

Executive Summary

A Five-Year Strategic Plan for Reform of New Orleans Public Schools (1999-2000 Through 2003-2004)

Dedicated to the children and entire New Orleans community

Mission Statement

The New Orleans Public School system, with the support of the entire community, commits to ensuring that every child in every grade of every public school will achieve the maximum potential of her/his ability. Children come first. They must be educated to graduate with mastery of essential subjects and be technologically proficient to compete as productive citizens in the challenging 21st Century.

Overarching Goal for the District

To improve teaching and learning so that academic achievement for all students in the District is assured

Supporting Goals

- *The structure and organization of the District will be changed to make student learning and achievement the center of all activity and to better meet the needs of the community it serves. The administration will support the needs of the schools.*
- *Ensure that all schools are safe, secure and nurturing environments where the needs of students and teachers are the center of decision making, and where the community is welcomed.*
- *Engage the community and parents in all areas of the District, including policy, planning and implementation.*

Facts and Realities

FACT: In New Orleans Public Schools (NOPS), nearly 72 percent of second graders are not reading at grade level.

REALITY: The shocking reality is that unless they receive immediate, long-term, and effective remediation after school and on Saturdays, the probability is high that many of these little 7- and 8-year-olds will fail the Developmental Reading Assessment test (DRA) in the Spring, and face the prospect of repeating their grade next Fall.

FACT: For the first time this year, 4th and 8th graders will be tested with the more stringent Louisiana Educational Assessment Program (LEAP/CRT for the 21st Century), in accordance with Louisiana's Public Education Accountability System, effective in spring, 1999.

REALITY: Based on 1997-98 LEAP test scores for this same student group – last year's 3rd and 7th graders – the outlook is not good. Twenty-six percent of 3rd graders failed reading and 28 percent failed math; 28 percent of 7th graders failed reading and 38 percent failed math. There is a high probability that many of these students won't be

achieving any better with this spring's more challenging LEAP/CRT. Moreover, next year's 4th and 8th graders who fail LEAP/CRT for the 21st Century will be retained by state law.

FACT: The 1997-'98 senior class numbered 4,618 students. That was down from more than 6,000 students in the freshman class, four years earlier.

REALITY: Of the 4,618 seniors, 617 failed to graduate, due to failure to pass the LEAP/Graduate Exit Exam, failure to pass certain classes, or both.

Understanding the Strategic Plan

When you understand the dire impact of these realities, you understand the need for a Strategic Plan that calls for:

- Ending social promotion;
- A Curriculum & Instruction Department that demands reading proficiency by 3rd grade as an essential, non-negotiable item;
- A need for early identification of underachieving students and effective after-school and summer remediation programs, similar to those in Houston and Chicago;
- Lowering of student/teacher ratios, and;
- Equity of resources, including teaching staff, textbooks and other essentials.

This document stands as the representative voice of the community, a clarion call to the school district. Some may say it is different from all other Strategic Plans, while others deem it uniquely New Orleans. Some parts of the plan are written in broad terms; other sections with specificity. The latter was not a demure request but a demand by many individuals, including parents, community members and District employees, all of whom contributed significantly to the plan. While it is intended as a roadmap for the new CEO, it tries not to dictate how he/she should reach desired destinations. The insistence comes largely in the goals, accountability, outcomes and mission statement put forth for the District; the flexibility and creativity are in the recommended strategies.

While this community understands that a strong leader will need flexibility on how to get the job done and choice concerning priorities, so too does it expect this person to respect and embrace a document for, of and by the citizens of this District.

As a living document, this Strategic Plan is only as effective as the leader who brings life to it, and as the community who stands by it. To make the plan more than the mere text that it is and to prevent it from being shelved as another dusty document, it will take the passion of people and vision of a leader. It takes a powerful mind to turn a troubled corporation into a successful one. It takes a powerful heart and mind to save a school system when thousands of young lives are counting on it.

