause dismissal law, which does not apply to RSD or charter school teachers.⁵⁰ Although a new contract has not been negotiated, the United Teachers of New Orleans provides representation for OPSB regular school teachers and is the recognized bargaining agent. Teachers report that schools generally operate as if the pre-existing contract were in effect.

Figure 5 - Distribution of Veteran Teachers in August 2006 Compared with October Enrollment



Source: Membership census, August 2006, UTNO/AFT/AFL-CIO organizing campaign and BESE SIS Report on MFP and other funded membership (October 4, 2006).

*Excludes schools operated by the Algiers Charter School Association.

Most OPSB charter schools also were able to hire a significant percentage of veteran teachers. They enrolled 20 percent of students in October 2006 and employed 22 percent of veterans who had returned to teaching. Several of these schools scored relatively high on state performance exams, and the bulk of the OPSB schools that converted to charter status did so because it was the only way to reopen quickly. Yet they rehired the staff they could, and they continue to operate much like any public school with a teacher union presence. According to one teacher we interviewed in late August 2006, “The

biggest problem is at-will employment, and I see the need for a union contract. However, I am relatively pleased because my principal follows union protocol.”

As of October 2006, the Algiers charter schools and the RSD charter schools each enrolled approximately 17 percent of the students, with Algiers employing 10 percent of the veteran teachers working in New Orleans and the RSD charter schools employing 12 percent. Because charter schools can limit class size and cap enrollment, they provide an attractive work environment and, in this sense, should encounter fewer problems attracting veteran teachers. The research, however, shows that the typical charter school employs less-costly inexperienced teachers (see Table 1).

The lack of a critical mass of experienced teachers in RSD schools leaves newer teachers with relatively few seasoned colleagues to whom they can turn for professional support and guidance.

By October 2006, RSD regular schools enrolled just over one-third of returning students, but employed only a little more than one-quarter of the veteran teachers working in New Orleans’ schools. Compared with charter schools, regular RSD schools have a very difficult position in the labor market. The burden of midyear enrollment growth has been placed almost entirely on noncharter RSD schools. This not only disrupts the harmony and stability of the learning environment for children in those schools; but it also places intense, constant pressures on RSD officials to attract and retain teachers. In addition to a poor working environment, RSD teacher policies, which are similar to those in charter schools, are not attractive to veteran teachers — policies such as at-will employment and the absence of union representation.

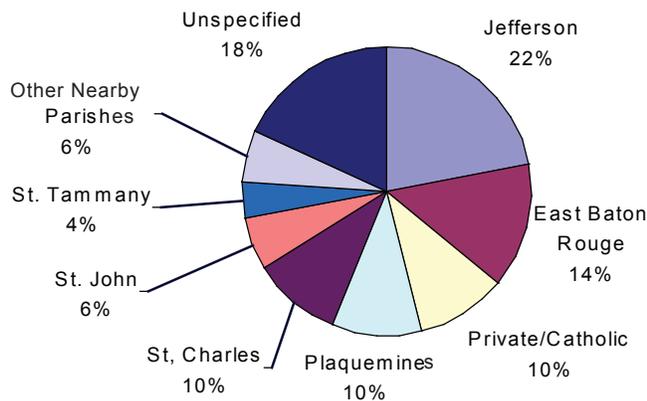
When enumerated by school, the employment of experienced teachers varied considerably (see Appendix A for a school-by-school listing). Our extensive interviews of teachers in New Orleans suggest that veteran principals usually preferred to hire more seasoned teaching staff, even in charter schools. Among RSD charter schools, for example, at least half of the teachers at Wright Middle School and Martin Luther King School for Science and Technology are veteran New Orleans teachers. On the other hand, schools contracted to outside providers such as the Leona Group (Free Elementary and McDonogh 28 Elementary) and Mosaica (Lafayette Academy) employ hardly any veteran New Orleans teachers. Interestingly, earlier this school year, a national news magazine reported on the high turnover and low morale among Lafayette Academy teachers, noting: “In the way the newer teachers spoke about the students, their jobs, the school, there was a sourness — as if in just six weeks their spirits had curdled.”⁵¹

Although first-year teachers in various urban districts frequently express serious on-the-job frustrations, the lack of a critical mass of experienced teachers in RSD schools leaves newer teachers with relatively few seasoned colleagues to whom they can turn for professional support and guidance. In New Orleans’ sink-or-swim teaching environment, high turnover is inevitable.

Former OPSB Teachers Living in New Orleans but Teaching in Nearby Parishes.

