

# Stakeholder Organizations

## Hurricane Katrina and the New Orleans Public Schools

Brian Beabout

The public schools of New Orleans have long been believed to be among the worst of any big city school systems in the United States. The students are the poorest citizens of one of the poorest cities in one of the poorest states in the country. Although the population of the city is approximately 65% African American, the student population in the district is more than 90% African-American—a result of continuously failing schools and decades of white flight. In a city with one of the highest rates of private school attendance in the country, 25% compared to 10% nationally (Newmark & De Rugy, 2006), the public schools have been consistently under-funded and neglected. Prior to the storm, the district was led by 10 superintendents in 10 years, and several have left under clouds of suspicion regarding mishandled money. Until the eyes of the nation fell on this city after Hurricane Katrina struck on 29 August 2005, there had been little political will to improve the failing system.

The nation cringed at the TV news clips of poor African Americans huddled, dehydrated, and dying at the convention center and Superdome waiting for handouts from the government. The embarrassment to the city was real, and this may provide the political will to change the city's public schools permanently. In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, the district temporarily lost 100% of its students and did not reopen a single school for more than two months. As it became apparent that the district was not prepared to bring the schools back from such a devastating blow,

educators began to see a silver lining in Katrina's dark clouds. State School Board member Leslie Jacobs said, "The Diaspora of New Orleans represents the opportunity to rebuild our public school system" (Inskeep, 2005b). While some saw this as an opportunity to rebuild the system, huge segments of the population were living in Houston, Baton Rouge, Atlanta, and hundreds of other places across the country. With the low-income, non-white residents most often affected by the disaster, it fell to the educational organizations in the city to lead the debate over how the schools should be reopened. Could these organizations follow through on their promise to improve schooling for the lower-income residents of New Orleans? With leadership structures and educational platforms already in place, these stakeholder organizations (teachers union, school board, and the like) were well-situated to influence the course of events in the tumultuous few months following the storm. Would they seize the opportunity? This article addresses the question: *How did stakeholder organizations respond to the post-Katrina collapse of the New Orleans Public Schools?* Components of this question are:

- ◆ Why did groups act when they did?
- ◆ What basis did they use to argue for their proposed reforms?
- ◆ What successes/failures have groups had in bringing their educational vision to fruition?

In understanding the ways in which various stakeholder organizations responded to Katrina, it should be possible to understand the reasons for the success and failure of certain groups. This may give some insight into the complex social and political forces that surround any effort to

change urban schools. Although Seymour Sarason has noted "The intractability of schools to educational reform" (Sarason 1990, p.147), it is possible that schools are not intractable as much as reformers are ignorant of the complexities of changing organizations as complex as urban schools. Understanding the role of stakeholder organizations in post-Katrina reforms is one small step toward the larger agenda of understanding how urban schools change.

### Theoretical Framework

Fullan, (2000) addresses the concepts of *cultural* and *structural change* as they apply to school reform. Structural change involves change in governance structures (Cuban & Usdan, 2002) and formal leadership roles in an effort to improve the educational outcomes of a district. Cultural change, in this case, involves the active participation of many individuals in the transformation of classrooms into places where learning is a shared goal and shared responsibility. Ideally, this type of change involves schools that use professional learning communities to examine student work and make appropriate alterations to teaching practice (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995; Schlecty, 1990).

While cultural change is generally a more powerful agent in the reform of systems of education, cultural change without a supportive governance structure is both challenging and exhausting (Vibert & Portelli, 2000). Stakeholder groups, especially in the case of post-Katrina New Orleans, are able to influence district structure and make it either accommodating or hostile to the development of professional learning communities that lead to deep cultural changes. This study will examine the roles of five stakeholder organizations and their success in implementing structural

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reforms in the post-Katrina redesign of the New Orleans Public Schools.

### **Five Key Stakeholder Organizations**

The roles of five key stakeholder organizations: United Teachers of New Orleans; Orleans Parish School Board; State of Louisiana; Algiers Charter School Association; and Mayor Ray Nagin's "Bring New Orleans Back" Education Subcommittee will be explored to answer the research questions posed above. While this is by no means an exhaustive list of such groups, they represent some of the more influential groups in terms of their ability to influence the massive post-Katrina restructuring in the district. A brief description and abbreviation for each organization is given below.

