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

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**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.¹ 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*, 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”


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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment Test</th>
<th>Per Cent Scoring At or Above Proficiency Level – Spring 2009</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mathematics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grade 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Anchorage</strong> Standards Based Assessment</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Atlanta</strong> Georgia Criterion-Referenced Competency Tests</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Birmingham</strong> Alabama Reading and Mathematics Test</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cincinnati</strong> Ohio Proficiency Test</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Name of Governing Board</th>
<th>Number of Members</th>
<th>Elected, Appointed or Combination</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anchorage</td>
<td>Anchorage School Board</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Elected</td>
<td>All members elected at large.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atlanta</td>
<td>Atlanta Board of Education</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Elected</td>
<td>Six members elected by district, 3 members elected at large</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birmingham</td>
<td>Birmingham Board of Education</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Elected</td>
<td>All members elected by district</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cincinnati</td>
<td>Cincinnati Board of Education</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Elected</td>
<td>All members elected at large</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jackson</td>
<td>Jackson Board of Trustees</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Appointed</td>
<td>All members appointed by the City Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philadelphia</td>
<td>School Reform Commission</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Appointed</td>
<td>Governor appoints three members; mayor appoints two members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pittsburg</td>
<td>Pittsburg Board of Education</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Elected</td>
<td>All members elected by district</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Francisco</td>
<td>San Francisco Board of Education</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Elected</td>
<td>Seven members elected by voters.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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\(^{iv}\)

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.\(^{v}\) 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\(^{vi}\), 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.

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
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.

**Pittsburgh, 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**


ii Council of Great City Schools: “Good News About Urban Schools”, October 2007


vi La.R.S. 17:10.5