Unlike New Orleans, surrounding parishes kept their teachers on the payroll and began reopening schools relatively quickly after Hurricane Katrina. A large number of estranged New Orleans teachers quickly found employment in neighboring parishes. Many were disenchanted with the way teachers were treated after Katrina and declined to move back to New Orleans. Even though teacher pay is less in these nearby parishes than in the RSD (see Table, page 30), these communities are rebuilding their education systems in an orderly and fair manner, and the professional environment for teachers is better. Jefferson and St. Tammany parishes have collective bargaining, giving teachers the ability to have a legally recognized organization formally represent them on key issues.

Figure 6 - Pre-Katrina Orleans Parish Employees Living in New Orleans by Parish of Employment, August 2006



Note: An estimated 200 former New Orleans teachers still living in New Orleans work in nearby parishes. Source: Membership census, August 2006, UTNO/AFT/AFL-CIO organizing campaign.

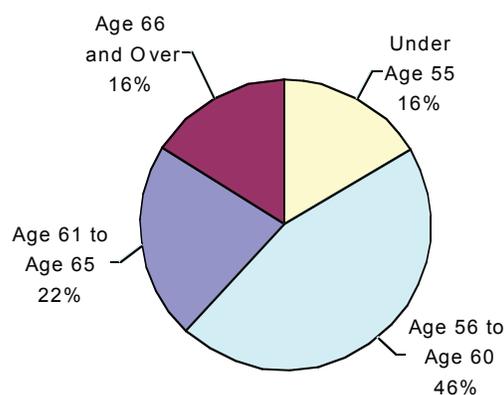
An estimated 200 former OPSB teachers residing in New Orleans (about 16 percent of veteran teachers living in the city) now work in a nearby parish (Figure 6). According to the Federal Schools and Staffing Survey, only about 3 percent of teachers typically switch to a different school district in any given year.⁵² This figure of 200 ex-Orleans Parish teachers does not include an unknown number of other former OPSB educational staff who fled New Orleans right before Katrina and found teaching positions in school systems in Houston, Memphis or other, more distant, cities. Men and women in both of these categories might be persuaded to return to teaching in New Orleans schools if Louisiana officials took the necessary steps to create more positive and professional teaching environments.

As shown in Figure 6, Jefferson Parish is the biggest employer of former New Orleans teachers (22 percent) followed by East Baton Rouge (14 percent). Nationally, very few public school teachers switch to private schools (about 4 percent of switchers), but approximately 10 percent of former New Orleans public school teachers who switched found employment in a private schools.

Early and Forced Retirement. In August 2006, approximately 220 pre-Katrina veteran teachers had retired and were living in New Orleans. Even more retirees were living outside the city. Many teachers retired partly to get money needed to pay bills and just to survive financially. Other retirees have vowed that they would never again work in the parish that fired them in such an insulting way after so many years of service. Indeed, as *Atlantic Monthly* observed earlier this year, “Many [New Orleans] teachers had lost their homes and were living in trailers. They were fighting for insurance payments, caring for elderly parents traumatized by the storm, gutting their homes. The same people expected to shoulder the burden of reinventing the public schools, in short, were reinventing their lives. Being fired had been humiliating.”⁵³

Among pre-Katrina OPSB employees who chose to retire or were forced to do so by economic circumstances, nearly half were between the ages of 56 and 60 — and another 18 percent were under age 55 (Figure 7). Altogether, only 16 percent of retirees had reached the age of 65.

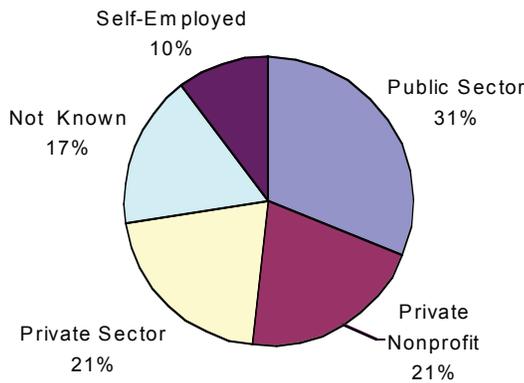
Figure 7 - Pre-Katrina Orleans Parish Employees Residing in New Orleans Who Retired, by Age



Note: An estimated 220 former New Orleans teachers still living in New Orleans have retired.
 Source: Membership census, August 2006, UTNO/AFT,/AFL-CIO organizing campaign.

Early retirees represent a significant number of veteran teachers who could make a dent in the teacher shortage. Many states with teacher shortages allow retired teachers to return to work on a year-to-year basis; they also cost less because neither the employee nor the state contributes on behalf of the once-retired teacher to the state pension fund. Returning to teaching could be attractive to early retirees because so many New Orleans teachers retired many years short of Social Security age and without enough years of service to earn the maximum retirement benefit.

Figure 8 - Pre-Katrina Orleans Parish Employees Residing in New Orleans No Longer Working in Education, August 2006



Note: An estimated 80 former New Orleans teachers still living in New Orleans now work in a nonteaching job.
 Source: Membership census, August 2006, UTNO/AFT/AFL-CIO organizing campaign.

