

# Governance: Best Practices of Successful Urban School Districts And Implications for New Orleans

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## Executive Summary

The Council of Great City Schools identified eight (8) urban districts with upward academic trends. With regard to their governance structure, all eight (8) successful urban districts are governed by local boards of education, with either elected or appointed members. None of the successful urban school districts are governed by a state board of education, as the majority of schools in New Orleans are so governed by the Recovery School District (RSD). Returning New Orleans schools to local governance, with mandatory stipulations and conditions that continue and reinforce site-based management through Charter Schools and Community Schools, is the best chance to improve New Orleans' District Performance score, which plummeted from 56.9 in 2005 to 51.4 in 2009 for the RSD. (In 2009, there were two District Performance Scores for New Orleans. The OPBS score, with 17 schools, was 104.3 and the RSD score, with 61 schools, was 51.4. See Part III)

- Part I: Identifying Successful Urban School Districts
- Part II: Governance Structures of Successful Urban School Districts
- Part III: New Orleans; District Performance Scores
- Part IV: Implications for Governance of the New Orleans Public Schools

## Part I: Identifying Successful Urban School Districts

### A. Upward Academic Trends

The Council of Great City Schools is a national organization, founded in 1956, that collects and analyzes data in order to inform policy makers and the public of the successes and challenges faced by urban schools.<sup>i</sup> The New Orleans public school system is one of its sixty-six (66) member districts. (Appendix A)

In its report, *Good News About Urban Public Schools*<sup>ii</sup>, the Council of Great City Schools cited eight (8) urban school districts with upward academic trends. The following are excerpts from that report.

1. Anchorage School District had marked improvements in language arts and math, and met 98% of the targets defined by NCLB.
2. Atlanta Public Schools made Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) increase of 8% over the previous year.
3. Birmingham City School system made 100% of its adequate yearly progress goals for the second consecutive year.
4. Cincinnati Public Schools earned the Continuous Improvement rating on the Ohio Report card, reflecting steady overall gains in student academic achievement.
5. Jackson Public School district has ranked higher on state accountability ratings.
6. Philadelphia school district set a record fifth consecutive year of growth in math and reading scores.
7. Pittsburg Public Schools show a second year of test-score gains.
8. San Francisco Unified School District improved on the California Standards Test for the sixth consecutive year.

#### **B. Scoring “At or Above Proficiency”**

In its report, *Beating the Odds*,<sup>iii</sup> the Council of Great City Schools examines student achievement in mathematics and reading from 2006-2009. The eight (8) schools, cited above, demonstrated progress in the number of students who scored at or above proficiency. The report can be accessed at [www.CounciloftheGreatCitySchools.org](http://www.CounciloftheGreatCitySchools.org). The spring 2009 data from that report is excerpted below.

**Table 1: Percent of Students Scoring “At or Above Proficiency Level” in Cited Urban Districts**

	Assessment Test	Per Cent Scoring At or Above Proficiency Level – Spring 2009					
		Mathematics			Reading		
		Grade 4	Grade 8	High School	Grade 4	Grade 8	High School
<b>Anchorage</b>	Standards Based Assessment	75	66	71	79	82	85
<b>Atlanta</b>	Georgia Criterion-Referenced Competency Tests	71	77	87	86	92	86
<b>Birmingham</b>	Alabama Reading and Mathematics Test	65	63	n/a	72	62	n/a
<b>Cincinnati</b>	Ohio Proficiency Test	57	52	85	62	57	92

<b>Jackson</b>	Mississippi Curriculum Test	57	49	n/a	51	37	n/a
<b>Philadelphia</b>	Pennsylvania System of School Assessments	61	51	32	47	62	38
<b>Pittsburg</b>	Pennsylvania System of School Assessments	70	58	43	56	70	50
<b>San Francisco</b>	California Standardized Testing and Reporting	68	n/a	n/a	66	55	48

## **Part 2: Governance Structure of Successful Urban School Districts**

Of the eight (8) successful urban school districts, the governance structure ranges from elected boards to appointed boards. However, whether elected or appointed, the governance boards are all local boards. None of the successful urban school districts is governed by a state board.