#### **United Teachers of New Orleans (UTNO)**

UTNO is the AFT-affiliated teachers union that counted approximately 4700 dues-paying members before Katrina and fewer than 300 after the storm. Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB): The seven-member board that was directly responsible for the operation of 117 schools prior to Katrina and currently oversees the operation of five schools. Members are elected to four year terms by residents of seven geographic districts in the city.

#### **State of Louisiana**

This organization consists primarily of state legislature, Governor Kathleen Blanco, State Superintendent Cecil Picard, and the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE), which consists of eight elected members and three members appointed by the governor. The BESE Board is directly responsible for 102 New Orleans' campuses under the control of the state-run Recovery School District (RSD).

#### **Algiers Charter School Association (ACSA)**

A community group that created a collection of 14 charter schools shortly after Katrina. This group enrolled about one in five New Orleans Public School students as of September 2006.

#### **Mayor Ray Nagin's "Bring New Orleans Back" Education Subcommittee (BNOB-ED)**

A volunteer committee of nearly 70 members appointed by the mayor to develop and present a proposal for the rebuilding of the New Orleans Public Schools.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

As a former teacher in the New Orleans Public Schools, I began collecting media reports of the post-Katrina school reforms immediately after the storm. As it became clear that the school board would not be able to retain control of the district, and that significant reforms were imminent, my collection of media reports became more systematic. I collected approximately 150 media reports (both print and radio) to trace the activity of stakeholder organizations after Katrina. Some federal and state government documents and recordings of public meetings focusing on the school system supplemented these media reports. Additionally, I reviewed such important primary sources as public information released by these organizations via press releases, publications, and Internet sites.

Analysis of these data consisted of chronological analysis of the major actions and public statements of each stakeholder organization, which indicated the general position of each with regard to change within the district. When the general position of each of the five groups included here are taken as a whole, it is possible to see which groups have been more effective in translating their vision into reality. Of course, events are still unfolding rapidly in New Orleans, and the groups that have had success influencing reforms at the time of this writing are not necessarily the groups that will have the most long-term success. A current longer-term study of the results of post-Katrina reforms will help in seeing the true extent of the changes that Katrina brings to the New Orleans Public Schools.

### **Responding to Disaster**

This section traces the actions of five stakeholder organizations in response to Hurricane Katrina on August 29, 2005. In addition to the important actions of each group, a summary of its plan for post-Katrina schooling will conclude each section. In some cases, this plan is a written document which leaves little need for interpretation. In others, the plan must be pieced together from organizational actions and public statements.

#### **Stakeholder #1:**

#### **United Teachers of New Orleans (UTNO)**

UTNO called for a quick resumption of classes following the storm. They linked the reopening of schools with the return of

population that would galvanize the city-wide recovery process. Initially disregarding calls from other groups that extensive redesign of the schools should precede the reopening of the city's overwhelmingly failing schools, union president Brenda Mitchell preferred "that all attention is on the resumption of instruction" noting that radical changes to the school system "should be put off until a later date" (United Teachers of New Orleans, 2005a). Mitchell criticized the school board's rapid creation of charter schools, blaming the discussion of charters as responsible for the delay in reopening public schools for the city's children. The union filed suit in city court on November 8 to force the district to reopen a small number of schools (Ritea & Warner, 2005)

At the state level, Louisiana Federation of Teachers President, Steve Monaghan vehemently opposed a proposal that would have created a state-funded voucher program (United Teachers of New Orleans, 2005b). In November 2005, while the OPSB was busy chartering schools, and the state legislature was beginning to consider a takeover bid in the upcoming special session, UTNO released its plan for the reopening of schools in the flood-ravaged city.

Their plan called for the rapid opening of schools that would maintain the same organizational structures and curricula that were in place prior to the storm. The changes they focused on were related to working conditions (class size, building cleanliness) and a call for more ethical behavior from district officials (United Teachers of New Orleans, 2005c). Arguing that the majority of the public school community was physically absent from the city, the union consistently argued that any large departures from the pre-Katrina system would be unwise due to the unavailability of community input.