Working in Non-Education Jobs. In August 2006, approximately 6 percent of veteran teachers who had returned to the city were working but not teaching (Figure 8). The nonteaching jobs they had taken were diverse and included a nurse, prison guard, massage therapist, real estate agent, prison guard and grocery store owner. Many worked for the state government and others worked for private relief agencies. AFT volunteers learned that only one in five worked in the private sector. A majority of the veteran former teachers worked either in another public sector job or for a private nonprofit organization. These findings strongly suggest that the lion’s share of these experienced teachers remained committed to the values of public service and that their decision not to re-enter teaching was not due to a sudden desire to raise their financial standard of living.

“Many (New Orleans) teachers had lost their homes and were living in trailers. They were fighting for insurance payments, caring for elderly parents. ... The same people expected to shoulder the burden of reinventing the public schools, in short, were reinventing their lives. Being fired had been humiliating.”

—Atlantic Monthly, 2007

VII. Teacher Policies and Recruitment After Katrina

The firing of virtually all OPSB employees on Dec. 9, 2005, was prompted largely by OPSB’s decision to charter most of its schools and the poorly conceived state takeover. In effect, approximately 90 percent of schools were

new employers with new employment policies.

United Teachers of New Orleans is still recognized as the bargaining agent for teachers in OPSB regular schools, but the board has not engaged in negotiations over a new contract to replace the one that expired in June 2006. Collective bargaining — the right of education employees to have a legally recognized organization represent them and, on their behalf, negotiate a collectively bargained agreement on key issues — is expressly allowed in Act

35.⁵⁴ However, in order to engage in collective bargaining, each charter school and each RSD school must individually recognize a union to negotiate a collectively bargained contract on behalf of teachers. Currently, there is no specific process through which teachers can form a union at charter and RSD schools and then secure legal recognition of that union.

Nearly every aspect of the post-Katrina New Orleans takeover experiment runs counter to the research on teaching experience and student achievement.

The AFT's extensive interviews with pre-Katrina employees indicate that the pre-Christmas 2005 firing was a seminal event — the ultimate disrespect for men and women who had devoted their professional lives to educating children within a state and a school system that had frequently undermined their efforts.

Veteran New Orleans teachers have been returning to the city schools half as fast as the children because they found jobs in other parishes, began working in non-education jobs or retired early. In February, we estimated that about 75 percent of the workforce in OPSB schools are pre-Katrina employees.⁵⁵ The original 17 RSD schools had about 625 employees, and 300 of those (48 percent) are pre-Katrina veteran employees. When three additional public schools opened in late January, total employment in the RSD exceeded 800. Not counting the Algiers charters, RSD charter schools have about 45 percent pre-Katrina employees.

Nearly every aspect of the post-Katrina New Orleans schools takeover experiment runs counter to the research and is at odds with national efforts to improve teacher quality in low-achieving schools:

Fired Veteran Teachers. Instead of taking steps to preserve the veteran teaching force and ensure its return to the city, teachers were fired. According to Lance Hill, executive director of the Southern Institute for Education and Research at Tulane University, “The only people capable of teaching these children are the very teachers they fired — teachers born and raised in the city who are culturally competent, understand what motivates the children, and have the respect of the children. So, sad to say, the RSD and even most of the charters will contract these kids [altruistic, young, inexperienced teachers from outside the city] for one year, burn them out, and then send them home disillusioned.”⁵⁶

Hill's concerns gain credence from an article for *Atlantic Monthly* written by

Amy Waldman, an award-winning journalist, who profiled one of the RSD charter schools: “Brand-new, and filled with children from across the city, Lafayette Academy had neither history nor community to draw on. The principal seemed unhappy, the chief administrative officer tentative, and the lines of authority between them unclear. Two teachers had already quit by mid-October. ... Some of [the school’s] teachers, in turn, had little or no urban teaching experience. The result was an endless clash of wills between students and staff, and what teachers described as a profound lack of respect.”⁵⁷ According to the census of veteran teachers we conducted in August 2006, none of the faculty at Lafayette Academy had prior New Orleans teaching experience.

Teachers Excluded from Rebuilding Efforts. In spite of great needs, local, state and national teacher organizations have been effectively excluded from the rebuilding efforts. New Orleans City Council member Cynthia Hedge-Morrell has urged state and local education officials to re-establish a working relationship with the United Teachers of New Orleans (UTNO). “There was a lot of good that this school district and UTNO did together,” Hedge-Morrell told the Orleans Parish School Board in April.⁵⁸ “We can’t begin to rebuild our city, our neighborhoods and our schools,” she said, “without our teachers and other school employees. That’s our tax base. That’s our middle class. That’s our homeowners.”⁵⁹

By ignoring and marginalizing the largest teacher organization in the city, state and local officials are allowing partisan political considerations to trump the needs of teachers and students. Unless these officials are willing to work with UTNO, and utilize UTNO’s relationships with state and national teacher organizations, the dual system’s teacher recruitment and retention efforts are unlikely to succeed.

