

IDENTIFYING SCHOOL PRACTICES THAT IMPACT
ACADEMIC OUTCOMES IN ORLEANS PARISH CHARTER
SCHOOLS

NEW ORLEANS LOUISIANA PUBLIC SCHOOLS
LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



PERFORMANCE AUDIT SERVICES
ISSUED MARCH 29, 2021

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March 29, 2021

The Honorable Patrick Page Cortez,
President of the Senate
The Honorable Clay Schexnayder,
Speaker of the House of Representatives

Dear Senator Cortez and Representative Schexnayder:

This report provides the results of our review of New Orleans Louisiana Public Schools (NOLA-PS) and the Louisiana Department of Education (LDE). The purpose of this review was to determine whether NOLA-PS and LDE analyze the academic outcomes of charter schools in New Orleans to determine which school practices have positive results and which do not.

The law authorizing the creation of charter schools in Louisiana states that the legislature's intention was to allow school boards to establish innovative independent public schools, determine which innovative practices yielded positive results for student achievement, and replicate those practices in other schools.

We found that while both NOLA-PS and LDE use standardized test scores as required by state law to analyze charter schools' academic outcomes, they do not consider whether specific practices are responsible for positive outcomes. However, state law does not require a formalized process to identify practices that result in improvements or declines at charter schools.

Based on our review of the charter school application, contract, and monitoring process, we developed two matters for consideration for NOLA-PS and LDE should they choose to begin identifying specific practices that result in improvements or declines in charter school performance. Specifically, NOLA-PS and LDE may want to consider analyzing data from the past 15 years to help determine which education practices resulted in positive outcomes and which ones resulted in negative outcomes. NOLA-PS and LDE may also want to consider using the information from the retroactive review to help identify practices that result in positive outcomes in charter schools with the goal of replicating these practices.

We would like to express our appreciation to NOLA-PS and LDE for their assistance during this audit.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Thomas H. Cole".

Thomas H. Cole, CPA, CGMA
Temporary Legislative Auditor

THC/aa
CHARTERSCHOOLS

Louisiana Legislative Auditor



Identifying School Practices that Impact Academic Performance in Orleans Parish Charter Schools New Orleans Louisiana Public Schools Louisiana Department of Education

March 2021

Audit Control # 40210007

Introduction

We received a legislative request to determine whether the New Orleans Louisiana Public Schools (NOLA-PS) and the Louisiana Department of Education (LDE) analyze the academic outcomes of charter schools in Orleans Parish to identify which school practices are associated with positive and negative results. Louisiana’s Charter School Demonstration Act (La. R.S. 17:3972) authorizes the creation of charter schools, which are public schools that are run by a nonprofit corporation through a contract called a charter. This law was intended to allow for city and parish school boards to experiment by creating “innovative kinds of independent public schools for students,” providing “a framework for such experimentation,” and creating “a mechanism by which experiment results can be analyzed, the positive results repeated or replicated...and the negative results identified and eliminated.”

Nearly all schools in Orleans Parish are charter schools.¹ Charter schools in Orleans Parish are grouped into four types: Type 1, Type 2, Type 3, and Type 3B, as described in Exhibit 1. During academic year 2019-20, NOLA-PS had oversight of 75 of the parish’s 81 charter schools, while the LDE² had oversight of six.

¹ During the 2020-2021 academic year, NOLA-PS directly ran one school, while two other schools were run by non-charter contracted organizations. Another school in the parish, overseen by the Louisiana Legislature, is also not a charter school.

² Charter schools in Louisiana are chartered by charter authorizers, either local school boards - in Orleans Parish, this is the Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB) - or the state Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE). New Orleans Louisiana Public Schools (NOLA-PS) is responsible for the oversight of the charter schools OPSB authorizes, while the Louisiana Department of Education (LDE) is responsible for the oversight of BESE-authorized charter schools.

Exhibit 1 Oversight Authority for Charter Schools in Orleans Parish Academic Year 2019-20			
Type	Type Description	Oversight Agency	Schools in Orleans Parish
1	New	NOLA-PS	21
2	New or Converted from Existing School	LDE	6
3	Converted from Existing School	NOLA-PS	13
3B	Former Type 5 School in Orleans Parish*	NOLA-PS	41
4	New or Converted from Existing School	BESE	0
5	Converted from Existing School in the Recovery School District	LDE	0
Total			81**
*Initially overseen by the state's Recovery School District, oversight for Orleans Parish Type 3B schools was transferred to NOLA-PS in 2018.			
**These 81 schools do not include the four schools that are not operating as a charter school in Orleans Parish.			
Source: Prepared by legislative auditor's staff using R.S. 17:3973 and documentation from NOLA-PS and LDE.			