While this plan serves as an ideological snapshot of what the union wanted the rebuilding process to look like, it quickly became a meaningless plan. UTNO lost nearly all of its power when Governor Blanco signed House Bill 121 that swept more than 90% of New Orleans Public Schools into state control—voiding the bargaining agreement that the union had in place with the school board. The union was left to watch passively as the district fired nearly 95% of its dues-paying members in February's post-Katrina budget crunch (Ritea, 2006). In fact, when the *American School Board Journal* did a story on the recovery process of NOPS,

they included articles on six different stakeholders in the new district, but union leadership was not one of them (Dillon & Vail, 2006). In September 2006, the school board voted to cease payments to UTNO's Health and Welfare Fund that defrayed medical costs incurred by UTNO members (Ritea, 2006b).

In the end, UTNO sought a reopen-first, reform-second strategy that ignored the desire of the public to overhaul the NOPS in the wake of Katrina. Their calls for the "renaissance, not replacement" of the system sounded like calls for the status quo and left it with few allies and little political power following the state takeover. Time will tell if workplace issues in the charter-dominated district will bring about a resurgence of the teachers' union.

#### **Stakeholder #2:**

##### **Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB)**

The OPSB was in dire straits even prior to the destruction caused by hurricane Katrina. It had hired 10 superintendents in 10 years and diverted money from the classrooms to hire a New York consulting firm Alvarez and Marsal to help track down \$71 million in unaccounted for federal funds (Inskeep, 2005). Public trust in the school board was low, and recent scandals involving missing money, continued school violence, and poor academic performance had many people plotting for a way to remove the district from under the board's mismanagement even before Katrina.

After the storm, the school board first met on September 15 in Baton Rouge. At the meeting, Board member Phyllis Landrieu suggested inviting former Secretary of Education Rod Paige and retaining Bill Roberti from Alvarez and Marsal to take over leadership of the district (Orleans Parish School Board, 2005). The vote failed, but this shows the school board's lack of confidence in its own abilities to successfully reopen the district. During the same meeting, the board approved a charter for the Lusher Elementary School in a 5-1 vote, placed all employees on disaster leave, and set a target date of 1 November for the first school reopening. The move to decentralize the district was begun by the very people who would have been expected to attempt to maintain control.

At their next meeting on 28 October, the board approved charters for an additional 20 schools with the condition that 20% of the students at chartered school be eligible for free and reduced lunch (Ritea, 2005b). A federal grant of some \$21 million

forced the hand of the cash-strapped board to accept the charter proposals despite the feeling expressed by board president Torin Sanders that this decentralization could lead to problems of equity in the district. The district's chartering of its schools was also a response to harsh public criticism for not opening schools when private schools in the city and public schools in hard-hit St. Bernard Parish were already open. Superintendent Ora Watson apologized for the slow opening of schools and pushed the target date for opening back from 1 November to 14 November due to district financial problems.

Eventually on 28 November the first public school in the city was opened, nearly two months after the storm struck (Ritea, 2005c). Three days later, just as the UTNO was, the school board was stripped of nearly all of its power when the state took over 102 of its 117 campuses. Of the remaining 15 schools, seven already held charters with the district, leaving the board in direct control of only eight schools (Ritea, 2005d). The board, with the state's help, had removed itself from any important role in the short-term future of the New Orleans Public Schools.

The district was left with only cleaning up to do once the state takeover occurred. The behemoth district now had 61 central office employees instead of 1,200 and operated 3 functioning schools instead of 117 (Ritea, 2005e). In March, the district tried to recover some costs by selling some of its ruined school busses on Ebay as Katrina collectibles (Ritea, 2006a). In April 2006, superintendent Ora Watson announced that she would not seek an extension of her contract after it expired in July. This guaranteed that the much-smaller district would be led by its 11th superintendent in a decade.