Hostile Professional Environment. Specific policies and practices have placed the New Orleans public schools at a severe disadvantage as they compete in the labor market for teachers — especially experienced teachers:

- Unlike every other public school in the United States, veteran teachers in New Orleans are at-will employees and effectively treated as probationary employees who can be fired for any reason.
- Teachers in New Orleans cannot choose to work in a school with a collectively bargained agreement — a sharp contrast to the 70 percent of U.S. teachers, and, the teachers in neighboring St. Tammany and Jefferson parishes who have collective bargaining agreements. This is no small matter. In a 2003 national survey by the nonpartisan organization Public Agenda, 81 percent of teachers agreed that, without the representative voice of their union, “teachers would be vulnerable to school politics or administrators who abuse their power.”⁶⁰
- Teachers have no prospect of getting tenure, as provided for other teachers in Louisiana and all 50 states. This Public Agenda survey found that a clear majority of teachers recognized tenure laws as a

way to protect teachers from the impact of politics and favoritism, and only 23 percent agreed with the statement that “good teachers don’t have to worry about tenure.” Even Paul Hill, an architect of the New Orleans experiment, proposed that schools would be allowed to offer tenure to the best teachers, assuring them of a job at the school as long as it stayed open.⁶¹

Disparities in Working Conditions. New Orleans has a dual system of schools, segregated by two different standards of student accessibility. The students and teachers in RSD schools bear virtually the entire burden of midyear enrollment growth and teacher recruitment. In some RSD schools, class sizes have increased to 30, 35 and even 40 students. Returning special education students have overwhelmed the RSD in disproportionate numbers. The RSD has struggled to recruit enough teachers.

Charter School Teacher Policies. The national evidence reveals that charter schools prefer hiring inexperienced teachers. Further, charter schools hire three times as many first-year teachers as regular public schools, and teacher turnover within charters is twice as high. Teacher recruitment among charter schools has been aggressive, but these efforts have been aimed primarily at new teachers and little attention has been given to a teacher *retention* strategy.

Teacher recruiting efforts in New Orleans provide another example of a dual system that favors charter schools, while undermining teacher quality and student performance in the RSD. During this school year, the group TeachNOLA has sponsored teacher recruitment ads on various Web sites, including Job.net and Idealist.org, that included the proviso: “Certified teachers will teach in charter schools, and non-certified teachers will teach in the state-run Recovery School District.” After several months of public complaint, TeachHOLA modified its Web site so that it no longer directs prospective applicants without certification to the RSD.⁶²

TEACH NOLA

Rebuilding our city by teaching our children...

teachNOLA seeks the nation's most outstanding individuals to make a difference by teaching in public schools in New Orleans.

- ⊕ I am a certified teacher.
- ⊕ I want to become a certified teacher.

Our children deserve the best. Teach in New Orleans.

teachNOLA seeks the nation's most outstanding certified teachers to make a difference by teaching in New Orleans' charter schools.

Click **here** to apply for the 2007-2008 school year.

Be your own force of nature. Teach.

teachNOLA seeks the nation's most outstanding young, mid- and post-career professionals to make a difference by teaching in New Orleans' Recovery School District. Please review this website for more information for candidates who want an alternate route to certification and contact us with any outstanding questions.

This Web ad seeking teachers steered certified teachers to New Orleans' non-RSD charter schools. The ad was modified in spring 2007 and is no longer posted on the Internet.

The descriptions that had been posted on the TeachNOLA Web site seemed designed to steer prospective teachers away from RSD schools and toward non-RSD charter schools. According to the group's old Web site, "TeachNOLA Fellows will teach in one of the RSD's traditional schools, where the need for highly qualified teachers is most severe. Teachers should expect to teach students with various levels of academic achievement, many of whom are still struggling with the pain and confusion wrought by Katrina. While the first year for any teacher is difficult, teachNOLA Fellows need to be particularly prepared for challenges upon entering the classroom."

Certified teachers considering non-RSD charter schools were greeted with a message that was distinctly more upbeat: "New Orleans is undergoing one of the most compelling educational transformations in recent history. The linchpin of this transformation will be the rigorous and selective creation of charter schools."⁶³

In addition to intense recruiting efforts, salaries have been raised in the RSD, and many charter schools have had to match them. Paul Hill, one of the reform gurus who helped devise the New Orleans school experiment, proposed that average teacher salaries should increase by 50 percent to around \$60,000, as well as a generous benefit package of around 40 percent of salary, so that schools could choose among top-flight applicants.⁶⁴ The salary premium, he argued, would help compensate teachers for difficult living conditions and the lack of job security.