The process for starting a charter school begins when an individual or organization submits a letter of intent to the prospective authorizer. The potential charter operator then completes an application that includes specific information about the curriculum model, such as why the applicant chose the curriculum model, data and research to support the model, and how the curriculum will be assessed by the school as well as other details about the proposed charter school. A third-party external reviewer evaluates this application and the authorizer decides whether to grant the charter. If granted, the charter school is given an initial contract for four years, with a possible one-year extension based on performance. Subsequent charter terms can be renewed for between three and 10 years. During the charter renewal process, NOLA-PS or LDE assesses the school's organizational and financial performance using the criteria and procedures NOLA-PS and LDE provided to each school. NOLA-PS and LDE also assess the school's academic performance, using School Performance Scores (SPS) and corresponding letter grades which are based primarily on standardized test scores³. Schools that receive an "F" are typically ineligible for renewal.⁴ In Orleans Parish, 14.5% (12 of 83 schools) received an F for academic year 2018-19.⁵ Exhibit 2 shows a breakdown of Orleans Parish schools by their letter grade during academic year 2018-2019. Appendix C contains a list of all charter schools in Orleans Parish during the 2019-2020 academic year and their SPS.

³ The SPS for schools that include grades 8 -12 is also based on factors other than standardized tests, including how many credits students earn in their freshman year of high school, improvement over the academic year, how many students graduate on time, and the strength of diploma index.

⁴ Schools that score an "F" may be eligible for renewal under specific circumstances, including if they are evaluated using renewal standards for alternative schools or at the recommendation of the Superintendent of Education.

⁵ The most recent available test scores are for 2019 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Exhibit 2		
Charter Schools in Orleans Parish by 2018-2019 SPS Letter Grade		
SPS Letter Grade	Number of Orleans Parish Charter Schools	Percent of Orleans Parish Charter Schools
A	7	8%
B	11	13%
C	25	30%
D	22	27%
F	12	15%
T ^a	1	1%
No Score ^b	5	6%
Total	83^c	100%

^aSchools are given a score of T in the first two years after a charter operator has taken over a failing school.

^bSchools without SPS scores may be too new or have students that are too young to take the exams upon which SPS scores are based.

^cThe total number of charter schools does not match the total from Exhibit 1, because SPS scores are not available for the 2019-2020 academic year.

Source: Prepared by legislative auditor's staff using information in the SPS score cards.

Appendix A contains NOLA-PS and LDE, responses. Appendix B contains our scope and methodology. Appendix C contains a table summarizing information about Orleans Parish charter schools, including grades served, number of students, and their SPS letter grades in academic year 2017-18 and in academic year 2018-19.

Conclusion

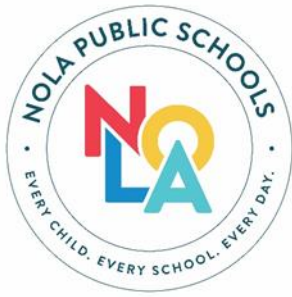
We found that the New Orleans Louisiana Public Schools (NOLA-PS) and the Louisiana Department of Education (LDE) use standardized test scores, as required by state law, to analyze the academic outcomes of charter schools in Orleans Parish. While using standardized test scores may be appropriate for the purpose of determining which schools should be renewed, this approach does not consider whether specific practices implemented at a school are responsible for the positive academic outcomes. Although not required by state law, a formalized process to identify the specific practices that result in improvements or declines in charter school performance would allow authorizers to replicate those practices that are working in their schools and eliminate those that are not.





Matters for Future Consideration

Based on our review of the charter school application, contract, and monitoring process, we developed the following matters for consideration that NOLA-PS and LDE may want to consider should they choose to begin identifying specific practices that result in improvements or declines in charter school performance.