#### **Stakeholder #3:**

##### **State of Louisiana**

Six weeks after Hurricane Katrina struck New Orleans, Jay Dardenne, a state senator from Baton Rouge said, "I don't want to rebuild those failing schools" (Anderson, 2005). It was clear that state lawmakers saw this as a golden opportunity to rid the state of an underperforming school district that had been an embarrassment for decades. In the state's most attractive city for outside investment, business balked at moving to New Orleans partly because of the decrepit condition of its public schools. Leslie Jacobs, an at-large member of the state BESE Board stated, "It's hard to find a silver lining from Katrina,

but one silver lining is that the school board can start anew. And if any school district needs to start anew, it's Orleans" ("New Orleans wants to rebuild schools," 2005). With public support for the school board waning as schools opened up in other hard-hit areas, the state passed House Bill 121 on 30 November, which moved 102 of New Orleans' failing schools into a state-run Recovery School District (RSD). The state would have until May to submit a plan for operating the 102 schools. After five years, progress would be assessed, and some schools could be returned to the board. At the bill signing ceremony, Gov. Blanco summarized the state's position well: "We see an opportunity here to just do something that is incredible" (Anderson, 2005b). Depending on one's point of view, that something incredible could be dismantling the professional community of the New Orleans Public Schools, or ridding the city of an inefficient bureaucracy and paving the way for change. In either case, the state was moving forward, and with its constitutional power, there was little meaningful opposition to the takeover. Change, in some form, was imminent.

#### **Stakeholder # 4:**

##### **Algiers Charter School Association (ACSA)**

A mere five weeks after the storm, ACSA petitioned the board to create charter schools in the relatively undamaged West Bank section of the city, which is located across the Mississippi River from downtown and did not get the standing water that caused most of the damage in other areas. The school board approved a single charter, granting control of all 13 public schools on the West Bank to the Algiers Charter School Association.

The ACSA board, consisting of New Orleans educators and West Bank residents, approved a \$22.6 million budget on 4 November. This budget called for opening up eight schools by January for up to 5,400 students on a citywide open-enrollment basis (Ritea, 2005f). ACSA, like OPSB, hired New York turnaround consultants Alvarez and Marsal to help plan their recovery process. After some delays, schools opened on 14 December with 1,324 students attending classes at five schools. OPSB had opened its first school on 29 November, but by September 2006, ACSA would expand to eight schools and serve nearly one-in-five NOPS students. Despite critiques that the lack of a union contract and ACSA's use of a basic skills test for teaching applicants (Polier, 2006), this district-within-a-district has had fewer of the problems with sup-

plies, staffing, and student violence that have plagued the state-run schools.

**Stakeholder # 5:  
Mayor's Bring New Orleans Back Education Committee (BNOB-ED)**

New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin was a fixture in the national media following the Katrina disaster and gained notoriety for the abusive language he directed at the Bush administration and his "chocolate city" comments aimed at appeasing Black residents who felt they were being pushed out of the rebuilding process. As a part of his rebuilding efforts, he created seven volunteer committees to guide the city's initial actions following the storm. One of these committees was the BNOB-ED led by Tulane University president, Scott Cowen. This group had 20 members on its steering committee, most of whom were business and education elites in the city. The experience of this group, ranging from university administrators, to K12 principals, to state education officials led them to undergo a thoughtful process of examining what the storm meant for NOPS, researching other urban school reform efforts, and proposing a detailed report with suggestions for reforming the district in the wake of Katrina.

They held three public meetings in New Orleans that encouraged public

participation. Their first meeting, on 19 November 2005 attracted about 50 participants (Bazile, 2005). In addition, they collected school improvement data from 1,500 parents, teachers, and students through telephone and electronic communication with displaced residents. At this meeting, committee chairperson Scott Cowen noted the long-term aspect of their mission: "Most of the dialog has been about who will control the schools, not who will plan for the school's future" (Bazile, 2005). The committee worked through November and December to draft a plan, eventually dubbed the "educational network model" that they believed would address some of the bureaucracy and inequity of the old system.

After several public meetings to collect feedback on the plan, it was submitted to the Mayor and presented for public comment on January 17, 2006. Of course, during the process of creating the plan, control of the district had moved away from the school board and toward the state and the charter operators. So instead of pitching their idea to a single institution, they had to address a patchwork of groups that all controlled pieces of a somewhat balkanized educational landscape. While their educational network model included input from many residents and adopted successful practices from other urban districts,