Although nowhere near a 50 percent increase, the RSD does have the highest pay schedule in the state. The RSD's beginning teacher salary exceeds pay in OPSB regular schools by \$4,000 (Table 5).

	Table 5							
	Annual Salaries by Years of Experience, 2006-07							
	Bachelors				Masters			
	0	5	15	25	0	5	15	25
Recovery School District	36,900	39,300	44,100	48,900	38,762	41,599	47,016	51,919
St. Tammany Parish	36,890	39,469	44,893	49,457	37,300	39,900	45,100	50,300
East Baton Rouge Parish	35,225	36,906	41,152	48,007	36,078	38,352	43,846	51,105
Jefferson Parish	34,755	37,755	43,755	49,755	35,355	38,355	44,355	50,355
OPSB Regular Schools	32,242	35,716	43,856	46,622	32,848	36,463	45,451	48,360

Source: Louisiana Division of Education Finance, <http://www.doe.state.la.us/lde/finance/1447.asp>.

Compensation and other employment practices of charter schools vary considerably. Each school has its own salary arrangements and benefits packages, making it difficult to recruit nationally when prospective applicants are eager to know and compare compensation packages. In the Algiers charter schools on New Orleans' West Bank, teacher salaries are individually negotiated and kept secret. In fact, teachers in these charter schools can be fired for simply sharing information about or discussing employee salaries.⁶⁵

VIII. Conclusion

Other school districts across the Gulf Coast have scrambled against tough obstacles to welcome children back to the schools they had attended in the weeks before Hurricane Katrina. But something went seriously wrong in New Orleans. Many children in New Orleans lost this post-Katrina school year to trial and error. A natural disaster usually leads a community to a greater sense of shared identity, shared values and shared goals, but there is nothing "shared" about the New Orleans schools takeover experiment.

The dual and unequal systems of schools in the city intensify the educational disparities that existed before Katrina. One school system (OPSB schools) has the privilege of closing its doors to returning students for most of the year and the privilege of recruiting certified teachers. The other (RSD Schools) is a school system of last resort, expected to enroll all students at any time, even if it means accepting noncertified teacher candidates to cover midyear expansion.

State and local policymakers must focus their attention on two goals: 1) to provide more physical classroom space and educational materials for *every* student, and 2) to provide the best qualified teachers possible for *every* child. The Katrina recovery will not be complete until families can send their children to a neighborhood school — charter or not — that is staffed by qualified, mostly experienced teachers.

Recruiting teachers is not enough. Retention must be a priority. As the prevailing research indicates, a critical mass of experienced teachers is crucial to a district's success in raising student achievement. For this reason, state and local officials must make a concerted effort to encourage seasoned, experienced teachers to return to New Orleans. The professional environment and working conditions for teachers must be stable, safe, collegial and supportive.

By itself, higher teacher pay is not the way out of the teacher shortage. Issues regarding professional treatment are more important to teachers than pay. Currently, seasoned teachers in New Orleans are treated like probationary employees. It should surprise no one that many veteran teachers have avoided this undesirable environment by working in nearby parishes, by working in other occupations, or by retiring early.

Additionally, teachers and their unions must be made full partners in the rebuilding and revitalization effort. A few years ago in a national survey, 81 percent of teachers said they would feel "vulnerable to school politics or administrators" without the presence of a union. Yet this isn't a teacher-only issue. A collective representative voice for teachers serves a broader and vital purpose by amplifying the needs of those who work most closely with students. A union voice helps hold administrators accountable to the public and also enables teachers to shine a light on policies that may hamper quality teaching or may conflict with other priorities — issues or concerns that would otherwise remain in the shadows. Parents, children and the public benefit when these issues rise to the surface.

Finally, it isn't unusual for diners, discount stores and other businesses to periodically post signs in their windows seeking job applicants — signs that include the three words "no experience necessary." But this mantra should not be the philosophy that guides teacher recruitment efforts for the New Orleans public schools.

Simply put, experience matters. It is a critical ingredient that improves student achievement. This conclusion has been reached by a wide range of studies, including one by Teach For America, an organization whose focus is recruiting new teachers.⁶⁶ Of course, New Orleans needs to recruit new teachers. Yet a one-dimensional approach shortchanges students, and it is no substitute for a comprehensive recruitment *and retention* strategy — a strategy that truly values veteran teachers and creates a working environment in which they (and their students) can succeed.

The Katrina recovery will not be complete until families can send their children to a neighborhood school — charter or not — that is staffed by qualified, mostly experienced teachers.

It's time for state and local officials to embrace policies and establish supports that welcome teaching veterans back to New Orleans and attract other experienced teachers, while encouraging newly hired teachers to stay and make teaching their career.