*Appendix B*

**Table 2: Governance Structure of Successful Urban School Districts**

<b>District</b>	<b>Name of Governing Board</b>	<b>Number of Members</b>	<b>Elected, Appointed or Combination</b>	<b>Notes</b>
<b>Anchorage</b>	Anchorage School Board	7	Elected	All members elected at large.
<b>Atlanta</b>	Atlanta Board of Education	9	Elected	Six members elected by district, 3 members elected at large
<b>Birmingham</b>	Birmingham Board of Education	9	Elected	All members elected by district
<b>Cincinnati</b>	Cincinnati Board of Education	7	Elected	All members elected at large
<b>Jackson</b>	Jackson Board of Trustees	5	Appointed	All members appointed by the City Council
<b>Philadelphia</b>	School Reform Commission	5	Appointed	Governor appoints three members; mayor appoints two members
<b>Pittsburg</b>	Pittsburg Board of Education	9	Elected	All members elected by district
<b>San Francisco</b>	San Francisco Board of Education	7	Elected	Seven members elected by voters.

### **Part III: New Orleans District Performance Scores**

In 2004-05, the New Orleans school district had one district performance score because all schools were under the jurisdiction of the Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB). In 2004-05, there were 127 schools with a total of 64,920 students. The OPSB District Performance Score then was 56.9<sup>iv</sup>

In 2008-09, the New Orleans school district had two district performance scores: one score for the schools under the jurisdiction of the Orleans Parish School Board, and one score for the schools under the jurisdiction of the Recovery School District.

In 2008-09, the district performance score for the Orleans Parish School Board was 104.3. The district performance score for the Recovery School District was 51.4.<sup>v</sup> It is statistically incorrect to average these scores since there were 17 schools under the OPSB and 61 schools under the RSD.

### **Part IV: Implications for Governance of the New Orleans Public Schools**

All of the successful urban school districts, identified by the Council of Great City Schools, have local governance boards, with either elected or appointed members. New Orleans has a governance structure that is bifurcated, with the majority of schools governed by the state through the Recovery School District and with a few schools governed by the elected Orleans Parish School Board.

The Recovery School district retains jurisdiction of schools transferred to it for a period of not less than five years. (*LaR.S.17:10.5*) No later than nine months prior to the expiration of the five-year period, the Recovery School District is required to make a recommendation to the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education<sup>vi</sup>, as to whether the schools under its jurisdiction shall be:

- a) Continued in the RSD pursuant to its reported operational status,
- b) Continued in the RSD with a change in its operational status,
- c) Closed and the reasons provided, or
- d) Returned to the administration and management of the transferring system with proposed stipulations and conditions for the return.

The RSD's report must also include whether there has been improvement in student academic performance. Recent reports have shown that school and student performance have not

improved under the jurisdiction of the RSD. Since 2007, the RSD discontinued reporting student performance to the Council of Great City Schools.<sup>vii</sup>

**Since school and student performance have not improved under the RSD, and since successful urban school districts are governed locally by elected or appointed boards, it is imperative that the schools be returned to the Orleans Parish School Board, “with proposed stipulations and conditions for the return.”**

Both the RSD’s jurisdiction of the schools and the previous OPSB’s jurisdiction of the schools have been dismal. Local control is favored over state control, but local control must have stipulations that are mandatory.

The RSD did advance site-based governance through increasing the number of charter schools. Charter schools must be allowed to continue, flourish and expand. Another form of site-based governance, Community schools using the NCLB Title I Schoolwide Project model, must also be implemented. Both models place all funds directly at the site-level for administration. For charter schools, a nonprofit serves as the charter operator, which can contract with a for-profit for educational services. For Community Schools, the Schoolwide Project model allows schools with 40% of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, to be governed by the school council, comprised of teachers, parents and community members.

Further research of successful urban school districts would probably provide additional recommendations for stipulations if New Orleans schools are returned to the local governance structure. However, the most important stipulation must be for the Orleans Parish School Board to grant site-based status to schools, whether Charter Schools or Community Schools.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Council of Great City Schools: Member Districts

The following are the member districts of the Council of the Great City Schools.