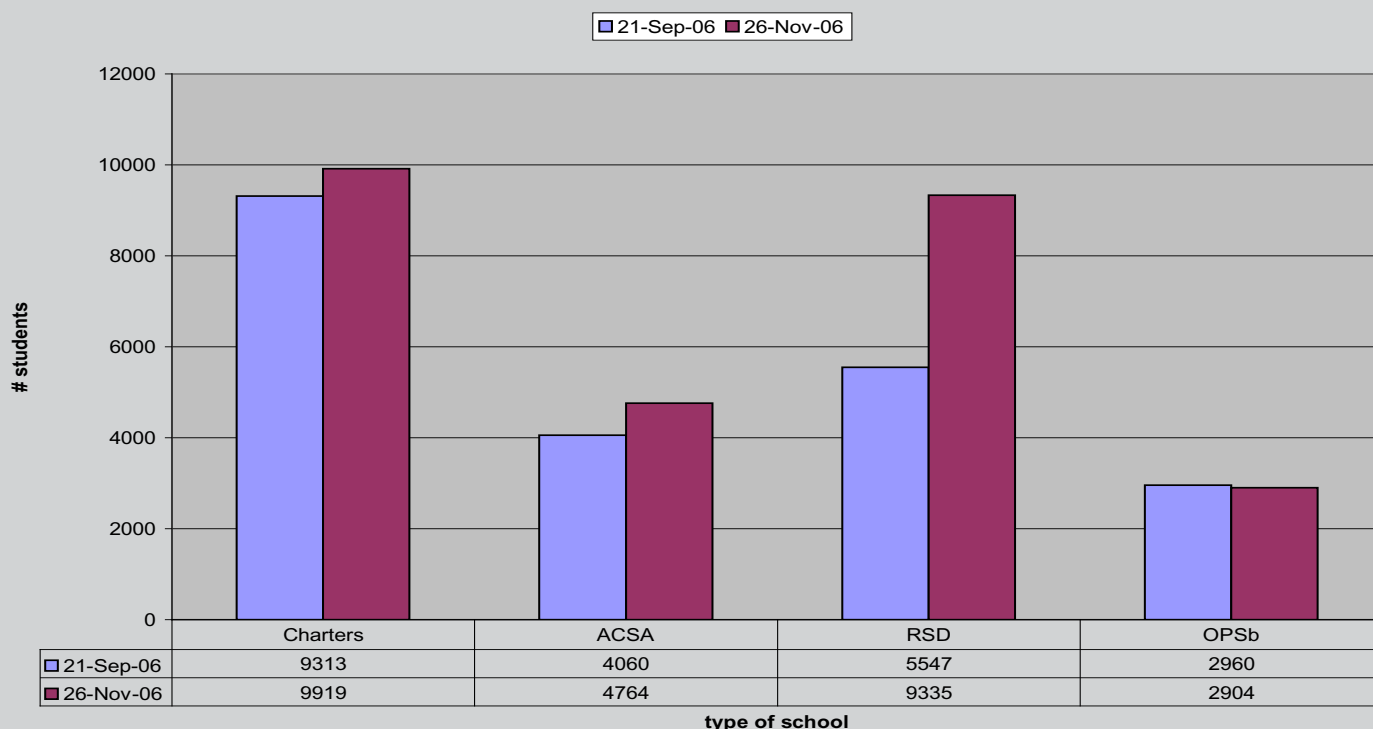
without formal power, their plan simply died. The state may, in the future, decide to implement portions of the BNOB-ED plan, but it also has complete authority to ignore it.

**Findings**

Based on this analysis, the reactions of stakeholder organizations to Hurricane Katrina appear in several cases to have somewhat more to do with maintaining or winning political control of the school system than with improving the academic success of New Orleans students. The self-interest of many of the stakeholder groups and their need for self-preservation or political influence is the central finding of this study. This finding is consistent with other studies of curricular change (Kliebard, 2004) and those who study complex social systems (Hutchins, 1996).

But this is not a story of mindless land grabbing by these stakeholder organizations. There may be a specific effect of Fullan's (2001) *structure/culture* dualism at play here in that the organizations that were successful in gaining access to the structure of the district were, in most cases, those that proposed a new vision of the culture of the school system. Perhaps the conservative nature of the educational system maintains its current structure

**Figure 1: Enrollment in New Orleans Public Schools**



unless overwhelmingly convincing visions of a new organizational culture can be expressed by a particular group. An examination of each of my three original research questions shows this in more detail.