- **Analyzing data from the last 15 years may help NOLA-PS and LDE know which past strategic education practices resulted in positive and negative outcomes for student performance.** Since Hurricane Katrina in 2005, the charter school model has been a prominent part of the Orleans Parish public school system. NOLA-PS and LDE could use data from this 15-year period to gain insight about which practices of charter schools have had positive effects on student performance. NOLA-PS and LDE could then recommend replicating these practices in other schools across Orleans Parish and the state. While there may be challenges associated with a retroactive assessment, it may be able to provide valuable information about what works in education and which school practices are associated with positive educational outcomes.
- **Use information obtained from the retroactive review to help identify practices that result in positive outcomes in charter schools with the goal of replicating practices that are successful going forward.** Some charter school applications we reviewed included specific practices they intended to implement, such as type of curriculum, school calendar, and student support services. For example, one school indicated that it intended to use shorter school days, lower teacher to student ratios, and greater access to technology-based classes in its school. Collecting this type of information would help authorizers identify practices to use when evaluating a school's experimental results. Identifying successful practices may involve collecting certain data from schools beyond the standardized test scores that are currently required. Of the 29 contracts we reviewed, only four of their contracts included requirements that schools report any data other than standardized test scores. Without collecting additional data, authorizers may not be able to determine which school practices had positive or negative effects on charter school performance.

APPENDIX A: MANAGEMENT'S RESPONSES



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March 12, 2021

Mr. Thomas H. Cole, Interim Legislative Auditor
Louisiana Legislative Auditor
P.O. Box 94397
1600 North Third Street
Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70804

Dear Mr. Cole:

This communication responds to the Louisiana Legislative Auditor's report entitled, "Identifying School Practices That Impact Academic Outcomes in Orleans Parish Charter Schools," on behalf of NOLA Public Schools.

NOLA Public Schools agrees with the conclusion reached by the Louisiana Legislative Auditor and agrees that there are areas that warrant reflection in the district's authorizing and accountability practices. The district appreciates the opportunity to respond to the report.

NOLA Public Schools is in agreement with the information provided in the Louisiana Department of Education's written response to the audit report, specifically as it relates to the district's role as an authorizer focused on respecting the autonomy of charter schools in its portfolio. The district does not directly replicate best practices in its charter schools, but rather ensures a diverse portfolio of schools providing high-quality options for families. As it relates to replication of high-quality schools, the district has a policy in place for automatic replication of schools that meet rigorous standards (OPSB Policy HA).

The conclusion of the audit report suggests the following:

[A]lthough not required by state law, a formalized process to identify the specific practices that result in improvements or declines in charter school performance would allow authorizers to replicate those practices that are working in their schools and eliminate those that are not.

NOLA Public Schools regularly reviews a robust set of qualitative and quantitative data to measure the academic, organizational, and financial performance of the charter schools it authorizes. Data is collected throughout the year and informs additional monitoring or support that may be needed to improve performance. In alignment with best practices, the district does not, however, analyze performance relative to any one specific innovative approach at a specific charter school. The charter schools in the portfolio are often continually improving upon their approaches and practices and are afforded the flexibility to do so by their authorizer.

The report suggests the following for future consideration:

[I]dentifying successful practices may involve collecting certain data from schools beyond the standardized test scores that are currently required. Of the 29 contracts we reviewed, only 4 of their contracts included requirements that schools report any data other than standardized test scores. Without collecting additional data, authorizers may not be able to determine which school practices had positive or negative effects on charter school performance.

As stated above, the district regularly collects data from the charter schools directly, on a regular basis through the reporting calendar submissions, site visits or upon request from the district. The charter school contracts require charter operators to:

[P]roduce all data, records, documentation and information requested by OPSB within three (3) business days of a request or other time period agreed to by the Parties, in accordance with Section 5.3.1.1 of this Agreement. Such request [sic] shall provide reasonable specificity regarding the data, records, documentation or information being sought. The production of documents requested pursuant to this provision shall be distinguished from requests for documents made during site visits as set forth in Section 5.12 herein. [...] During such site visits, the Charter Operator shall allow the visiting officials full and immediate access to its on-site financial and educational records, reports, files, and documents of any kind on site, whether in electronic form or hard copy, except to the extent that such records are afforded privilege under applicable law. (Orleans Parish School Board Charter School Agreement (2017), Paragraph 5.4.1).

Site visits occur for all schools on an annual basis. Additionally, NOLA-PS receives school-level data from the LDE used for analysis and accountability purposes on a regular basis.