1. [Albuquerque Public Schools](#)
2. [Anchorage School District](#)
3. [Atlanta Public Schools](#)
4. [Austin Independent School District](#)
5. [Baltimore City Public Schools](#)
6. [Birmingham City Schools](#)
7. [Boston Public Schools](#)
8. [Broward County Public Schools](#)
9. [Buffalo City School District](#)
10. [Caddo Parish School District](#)
11. [Charleston County School District](#)
12. [Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools](#)
13. [Chicago Public Schools](#)
14. [Christina School District](#)

15. Cincinnati Public Schools
16. Clark County School District
17. Cleveland Metropolitan School District
18. Columbus City Schools
19. Dallas Independent School District
20. Dayton Public Schools
21. Denver Public Schools
22. Des Moines Independent Community School District
23. Detroit Public Schools
24. District of Columbia Public Schools
25. Duval County Public Schools
26. East Baton Rouge
27. Fort Worth Independent School District
28. Fresno Unified School District
29. Guilford County Schools
30. Hillsborough County School District
31. Houston Independent School District
32. Indianapolis Public Schools
33. Jackson Public School District
34. Jefferson County Public Schools
35. Kansas City School District
36. Little Rock School District
37. Long Beach Unified School District
38. Los Angeles Unified School District
39. Memphis City Public Schools
40. Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools
41. Miami-Dade County Public Schools
42. Milwaukee Public Schools
43. Minneapolis Public Schools
44. New Orleans Public Schools
45. New York City Department of Education
46. Newark Public Schools
47. Norfolk Public Schools
48. Oakland Unified School District
49. Oklahoma City Public Schools
50. Omaha Public Schools
51. Orange County Public Schools
52. Palm Beach County Public Schools
53. The School District of Philadelphia
54. Pittsburgh Public Schools
55. Portland Public Schools
56. Providence Public Schools
57. Richmond Public Schools
58. Rochester City School District
59. Salt Lake City School District
60. San Diego Unified School District
61. San Francisco Unified School District
62. Seattle Public Schools
63. St. Louis Public Schools
64. St. Paul Public Schools
65. Toledo Public Schools
66. Wichita Public Schools



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## **Appendix B: Governance Structure of Successful Urban School Districts**

### **Anchorage, Alaska**

The Anchorage School Board consists of seven (7) members, elected at-large.

### **Atlanta, Georgia**

The Atlanta Board of Education consists of nine elected members, representing six geographical districts and three at-large districts.

### **Birmingham, Alabama**

The Birmingham Board of Education consists of nine elected members, representing nine voting districts.

#### Cincinnati, Ohio

The Cincinnati Board of Education is comprised of seven people elected at-large.

#### Jackson, Mississippi

The Jackson Public School District's Board of Trustees consists of five (5) members appointed by the City Council.

#### Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

The School District of Pennsylvania is governed by a five member School Reform Commission. The Governor appoints three members and the Mayor appoints two members.

#### Pittsburg, Pennsylvania

The Pittsburgh Board of Public Education is an elected body made up of nine district representatives.

#### San Francisco, California

The San Francisco Unified School District is under the control of a Board of Education composed of seven members who are elected by the voters of the Unified School District.

### **Endnotes**

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<sup>i</sup> Council of Great City Schools, 1301 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW Suite 702, Washington, DC, [www.CounciloftheGreatCitySchools.org](http://www.CounciloftheGreatCitySchools.org)

<sup>ii</sup> Council of Great City Schools: "Good News About Urban Schools", October 2007

<sup>iii</sup> Council of Great City Schools: "Beating the Odds-An Analysis of Student Performance on State Assessments and the NAEP," March 2010.

<sup>iv</sup> La. State Department of Education, District Accountability Results; see 2006-07 District Composite report which provides performance scores for the years 2001-2007.

<sup>v</sup> La. Department of Education, District Performance Scores, 2009 rankings.

<sup>vi</sup> La.R.S. 17:10.5

<sup>vii</sup> Council of Great City Schools: "Beating the Odds – Individual District Profiles", March 2010, New Orleans district, pp. 389-396.