Finally, this document remains in draft form, and has not yet been formally presented to NOPS. This has been done to allow the public further time to review it and write the Foundation in response. Commentary can be mailed, faxed or e-mailed to the Greater New Orleans Education Foundation at: 210 Baronne St., Suite 841, New Orleans, LA 70130; Fax: 593-9511; e-mail: gnoef@bellsouth.net. The Foundation will review and consider all responses received by February 23, 1999.

Salient Highlights of the Strategic Plan

- **Structure & Organization:** The Orleans Parish School Board will select a superintendent as Chief Executive Officer who possesses strong leadership skills and who will restructure the District by function.
 - The CEO will be accountable for overall management and performance, as measured by student achievement, of the school system.
 - A comprehensive District-wide reorganization plan will be implemented to increase coordination and reduce fragmentation in order to improve student achievement.
- **Curriculum & Instruction/Professional Development:** The District will establish a Curriculum & Instruction/Professional Development Department. Reading is central to the District's mission of student achievement, including the K-3 initiative, which will be fully funded and implemented.
 - A strong standards-based curriculum will meet the diverse learning needs of all students.
 - Social promotion will end (students who fail their grade level will receive remediation, including after-school and summer programs. Students will be retained as per state law and the NOPS' Pupil Progression Plan).
 - Students in danger of failing will be given assistance. After-school and summer tutorials will be in place in the fall and summer of 1999 to prepare students for spring 2000 testing.
- **Parent Involvement:** Parents will be included in decision making at the school and School Board level, and will be among those held accountable for the achievement of children.
- **Human Resources:** This department will review, revise and fully implement a District-wide evaluation plan for all employees, in accordance with state law, District policy and collective bargaining agreements. It also will develop a recruitment, retention and longevity plan for teachers and other critical personnel.
- **Educational Accountability:** Multiple levels of accountability will be implemented to assure student achievement. This department will monitor student academic progress, based on performance objectives. It will measure and monitor school and system-wide improvements using standardized tests, pupil/teacher attendance rates, suspension and expulsion rates, subjects taught, grades given and level of parental involvement.
- **Compliance:** This unit will ensure that all federal/state/local policies and mandates are followed in the implementation of various programs throughout the District. A District-wide plan will be developed to determine what needs to be monitored and the process for monitoring, including detailed performance objectives.
- **Financial Services:** The Division of Financial Services will develop a financial plan for implementation of the Strategic Plan, including funded and non-funded initiatives/plans. The site-based purchasing plan will be fully implemented.

- **Grants Development and Management Department/Monitoring 8(g) Grants:** A plan will be developed and implemented to access external sources of funding. Technical assistance will be given to proposal developers, and monitoring will assure funded grants are implemented expeditiously.
- **Technology:** All infrastructure wiring within the District will be completed to allow teachers and students access to the Internet and to fully implement the Wide Area Network (WAN). A 5:1 student/computer ratio will be fully implemented. A plan will be implemented to ensure Y2K technology compliance.
- **Facility Planning:** A plan will be finalized for Capital Improvement Programs, which will engage the appropriate professionals to reassess the capital needs of the District and develop a plan for funding.
- **Comprehensive Educational Support Programs:** A plan will be developed to coordinate all support services for students while strengthening relationships with parents and community agencies.
 - The Discipline and Dress Code Handbook will be revised. The Zero Tolerance Policy will be enforced for all criminal activities and will be aligned with the revised discipline handbook.
- **Security:** A committee will develop a comprehensive security plan for the District, which will result in a common command center for disaster operations. Coordination with all law enforcement and correctional agencies and NOPS security will occur to enhance safety.
- **Center for Instructional Media, Technology and Communications:** This department will devise a communications plan that will effectively maintain two-way communication with NOPS employees and students, and with parents and the community.
- **Transportation:** This department will develop and implement a comprehensive transportation plan, based on recent audit findings, in such areas as facilities upgrade, vehicle replacement and improved student transportation.

Background

This Strategic Plan for revitalization of the New Orleans Public Schools is the work of the broad community of New Orleans. It represents the response of this community to the dire condition of the public schools in this and many other cities across the country. It also is the fruit of the alliance forged in late 1998 by the Orleans Parish School Board with the Greater New Orleans Education Foundation.