Furthermore, NOLA Public Schools would like to clarify the review process for the charter applications. It is mentioned in the report that “a third-party external reviewer evaluates this application and the authorizer decides whether to grant the charter.” NOLA-PS has a robust approach to reviewing charter applications that involves three review teams:

- 1) NOLA Public Schools Internal Review Team: content experts in each area of the application: facilities, finance, special education, etc.
- 2) Community Review Team: comprised of community members from the Superintendent’s advisory groups (parents, students, teachers, and faith-based community members)
- 3) Independent Review Team: third-party contractor

Input from the Internal Review Team and the Community Review Team are compiled with any additional relevant information in a report, along with the Independent Review Team’s recommendation and provided to the Superintendent to make recommendations to the board. Applications are also reviewed for alignment with the board-approved District Authorizing Priorities. These priorities outline what the district seeks in operators to expand high-quality options for families. Setting clear District Authorizing Priorities informs recruitment strategies for new operators and expansion of existing operators; provides

transparency in the charter application process of the district’s objectives; and informs the Superintendent’s decision to approve new schools. The priorities are guided by the student population, programmatic needs, and location data to ensure the portfolio of schools increases opportunities for every student to receive a high-quality education that fosters his or her individual capabilities. These District Authorizing Priorities are based on an assessment of board goals, portfolio needs, feedback from the community, and internal data. The most recent priorities were approved by the Orleans Parish School Board in 2020. While new operators do not have to explicitly meet all identified priorities, authorizing schools that can respond to the needs below is the aim of the district’s annual charter request for applications process. The district seeks a well-rounded portfolio of options to meet the needs of New Orleans families.

Additionally, the report suggests “analyzing data from the last fifteen years may help NOLA-PS and LDE know which past strategic education practices resulted in positive and negative outcomes for student performance,” NOLA-PS agrees with the importance of analyzing historic data to better understand what practices result in positive outcomes. A part of this work was undertaken in 2020 when significant qualitative and quantitative research was conducted on three of the highest performing and oldest charter schools in the city. This research helped inform the application standards and review process for new charter schools to help ensure that the district approves the highest quality operators who are aligned with what has been successful in the parish, beginning with the Spring 2020 Charter RFA cycle.

In Service,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Henderson Lewis, Jr." with a stylized flourish at the end.

Dr. Henderson Lewis, Jr
Superintendent-NOLA Public Schools



LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

March 12, 2021

Mr. Thomas H. Cole, Interim Legislative Auditor
Louisiana Legislative Auditor
P.O. Box 94397
1600 North Third Street
Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70804

Dear Mr. Thomas Cole, Interim Legislative Auditor:

In response to the March 2021 Louisiana Legislative Audit (LLA) report titled, "Identifying School Practices That Impact Academic Outcomes in Orleans Parish Charter Schools," the Louisiana Department of Education issues the succeeding response.

The LLA concludes that NOLA Public Schools (NOLA-PS) and Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE) "use standardized test scores, as required by state law, to analyze the academic outcomes of charter schools in Orleans Parish. While using standardized test scores may be appropriate for the purpose of determining which schools should be renewed, this approach does not consider whether specific practices implemented at a school are responsible for the positive outcomes. Although not required by state law, a formalized process to identify the specific practices that result in improvements or declines in charter school performance would allow authorizers to replicate those practices that are working in their schools and eliminate those that are not."

While we acknowledge that there are areas of improvement to be considered in our authorization practices, there are generalizations and general misunderstandings that are evident by the nature of the initial request for such audit, and within the report itself. Thus, it is the intent of this response to clarify misunderstandings, provide an overview of the recent updates to charter school authorization aligned to national standards and principles, and acknowledge areas of improvement.

Clarification of Misunderstandings

A charter school is defined as "an independent public school that provides a program of elementary and/or secondary education established pursuant to and in accordance with the provisions of the Louisiana charter school law to provide a learning environment that will improve pupil achievement" (BESE Bulletin 126, §103). Charter schools have a high degree of autonomy to make operational and programmatic decisions. However, in exchange for this autonomy, charter schools are held accountable for improving academic outcomes. Louisiana charter school law establishes the high-level parameters for how local authorizers such as NOLA-PS are required to hold charter schools accountable for achieving these results. Charter schools operate through an executed contract between their non-profit charter board and the authorizer and are held accountable for academic effectiveness through student outcomes, organizational performance, and fiscal responsibility. Charter contracts may be for a term of

3-10 years and failure to meet the expectations set forth in the contract may result in the charter school being non-renewed, closed, or revoked.