Appendix A

Estimated Percent of Pre-Katrina Teachers by School			
Over 75%	45%-75%	10%-45%	Under 10% or more
OPBE Regular Schools			
Franklin Elementary Bethune Accelerated Elem. McMain Magnet HS PM School at McMain	McDonogh 35 HS		
OPBE Charter Schools			
Audubon Montessori School	Warren Easton HS NO Science and Math HS	Lusher Elementary Moton Elementary Einstein Charter School Hynes Elementary Ben Franklin HS	Lake Forest Montessori Priestley HS
RSD Charter Schools			
Wright Middle School	MLK School for Sci. & Tech.	Singleton Charter Middle Nelson Elementary McDonogh 15 (KIPP)	McNair Elementary (KIPP) Lafayette Academy McDonogh 28 Elementary Free Elementary Capdau Elementary Green Elementary
RSD Regular Schools			
Banneker Elementary Henderson Elementary Habans Elementary	Live Oaks Johnson Elementary Drew Elementary Reed Elementary Craig Elementary	Reed 9-12 Tureaud Elementary McDonogh HS Douglass HS Laurel Elementary Rabouin HS	Wicker Elementary Dibert Elementary Clark HS
Algiers Charter Schools			
	Behrman Elementary	Fischer Elementary Karr Magnet HS Walker High School Eisenhower Elementary Harte Elementary	Tubman Elementary McDonogh 32 Elementary

Notes

¹ Steve Ritea, "300 students turned away by N.O. schools," *The Times-Picayune*, Jan. 24, 2007.

² Darran Simon and Steve Ritea, "For Students on Waiting Lists Life Is Put on Hold," *The Times-Picayune*, Feb. 4, 2007.

³ Steve Ritea, "School District Pledges to End Wait Lists," *The Times-Picayune*, Feb. 2, 2007.

⁴ Linda Darling-Hammond, a professor of education at Stanford University and co-director of the School Redesign Network, has defined inexperienced teachers as "those with less than three years of experience." See Linda Darling-Hammond, "Teacher Quality and Student Achievement: A Review of State Policy Evidence," *Education Policy Analysis Archives* 8(1) 2000.

⁵ "Eight Questions on Teacher Recruitment and Retention: What Does the Research Say," Education Commission of the States, September 2005.

⁶ Amy Waldman, "Reading, Writing and Resurrection," *Atlantic Monthly*, January/February 2007.

⁷ "Characteristics of Schools, Districts, Teachers, Principals, and School Libraries in the United States 2003-04," *Schools and Staffing Survey*, National Center for Educational Statistics, April 2006, <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2006/2006313.pdf>.

⁸ “Louisiana Plan for Highly Qualified Teachers,” July 2006, <http://www.ed.gov/programs/teacherqual/hqtplans/la.doc>.

⁹ One prominent proposal would modify the comparability requirements of Title I (designed to ensure that Title I funding was not substituting for state and local funding) to include a comparison of average salaries. See “Beyond NCLB: Fulfilling the Promise to Our Nation’s Children,” The Commission on No Child Left Behind, Aspen Institute, 2007. Another proposal getting much attention calls for equalizing spending on teacher salaries using Weighted Student Funding (WSF) formulas and charging schools for actual salary costs. For example, “Fund the Child: Tackling Inequity and Antiquity in School Finance,” Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, 2006.

¹⁰ Brian A. Jacob, “The Challenges of Staffing Urban Schools with Effective Teachers,” *The Future of Children*, Brookings Institution, Spring 2007.

¹¹ Hamilton Lankford, Susanna Loeb, and James Wyckoff, “Teacher Sorting and the Plight of Urban Schools,” *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 24(1) 2002.

¹² Charles T. Clotfelter, Helen F. Ladd, and Jacob L. Vigdor, “Who Teaches Whom? Race and the Distribution of Novice Teachers,” *Economics of Education Review*, 24(4) 2005.

¹³ Eric A. Hanushek, John F. Kain, Daniel M. O’Brien, and Steven G. Rivkin, “The Market for Teacher Quality,” Working Paper 11252, National Bureau of Economic Research, 2005. Jonah E. Rockoff, Thomas J. Kane, and Douglas O. Staiger come to a similar conclusion in, “What Does Certification Tell Us about Teacher Effectiveness? Evidence from New York City,” Working Paper 12155, National Bureau of Economic Research, 2006. Also see, Jonah E. Rockoff, “The Impact of Individual Teachers on Student Achievement: Evidence from Panel Data,” *American Economic Review*, 94 (2004).