#### **Finding 1:**

##### **Why did groups act when they did?**

It appears that stakeholder groups with traditional power (the school board and teacher union) did *not act* immediately. They were slow, bureaucratic organizations that were unprepared to lead the district prior to Katrina, and even less prepared to do so afterward. Contentious relationships between the school board and the union prior to the storm left the city without any unified political coalition that could organize around the rebuilding efforts of NOPS. Despite some posturing that both groups intended to lead the rebuilding of the school district, neither did anything significant, and both are now significantly weaker organizations than they were before the storm. These two groups failed to act because they were bureaucratic monopolies and were not accustomed to doing *anything at all*, even in the best of circumstances.

ACSA and the mayor's group formed when it became obvious that the board could not reopen the schools. In the silence caused by the school board's slow response, these two new groups formed, desiring to significantly reshape the system of public education in New Orleans. To be sure, ACSA was spurred on by the federal government's announcement of a \$21 million grant to support charter schools in hurricane-affected districts, a highly political move consistent with the Bush administration's market-based school reform policies. But ACSA also formed in response to a desire to get out from under the stifling bureaucracy of the top-heavy school district. They were escaping the ineffectual policies, which their charter application refers to as "a one foot thick set of documents that have not been reviewed for consistency and necessity in the past 20 years" (Newmark & De Rugy, 2006). In a sense, they were seizing this opportunity, while the district was in a moment of weakness, to secede from the union.

Similarly, the mayor's committee seized on this break from business as usual to plan a completely redesigned district. Led by educational elites and including feedback from 1,500 citizens, they engaged in the process of redesign very much akin to the idealized design process explained by Banathy (1992). They acted because

they realized that the system as it existed prior to Katrina was dead, and they sought to ensure that sufficient thought was put into the redesign of the new system. This group stands alone as the only stakeholder group in this study that did not make an overt grab for power during the first six months following Katrina. They shared their final plan with the community on January 17, 2006 and have since retreated from the limelight as the state and other groups have carved up the district and ceased to examine the system as a whole.

Finally, the state had desired to increase its control over NOPS prior to the storm, and used the power-vacuum to carry out its takeover plans. State takeover was not a new idea in Louisiana, as the state attempted to take over NOPS in 1960 to prevent the implementation of federal desegregation orders (Inger, 1969). The traditional argument preventing state takeover was that local people were best suited to solve local problems. Now it seemed that local people had more serious issues of housing and economic stability to worry about. Conveniently for the state, any political organizations that might have protested such a move were temporarily unable to mount any opposition. The state used this opportunity to amend the pre-existing takeover law and place most of the district under its direct control.