The conclusion that the LLA has made — that an authorizer has the ability to replicate best practices present in charter schools — is not consistent with the autonomy provided to charter schools and the role of the charter school authorizer in contrast with the non-profit charter board (LA R.S. R.S. 17:3996). National Association of Charter School Authorizers (2018) asserts that it is the role of the authorizer to hold the school accountable for outcomes.

In 1991, Minnesota enacted the first charter school law to promote innovative educational programs and give teachers and parents the responsibility for managing and operating public schools. In 1992, City Academy in St. Paul, Minnesota became the nation’s first charter school and continues to operate today. Its founders, all veteran public school teachers, created the school in response to them trying, but failing, to create new programs for struggling students in their own schools.

In 1995, Louisiana enacted Louisiana’s Charter School Demonstration Act (LA R.S. 17:3972), which has since been revised, to authorize the creation of “innovative kinds of independent public schools for pupils.” As a result, Louisiana serves approximately 87,506 students (9%) within charter schools, providing families with school choice options.

The LLA’s audit objective provided during the entrance meeting with LDOE asked, “Did RSD/LDOE and the Orleans Parish School Board approve charter schools with innovative approaches, measure the degree to which the innovative approaches were implemented, analyze the results of that approach, and replicate or terminate charter schools with approaches that had positive/negative results, as required by state law?” It is important to note, that since the induction of charter schools in the United States, the word “innovative” has been associated with the creation of these schools and is most associated with laws and policies related to charter schools, including in the Louisiana Charter School Demonstration Act. In review of the Louisiana Charter School Demonstration Act and Minnesota Charter Law, a definition of “innovative” does not appear in the “definitions” sections of the law. United States Department of Education (ED) (2004) states that innovation is driven by a commitment to excellence and continuous improvement. Furthermore, in the world of education, innovation comes in many forms, which may include the organization and management of education systems, school accountability systems, instructional techniques, teacher recruitment strategies, funding formulas, and educator compensation to name a few. As a result, an assumption can be deduced that “innovative” does not have a definition written into law, as the sole purpose of innovation is to begin something new and is widely based on the context in which the innovation is being introduced. In other words, what may be an innovative practice in one parish may be a standard practice in another.

Secondly, in the LLA’s attempt to evaluate whether NOLA-PS and LDOE “analyze the academic outcomes of charter schools in Orleans Parish to identify which school practices are associated with positive and negative results.” The LLA links this request to only a portion of the statutory language of La. R.S. 17:3972 in stating: “This law was intended to allow for city and parish school boards to experiment by creating ‘innovative kinds of independent public schools for students,’ ‘providing a framework for such experimentation,’ and creating ‘a mechanism by which experiment results can be analyzed, the positive results repeated or replicated . . . and the negative results identified and eliminated.’”

However, this line of inquiry excludes the Legislature’s fuller intent in authorizing charter schools, which is clearly articulated in the entirety of La. R.S. 17:3972’s statements of intention and purpose.

La. R.S. 17:3972 states the “intent” of charter law as follows:

A. It is the intention of the legislature in enacting this Chapter to authorize experimentation by city and parish school boards by authorizing the creation of innovative kinds of independent public schools for students. Further, it is the intention of the legislature to provide a framework for such experimentation by the creation of such schools, a means for all persons with valid ideas and motivation to participate in the experiment, and a mechanism by which experiment results can be analyzed, the positive results repeated or replicated, if appropriate, and the negative results identified and eliminated. Finally, it is the intention of the legislature that the best interests of students who are economically disadvantaged shall be the overriding consideration in implementing the provisions of this Chapter.

The statute goes on to state the “purpose” of charter law:

B.(1) The purposes of this Chapter shall be to provide opportunities for educators and others interested in educating pupils to form, operate, or be employed within a charter school with each such school designed to accomplish one or more of the following objectives:

- (a) Improve pupil learning and, in general, the public school system.
- (b) Increase learning opportunities and access to quality education for pupils.
- (c) Encourage the use of different and innovative teaching methods and a variety of governance, management, and administrative structures.
- (d) Require appropriate assessment and measurement of academic learning results.
- (e) Account better and more thoroughly for educational results.
- (f) Create new professional opportunities for teachers and other school employees, including the opportunity to be responsible for the learning program at the school site.