When the Education Foundation was created at the request of Mayor Marc H. Morial in March 1998, New Orleanians were united in their determination to see to it that public education became effective. City residents were emboldened by crime reductions, which proved that even society's most intractable problems could be solved.

The Performance Engineering™ system, which has helped achieve dramatic results in organizational settings of various kinds (including police, child welfare, and mass transit, etc.), was used to design the Education Foundation's process of evaluation and planning.

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This included a Performance Diagnostic to identify the group values and programmatic elements that would unite the disparate and sometimes harshly confrontational elements of the New Orleans community in common purpose and rapid effect, as well as the structure of a 10-point project plan.

The project plan encompassed quantitative benchmarks comparing New Orleans with other urban school systems, classroom and student observations conducted by academic experts from New Orleans, site-based cost audits, performance audits of the transportation and purchasing functions, assemblage of best practice models, a needs assessment of the school system's physical plant and capital plan, an inventory of legal obstacles to the creation of a highly accountable and effective school system, and reengineering of individual organizational practices and structures.

The assessment of teaching and learning in the classroom resulted in publication last summer of the Orleans Parish School Observation Project. Its most significant finding was that teachers are losing up to one full day a week, on average, in instructional time, due to lack of effective classroom management and discipline, content knowledge, and other problems.

The Education Foundation also employed the services of Silas Lee and Associates to explore the sentiment of parents, voters and teachers in New Orleans regarding public education. This project resulted in the *Focus Groups Report*, in which Mr. Lee writes that "race remains the most distinctive feature of social, economic and educational life in New Orleans." Although many issues addressed drew responses along racial lines, there was a consensus about the need for strong leadership and for immediate and drastic change in NOPS.

Other external consultants were hired to examine current practices and to make recommendations for improvement or change in specific areas of the school system. The following areas were reviewed by consultants hired by the Foundation:

- Capital Construction Process, by Ravitch and Rice, New York City
- Transportation Department and Purchasing, a joint project by Deloitte & Touche, LLP, New Orleans, and Bruno & Tervalon, New Orleans
- Facilities Review, by Hewitt Washington & Associates, New Orleans
- Collective Bargaining Agreement Review, by Attorney Robert L. Clayton of Vial, Hamilton, Koch & Knox, LLP, New Orleans

Richard Ravitch of Ravitch and Rice, is a New York urban development expert whose chairmanships include the New York Metropolitan Transportation Authority and New York State Urban Development Corporation. Mr. Ravitch worked in conjunction with Irving Fischer, a New York construction engineer and management expert who has had major involvement in projects such as Citicorp Center, Madison Square Garden renovation and Trump Tower.

Deloitte & Touche, LLP, and Bruno & Tervalon are auditing and management consultant firms in New Orleans. Hewitt Washington & Associates is a New Orleans architectural and planning firm. Vial, Hamilton, Koch & Knox, LLP, is a New Orleans law firm.

The findings and recommendations of these consultants will be released in a separate report, however, many of their recommendations were incorporated in the Strategic Plan.

A Reengineering Committee, largely within the school system, was selected to research six areas to determine problem areas and assess needs, report on findings and make recommendations. The committee, numbering approximately 35, was comprised of principals, mentor teachers, parents and community experts. The six areas examined were:

- Organization & Structure
- Curriculum, Instruction and Teacher Training
- Safety & Security
- Discipline
- Parental Involvement
- Measurements & Accountability

The recommendations of the Reengineering Committee were supplemented with best practice model recommendations, based on national research, and bolstered by a series of “Expert Superintendent” forums. Three leading school superintendents were invited to New Orleans to discuss their reform plans and successes: Dr. Roderick Paige of the Houston Independent School District, Mr. Paul Vallas of Chicago Public Schools and Dr. Carl Cohn of Long Beach Unified School District.

In late August, the New Orleans Education Council was established to assemble representatives of groups who had shown deep interest in education. These groups included business, religious, political and community leaders, educators, students, parents, union representatives, and two School Board members. Their task was to review all work conducted to date. Later, they shaped the draft of a Strategic that would be, in fact, the community’s plan.