¹⁴ Ronald F. Ferguson, “Teachers’ Perceptions and Expectations and the Black-White Test Score Gap,” in *The Black-White Test Score Gap*, edited by Christopher Jencks and Meredith Phillips, Brookings Institution, 1998. Thomas S. Dee, “Teachers, Race, and Student Achievement in a Randomized Experiment,” *Review of Economics and Statistics* 86 (2004); and Hanushek and others, 2005.

¹⁵ Hanushek and others, “The Market for Teacher Quality.”

¹⁶ Jonah E. Rockoff and others; Don Boyd, Pam Grossman, Hamp Lankford, Susanna Loeb, and Jim Wyckoff, “Teacher Attrition, Teacher Effectiveness and Student Achievement,” paper presented at the American Education Finance Association Conference, Baltimore, Md., 2007).

¹⁷ John M. Krieg, “Teacher Quality and Attrition,” *Economics of Education Review* 25(1) 2006.

¹⁸ From a transcript of the “The News Hour With Jim Lehrer,” PBS, broadcast aired on March 1, 2007, http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/education/jan-june07/nola_03-01.html.

¹⁹ Linda Darling-Hammond, “Research and Rhetoric on Teacher Certification: A Response to “Teacher Certification Reconsidered,”” *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, Vol. 10, No. 36, Sept. 6, 2002, ISSN 1068-2341.

²⁰ Linda Darling-Hammond, 2002.

²¹ Linda Darling-Hammond, 2002.

²² Steve Giegrich, “St. Louis Schools May Oust Teach for America,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, June 4, 2007.

²³ Gary Miron and Brooks Applegate, “Teacher Attrition in Charter Schools,” Great Lakes Center for Education Research and Practice, May 2007, <http://www.greatlakescenter.org>.

²⁴ Donald Boyd and others, “The Draw of Home: How Teachers’ Preferences for Proximity Disadvantage Urban Schools,” *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 24 (2005).

²⁵ F. Howard Nelson, “The Impact of Collective Bargaining on Teacher Transfer Rates in Urban High Poverty Schools,” American Federation of Teachers, 2006.

²⁶ For example, Eric A. Hanushek, John F. Kain, and Steven G. Rivkin, “Why Public Schools Lose Teachers,” *Journal of Human Resources* 34 (2004). Benjamin Scafidi, David L. Sjoquist, and Todd R. Stinebrickner, “Race, Poverty, and Teacher Mobility,” *Economics of Education Review* 26(2) 2007.

²⁷ NCES, “Characteristics of Schools, Districts, Teachers, Principals, and School Libraries in the United States 2003-04,” 2006.

²⁸ Gary Miron and Brooks Applegate, “Teacher Attrition in Charter Schools.”

²⁹ Darran Simon and Steve Ritea, “For Students on Waiting Lists Life is Put on Hold,” *The*

Times-Picayune, Feb. 4, 2007.

³⁰ Bill Barrow, "Overcrowding Policy Gets OK of Education Panel," *The Times-Picayune*, March 14, 2007.

³¹ For school-by-school calculations, contact hnelson@aft.org.

³² Habans Elementary and Henderson Elementary (operated by the RSD as regular schools) and Rosenwald Elementary are West Bank schools included in the Oct. 7, 2005 Algiers charter.

³³ Amy Waldman, "Reading, Writing and Resurrection."

³⁴ Steve Ritea, "Buildings, Teachers Are in Short Supply," Jan. 24, 2007.

³⁵ Bill Barrow, "Overcrowding Policy Gets OK of Education Panel."

³⁶ Leslie Jacobs, "After Katrina: The Challenges of Building a Sustainable, Replicable Charter School System," National Charter Schools Conference, Albuquerque, N.M., April 26, 2007.

³⁷ See: Erik W. Robeien, "New Orleans Eyed as Clean Educational Slate," *Education Week*, Sept. 21, 2005; Paul T. Hill, "Re-creating Public Education in New Orleans," *Education Week*, Sept. 21, 2005; The Heritage Foundation, "From Tragedy to Triumph: Principled Solutions for Rebuilding Lives and Communities," Webmemo #835, Sept. 7, 2005; Education Industry Association, "Katrina – A Defining Moment for the Education Industry," Sept. 12, 2005, <http://www.educationindustry.org/tier.asp?bid=40>.

³⁸ The K-8 Lusher School affiliated with Tulane University. On Oct. 28, The Fortier High School building (a virtually all-black, low-performing high school with just over 900 students) was awarded to Lusher so it could expand to a K-12 charter. Of the \$52 million in FEMA money available for all schools in New Orleans, \$16 million was used to renovate Fortier.

³⁹ Six schools opened during 2005 and two more opened in fall 2006. However, the Rosenwald Elementary campus housed Drew Elementary until Oct. 2006 until late October 2006. Habans Elementary and Henderson Elementary are also in the ASCA charter, but they have been operated as regular RSD schools.