Recent Updates to Charter School Authorization Aligned to National Standards and Principles

In Louisiana, there are two chartering authorities (BESE Bulletin 126 §103): a local school board and the State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE). Charter school authorizers are entities that determine which applicants may start a new charter school, set academic and operational expectations, and oversee school performance. They also decide whether a charter school should remain open or close at the end of its contract (National Association of Charter School Authorizers, 2020). A local school board authorizes the operation of type 1, type 3, and type 3b charter schools. BESE serves as the authorizer of type 2, type 4, and type 5 charter schools. As a component of BESE authorizing responsibilities (BESE Bulletin 126 §305), they direct LDOE to provide oversight of the operation of charter schools authorized by BESE. The 2019-2020 Louisiana Charter School portfolio can be reviewed in Table 1.

Table 1.

Charter Type	Creation	Authorizer	Governance	Total # of Schools in 2019-2020	Students served in 2019-2020
Type 1	Charter school is a new school operated as a result of and pursuant to a charter between the nonprofit corporation created to operate the school and a local school board.	Local school board	Non-profit Board of Directors	45	19,566
Type 2	Charter school is a new school or a preexisting public school converted and operated as the result of and pursuant to a charter between the nonprofit corporation created to operate and BESE.	BESE	Non-profit Board of Directors	40	25,741
Type 3	Charter school is a preexisting public school converted and operated as the result of and pursuant to a charter between a nonprofit corporation and the local school board.	Local school board	Non-profit Board of Directors	15	12,658
Type 3B	Charter school is a former Type 5 charter school transferred from the Recovery School District to the administration and management of the transferring local school system.	Local school board	Non-profit Board of Directors	41	27,307
Type 4	Charter school is a preexisting public school converted and operated or a new school operated as the result of and pursuant to a charter between a local school board and BESE.	BESE	Local School Board	1	424
Type 5	Charter school is a preexisting public school transferred to the Recovery School District (RSD) as a school determined to be failing pursuant to state statute and operated as the result of and pursuant to a charter between a nonprofit corporation and BESE.	BESE	Non-profit Board of Directors	5	1,810

As a charter school authorizer, BESE (BESE Bulletin 126 §303) has the responsibility to implement a comprehensive application process with fair procedures and rigorous criteria. The developed application is used by each local authorizer and may be added to but shall not take away any components. Upon the

appointment and installment of a new Louisiana State Superintendent and administration, various divisions within the LDOE underwent administrative changes and restructuring. As a result, the work stream of charter schools was placed in the Office of Equity, Inclusion, and Opportunities. The Louisiana Department of Education Educational Priorities: *Believe to Achieve*, serves as the Department's roadmap to improving outcomes for all children. *Believe to Achieve* includes the Department's belief statements, which articulates "*Louisiana believes choice expands opportunities.*"

In January 2021, BESE and public meeting attendees were presented with a comprehensive overview of proposed changes to the charter application process and application for the 2021-2022 Charter Application Cycle. It is important to note that the changes proposed were a collaborative effort, as the Office intentionally engaged local authorizers through the creation of a workgroup, utilized quantitative and qualitative survey data administered to the charter applicants of the 2019-2020 charter application cycle, intentionally engaged local organizations such as Louisiana Association of Public Charter Schools (LAPCS), New Schools for Baton Rouge (NSBR), and New Schools for New Orleans (NSNO) for feedback and suggestions, and intentionally engaged the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) for review and feedback as well as alignment with the National Principles and Standards for Quality Charter School Authorization. Such practices are in alignment with the Louisiana Charter School Demonstration Act (§3981) as it states that BESE shall "engage in an application review process that complies with the latest Principles and Standards for Quality Charter School Authorizing, as promulgated by the National Association of Charter School Authorizers."

As a result, the following process components were approved by BESE for the 2021-2020 Charter Application Cycle:

1. LDOE provides orientation sessions to interested charter applicants

Purpose: To provide interested applicants the opportunity to learn about the application process, components, evaluation, and accountability prior to submission of the application.

Applicant Feedback: At the district level, there was a need for education on the RFA process and the legal interactions with charter applicants.

NACSA Standard: Application Process & Decision Making

2. Letter of Intent submitted to LDOE

Purpose: Allows the applicant to intentionally engage with the authorizer prior to the application submission and the authorizer to adequately plan for the number of submissions with the third-party evaluator.