#### **Finding 2:**

##### **What basis did stakeholder organizations use to argue for their proposed reforms?**

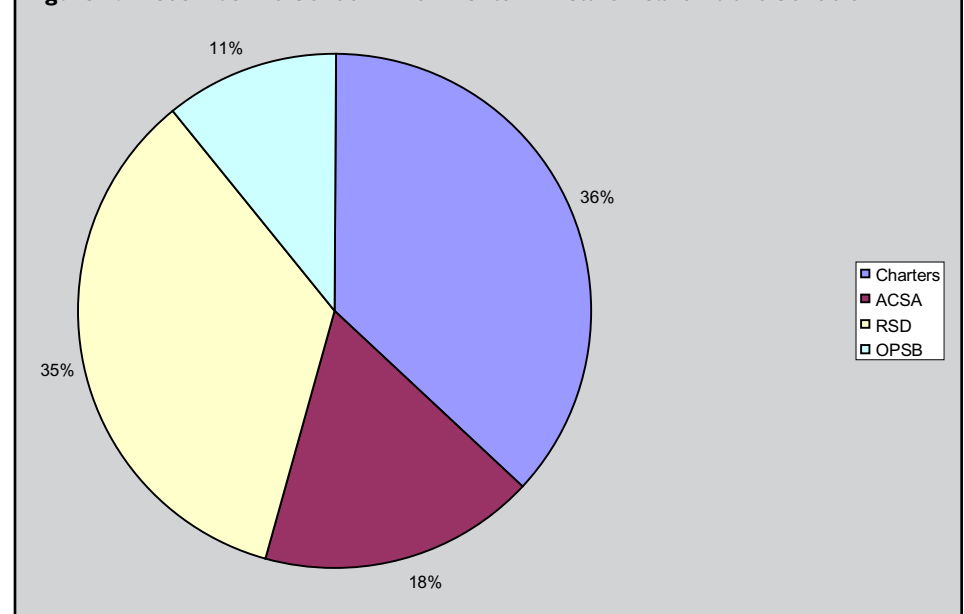
Equally important to understand-

ing the process of urban school reform is the rationale each group gave for their post-Katrina reforms. The teachers union argued that immediately opening schools would bring back population (and help the economy) as well as serve to bring the community together in this time of need. This basis looks past efforts to radically alter the pre-existing system and focuses on the need for immediate school reopening. This would be expected as the union's role is protecting the interests of its members, all of whom were without pay as long as schools were closed.

The school board acknowledged that they could not adequately bring the district back, and that schools would be back faster, and perhaps improved more readily with independent leadership. The fact that the board was in serious financial straits prior to the storm led them to the position that they were unable to bring the district back to where it had been. Federal charter money and the intense public interest in new school leadership were seen as the best route to ensuring the education of New Orleans' returning children.

ACSA, in the process of gaining control of 13 schools under its single charter, argued that a community run, low-bureaucracy school system would serve students better than the old system. They would be able to manage a much smaller budget and staff and avoid much of the mismanagement that plagued the pre-Katrina district. Embedded in their argument is a version of the local control argument that says that problems can be solved better by those who are closest to them. This argument

**Figure 2: November 26 School Enrollments in New Orleans Public Schools**



resonated well in a city that had been ill-served by a centralized school board and had been left to drown by FEMA's bungling antics in response to Katrina.

The mayor's committee argued that a broad base of input and careful, centralized planning were needed as part of a comprehensive plan to overhaul the district. Committee members knew that this was a once-in-a-century event that provided a unique opportunity to intervene in the downward spiral of the New Orleans Public Schools. This rationale resonates with Kurt Lewin's (1951) notion of freezing and unfreezing in organizational change. It could be argued that Katrina's aftermath was a period when the relatively rigid structures of the district were more malleable, and that soon after the return of the population and the reopening of schools, the district would refreeze into a new rigid structure. Thus, making the most of this opportunity was essential to the mayor's group.

Finally, the state of Louisiana had always viewed New Orleans schools as an embarrassment and an economic hindrance. Now was the time for the state to exercise its constitutional power to take direct control of the district. This was a move that would put the burden of running the troubled system on the state, but would move the management of the system away from the local political infighting that they assumed to be a cause of the problems. Embedded here is that a rational, resourceful government can manage affairs better than locals who are blinded by everyday affairs, which can, admittedly, get pretty blurry in the city of New Orleans.

**Finding 3:**  
**What successes/failures have groups had in bringing their educational vision to fruition?**

There has been a great imbalance between the groups that have been successful in getting their vision implemented, much of this having to do with political power and the ability to compose a reform message that was pleasurable to the ears of decision makers. The union and the board had no credibility due to their past failures in reforming the district. It appears that the board's mission may have been merely to divest itself of much of its authority in the district, in which case they were quite successful at implementing its mission. This does not, however, give much power to their educational vision, if there even was one. The union continued to harass the actions of others, but not engage in any sort of helpful dialogue with the district that has made other urban reforms successful

(Urbanski, 2000). Thus, they have been pushed aside and serve as representatives, but not an important force in guiding the direction of the district.

The Mayor's committee brought national media attention and harnessed the support of recognized educational experts in formulating a massively revised plan for NOPS. But, they had no formal power, and since the state take over, little of their plan has been implemented. As the state looks for guidance in running a school system (Nelson, 2006), the committee's "educational network model" may come back, but as of this writing, it has been put on the shelf.

The state and ACSA have had the most success in getting their educational vision for reform implemented. ACSA has done this by being the first major chunk of schools to be up and running and doing a reasonably good job of educating 1 in 5 of New Orleans students. The state has exercised its constitutional authority and controls the largest number of schools, but what exactly the state's influence will be is largely uncertain. The opening of schools in September 2006 was fraught with problems in the state-run schools (Ritea, 2006b; Saulny, 2006).