Throughout this process, the Foundation continued to maintain dialogue with the Orleans Parish School Board in an effort to shape a closer working partnership with the School District. On October 15, 1998, the Foundation and the School Board met for a full-day seminar to discuss how both parties could solidify a relationship that would benefit the children of the District.

The October 15th seminar proved to be a positive turning point in communications between the Foundation and the School Board, and a fruitful occasion for reform. The result of that meeting was the *Declaration of Intent to Reform (DIR)*, a five-page document which includes 14 principles of reform. These reform principles were articulated by the Education Council and resonate throughout the Strategic Plan. The *DIR* was agreed to by both parties and signed jointly at a news conference on November 18, 1998. Mayor Morial signed as a witness. This led to the development of a Strategic Plan for reform.

The Strategic Planning Process

At this point, the Strategic Plan began to move at an accelerated pace. In December, Dr. Matthew Proctor, then interim superintendent, directed 125 individuals within the District (principals, teachers and administrators) to work closely with the Foundation and

parents on shaping the plan. The work of the Strategic Planning Committee was guided by the findings and recommendations provided by the Reengineering Committee and external consultants; current District initiatives and plans; best practices; the 14 principles of reform created by the Education Council in the *DIR*; the United States Department of Education's (USDE) *Goals 2000* policy, and; the State Department of Education's (SDE) educational plan for reform, *Louisiana Education, Achievement & Results Now (LEARN)*.

In all, 19 areas were examined: Structure & Organization; Curriculum & Instruction/Professional Development; Consolidated 8(g) Programs; Comprehensive Educational Support Unit; Discipline/School Safety; Security Department; Educational Accountability; Compliance Unit; Parent & Community Involvement; Human Resource Department; Division of Financial Services; Grant Development and Management Department; Risk Management; Technology; Center for Instructional Media, Technology and Communications; Facilities Planning; Maintenance Services; Custodial Services; and Transportation.

Most of these areas were functioning without the benefit of a departmental plan. Thus, the first recommendation for each was to develop a plan within finite start and completion dates. Multiple recommendations were given for strategies and outcomes.

Each of the 19 sections included in this plan requires coordination and integration, and presumes a high degree of interdependency. For example, technology time lines (see Technology Department) must be adhered to before a full staff development plan (see Curriculum & Instruction/Professional Development) can be implemented. As with most strategic plans, this plan largely is written in broad terms, rather than with specificity, with some exceptions. For example, Technology and Facilities have District-approved, detailed plans in place that were worked out in recent years and involved the work of many individuals, including parents and the community.

The Education Council was reconvened in January to review the Strategic Plan, make recommendations, and approve the work.

This is the document that will guide the District for five years, from 1999-2000 through 2003-2004. It will coincide with Louisiana's Public Education Accountability System, which will be implemented statewide in spring, 1999. The Strategic Plan is in alignment with the federal *Goals 2000* policy, with the state's *LEARN* policy, and with *DIR/NOPS/GNOEF*.

Conclusion

This is the first time in New Orleans history that a school reform movement of this scope and magnitude, incorporating all stakeholders in the system and city, was actualized to achieve District-wide improvement – and one that provides for implementation and monitoring of progress.

Now the real work begins.

Barriers of distrust still must be removed, racial and class attitudes still must be overcome, and attitudes that led to years of neglect must be disavowed.

As you read this report, the term *accountability* looms large. It is a word that rolls easily from the mouths of reformers, and too often is used punitively. Perhaps the

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ultimate challenge is to change the system significantly enough so that accountability becomes associated with pride.

The teamwork necessary to produce results includes the collective minds and hearts of the entire city. Just as schools are an integral part of the community they serve, so too must the community serve its schools. Just as the task to produce measurable results in academic achievement is incumbent upon administrators, principals, teachers, parents and students, so too does it fall squarely on the shoulders of the community (in the need for business partnerships and financial support, volunteers, and voter support for educational issues).

Cities across America are realizing this undeniable truth: As the quality of education goes, so goes the social and economic life of a community.

In terms of reform, it takes a city to raise a school system. In terms of accountability, the burden of achievement falls upon all of us.

Attachments: *Declaration of Intent to Reform*