3. Eligibility Determination Forms submitted to LDOE

Purpose: Prior to the full submission of the application, this allows the authorizer to determine if the applicant has met the eligibility requirements outlined in BESE Bulletin 126, Chapter 5.

4. LDOE reviews process, timeline, and tools with the applicant

Purpose: To provide applicants with intentional touch points throughout the process to answer questions, clearly articulate deadlines, and ensure an understanding of the process.

Applicant Feedback: 40% disagreed that deadlines were communicated effectively. 40% disagreed that LDOE staff were transparent and supportive throughout the process.

NACSA Advanced Standard: Fair, Transparent, Quality Focused Procedures

5. Application evaluation by Internal Charter School Review Committee and Stakeholder Charter School Review Committee

Purpose: An internal practice used as a method of data triangulation, to support the consistency of the evaluation of the third-party evaluator.

6. LDOE and third-party evaluator meeting with Individual School Systems of appealing applicants

Purpose: To review the third-party evaluation of the charter application completed at the local level and allow the local system to provide rationale for the decision, and submit any supporting materials. This component is not evaluated, but for informational purposes only.

7. Charter School Presentations during public meeting

Purpose: Prior to approval, and before evaluation, holding a public meeting for the purpose of allowing the applicant the opportunity to present the proposal to BESE and the public.

In addition to the process components, a complete revision of the charter application was undertaken, and subsequently presented and approved by BESE for the 2021-2022 Charter Application Cycle, in which the changes are summarized as follows:

1. 2021 Common Charter Application Structural Revisions:

- a. Introductory Pages with Information about Louisiana Education
- b. An Overview of the Current Charter School Portfolio
- c. An Outline of Applicant Eligibility Requirements
- d. An Explanation of Each Application Process Component
- e. Establishment of Clear Application Section Headings

NACSA Advanced Standard: Fair, Transparent, Quality Focused Procedures

2. 2021 Common Charter Application Content Revisions:

- a. Requiring applicants to intentionally identify and provide a comprehensive plan to serve their intended student population
- b. Requiring applicants to demonstrate capacity to serve a diverse student population, which includes, but not limited to students with exceptionalities, English Learners, and students with diverse racial and socioeconomic backgrounds
 - i. Academic Plan
 - ii. School Calendar and Student Schedule
 - iii. Diverse Learners
 - iv. School Culture
 - v. Behavior Management
 - vi. Professional Development
- c. Requiring applicants to provide a detailed hybrid learning plan
- d. Requiring applicants to describe a plan to support social and emotional health of students
- e. Requiring applicants to describe a plan to recruit and retain a diversified staff.
- f. Revision to the Financial Template with MFP Projections

NACSA Standard: Application Process & Decision Making

3. 2021 Common Charter Application Content Revisions:

- a. Upon the conclusion of each application section, the applicant is required to list and provide a detailed description of the charter school's measurable academic goals, organizational goals, and financial goals.

NACSA Principle: Uphold School Autonomy

4. 2021 Common Charter Application Content Revisions:

- a. The development of sub-section "School Establishment" requires applicants to provide:

- i. in-depth analysis of the community in which they seek to serve
- ii. rationale for the selection of the community
- iii. analysis of the various educational programs and/or instructional approaches currently offered to the intended student population compared to what the proposed school will offer
- iv. reflection of stakeholders not engaged and recognition of potential barriers to them being included
- v. the extent to which, the application incorporates community input regarding the educational and programmatic needs of students

NACSA Focus Area: Community-Centered Authorizing

Areas of Improvement

The LDOE is committed to the continuous review of its charter authorizing practices to ensure alignment with NACSA's Principles and Standards for Quality Charter School Authorizing and encompass best practices that result in the community-centered authorizing practices, which center the needs and aspirations of communities. As a result of the continuous review, we have identified areas in authorization that we can improve upon and plan to do so in the following ways:

Charter Application Standards for Evaluation: The charter application evaluation rubric currently includes two sets of standards; holistic standards that evaluators will apply across all evidence presented, and standards that apply to specific pieces of evidence presented in the application. It is our intent to replicate a best practice that was led by NOLA Public Schools and develop application standards that are not only aligned with national best practice, but embeds Louisiana charter specific evidence for success as criteria. Specifically, using a regression analysis to identify charter schools that perform above the status quo to further conduct both qualitative and quantitative data review on their inputs that have led to their student outputs. The focus areas will be academic, organizational, and financial. Through the use of action research, the collected data will be triangulated and used to identify themes, which will ultimately lead to the development of individual standards. The standards will be included in the charter application evaluation rubric. It is the intent of this process to determine the practices that lead to positive student outcomes and evaluate applicant responses based on the evidence of innovations in Louisiana charter schools that are leading to positive student outcomes.