**Conclusions**

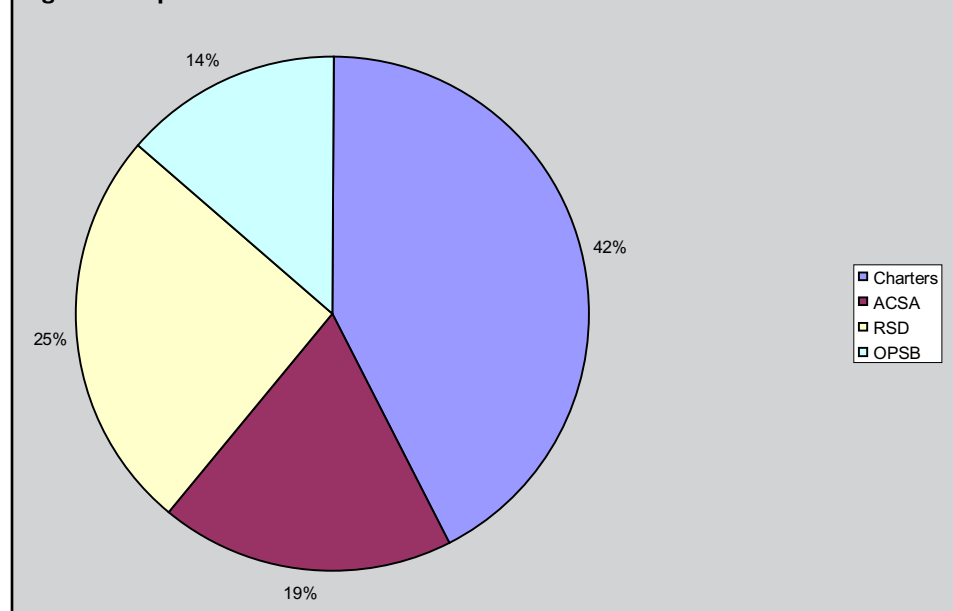
In this case of urban school reform initiated by a natural disaster, stakeholder organizations reacted in a number of ways, from divesting of authority, to creating subdistricts, to engaging in dialogue about what a new system might look like. In this

case, it appears that most of those who put forth visions of a new system have gained some measure of control in the post-Katrina era educational landscape. In other words, those who successfully espoused a particular cultural change within the district were often successful in achieving some of the structural changes that they sought. The union and the school board did not propose significant alterations to either the practice or function of education in the city, and have thus been pushed to the margins of the educational community.

ACSA, the state, and the mayor's committee all have put forth visions of a new educational system and all have found some purchase in New Orleans. ACSA's regional charter system represents an experiment as an urban K12 charter school district and has been sanctioned by the state to continue its operations as long as academic achievement does not falter. The state has taken over 100 buildings (half of which are empty) and is granting more charters as well as running some schools itself. As of November 2006, the district is approaching half of its pre-Katrina enrollment: 36% of the students are enrolled in independent charter schools, 18% in the ACSA charter network, 35% in the state-run RSD, and 11% in the few remaining district-run schools (see appendix).

What this patchwork quilt of educational options may tell us is that different theories of reform and different ideologies might exist within the same city, even the same district—if the district is conceived broadly enough. The opportunity to make substantive cultural changes in urban

**Figure 3: September 21 Enrollments in New Orleans Public Schools**



classrooms may also require the ability to carve out some space within the bureaucratic structure to enact classroom and school-level changes. This finding may support the type of loose-coupling (Weick, 1976) between districts and individual schools that allow both district-level support and freedom for schools experiment.

This structure has been popular with urban reformers who have promoted magnet schools and vouchers (Dougherty, 2004). It should be noted that such a structure was recommended by the mayor's BNOB-ED committee in their "educational network model." Time will tell if such a district model will be implemented in New Orleans, and further research is required to determine if the structural changes already made will indeed lead to the cultural and academic changes that have been proposed. Clearly, the citizens of New Orleans are watching this experiment closely, and the preliminary results of nation's largest experiment in urban school choice will be made public when school report cards come out in summer 2007. Until then, we can just continue to watch as events unfold.

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