⁴⁰ Prior to Katrina, the RSD already included four schools in New Orleans operated as charters. Act 35 expanded the takeover powers of the RSD *only in New Orleans* by skillfully crafting an easier takeover standard. Act 35 limits the expanded definition of "failure" to districts with more than 30 schools rated Academically Unacceptable (AU) or more than half of their students enrolled in schools rated AU. Orleans Parish was the only district meeting those criteria when the law was written, although other parishes may meet the criteria for easy takeover in the future. New Orleans schools transfer immediately to RSD control when the school scores below the state average (87.4 in 2004-05). For all other parishes in Louisiana, schools had to be AU for four years by scoring below the state proficiency target (60).

⁴¹ Mark Waller, Lynne Jensen, and Rob Nelson, "State Seeks \$2.4 Billion from U.S. to Pay Teachers," *The Times-Picayune*, Sept. 14, 2005.

⁴² Details of these calculations are available from hnelson@aft.org.

⁴³ <http://www.teachnola.org/ar/recoverydistrict.html>.

⁴⁴ Paul Hill and Jane Hannaway, "The Future of Public Education in New Orleans," After Katrina: Rebuilding Opportunity and Equity into the New Orleans," The Urban Institute, January 2006.

⁴⁵ The five additional schools include two start-up charter schools (Einstein Charter School and Priestley High School of Architecture and Construction), two schools that did not have performance ratings (New Orleans Science and Math HS, Orleans Parish PM School at McMain), and Lusher Middle and High School charter school, which was created when Lusher Elementary was converted to charter school status.

⁴⁶ Bethune Accelerated Elementary is operating in the Bauduit Elementary building. Lake Forest Montessori School is operating in the Gaudet Elementary building. Lusher Middle and High School is operating in the Fortier High School building. New Orleans Science and Math High School is using the Allen Elementary building. Einstein Charter School is in Village De l'Est Elementary.

⁴⁷ Memo from the State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education to Phyllis Landrieu, President of the Orleans Parish School Board, April 20, 2007. BESE accepted the proposal for Hansberry Elementary and Wheatley Elementary, but rejected the OPSB proposals for

Arthur Ashe Elementary and Dunbar Elementary because the RSD “will need the seats.”

⁴⁸ Louisiana Division of Standards, Assessments, and Accountability School Report Cards <http://www.louisianaschools.net/lde/saa/1639.html>.

⁴⁹ Stephen Provasnik and Scott Dorfman, “Mobility in the Teacher Workforce,” in *Condition of Education 2005*, National Center for Education Statistics, 2005.

⁵⁰ The state’s just cause dismissal law applies only to teachers employed by parishes, not to employees of charter schools or the RSD (Teachers are state employees in regular RASD schools).

⁵¹ Amy Waldman, “Reading, Writing and Resurrection.”

⁵² F. Howard Nelson, “The Impact of Collective Bargaining on Teacher Transfer Rates in Urban High Poverty Schools,” 2006.

⁵³ Amy Waldman, “Reading, Writing and Resurrection.”

⁵⁴ Louisiana labor law’s right to collective bargaining is stronger than what is written in Act 35, which says only that, “The governing authority of any Type 5 charter school may bargain and enter into a collectively bargained contract on behalf of all or any group of its employees. The provisions of this Subparagraph supersede the provisions of R.S. 17:3996(D) as it relates to Type 5 charter schools.”

⁵⁵ UTNO/AFT/AFL-CIO organizing campaign.

⁵⁶ E-mail from Lance Hill, Tulane University to F. Howard Nelson, American Federation of Teachers, April 22, 2007.

⁵⁷ Amy Waldman, “Reading, Writing and Resurrection.”

⁵⁸ “Orleans Parish School Board Refuses to Vote on Your Future,” *The AFT-UTNO Advocate*, April-May 2007.

⁵⁹ *The AFT-UTNO Advocate*.

⁶⁰ “America’s Teachers—Don’t Make Us Scapegoats,” a press release by Public Agenda, June 4, 2003. The survey findings released by Public Agenda were based on a national random-sample mail survey of 1,345 public school teachers conducted in the spring of 2003.

⁶¹ Paul Hill and Jane Hannaway, “The Future of Public Education in New Orleans.”

⁶² For a current version of this Web page, see <http://www.teachnola.org/index.html>.

⁶³ <http://www.teachnola.org/newschools.html>.

⁶⁴ Paul Hill and Jane Hannaway, “The Future of Public Education in New Orleans.”

⁶⁵ “Sharing information about or discussing employee salaries or wages” is an, “example of unacceptable workplace behavior.” Algiers Charter Schools Association Employee Handbook School Year 2006-7 <http://www.algierscharterschools.org/downloads/2006/ASCA%20Handbook.DOC>.

⁶⁶ Linda Darling-Hammond.



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