Charter School Contracts: NACSA Standard on Performance Contracting states that a "quality authorizer executes contracts with charter schools that articulate the rights and responsibilities of each party regarding school autonomy, funding, administration and oversight, outcomes, measures for evaluating success or failure, performance consequences, and other material terms." In reviewing the language of the current charter contracts for BESE authorized charter schools, there is an opportunity to better align the contracts with NACSA Standards. Prior to any revisions to the charter contract, the LDOE will intentionally engage various stakeholders to develop a working group to review, research, and propose revisions to the contract. While such revisions will be a longer process, in the interim, the LDOE has strategically updated the 2021-2022 charter application to ensure that successful applicants are fully prepared to meet expectations and execute charter contracts aligned to NACSA Authorizing Standards. The new 2021-2022 charter application has intentionally embedded questions requiring applicants to

identify academic, organizational and financial performance based goals as a way to begin associating both the authorizer and approved applicants to measuring school-specific performance metrics in addition to the Louisiana School Performance Score (SPS). This approach pushes the applicant to create specific goals that are aligned to their school-specific model and practice. Such goals have the opportunity to be used by the non-profit charter board to measure and evaluate the effectiveness of the model. The goals can also be used by the authorizer during annual site visits or other annual oversight activities as a discussion point to determine the trajectory toward meeting the authorizer standards outlined in the Charter School Performance Compact (CSPC). An authorizer shall focus on holding schools accountable for outcomes rather than process (National Association of Charter School Authorizers, 2018). An authorizer can strategically use information gained by examining and understanding school-specific “inputs” at high-performing schools as a way to share best practices among schools in the authorizer’s portfolio and with traditional public schools. Lessons learned in this process may also inform the development of charter application standards inclusive of effective practices throughout the portfolio.

In conclusion, the Louisiana Department of Education is committed to being reflective in our practices and determining improvement areas. While LDOE has begun to make incremental changes to our charter authorization process under the new administration, we recognize we can continue to improve our authorization practices which will directly impact the charter portfolio. We also appreciate the opportunity, through this management response, to highlight that school choice is a foundational belief of our agency and comes in many forms, inclusive of charter schools.

Sincerely,



Dr. Cade Brumley
State Superintendent
Louisiana Department of Education

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APPENDIX B: SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

This report provides the results of our performance audit of the New Orleans Public Schools (NOLA-PS) and the Louisiana Department of Education (LDE). We conducted this performance audit under the provisions of Title 24 of the Louisiana Revised Statutes of 1950, as amended. This audit covered the 2014-15 to 2019-2020 academic years. Our audit objective was:

To determine whether the NOLA Public Schools (NOLA-PS) and the Louisiana Department of Education (LDE) analyze the academic outcomes of charter schools in Orleans Parish to determine which school practices are associated with positive and negative results.

The methodology used in preparing this report was developed uniquely to address the stated objective; therefore, this report is more limited in scope than an audit performed in accordance with *Government Auditing Standards* issued by the Comptroller General of the United States. To answer our objective, we reviewed internal controls relevant to the audit objective and performed the following audit steps:

- Researched and reviewed relevant state statutes and regulations related to charter schools.
- Obtained legal opinion on interpretation of the Charter School Authorization Act.
- Interviewed representatives from the NOLA-PS about application, monitoring procedures, and criteria for charter schools.
- Downloaded tables of SPS letter grades for the 2014 through 2019 academic years from the Louisiana Department of Education website.
- Downloaded tables of Minimum Foundation Program (MFP) and enrollment statistics for the 2014-15 to 2019-20 academic years from the Louisiana Department of Education website.
- Downloaded annual governance charts for Orleans Parish charter schools for the 2014-15, 2016-17, 2017-18, 2018-19, and 2019-20 academic years produced by the Cowen Institute at Tulane University.
- Compiled a list of all charter schools that operated in Orleans Parish during the 2014-15 to 2019-20 academic years and took a stratified random sample of 32 of the 101 (31.6%) charter schools that operated in Orleans Parish at some point

during this time period. We stratified based on academic year 2019 SPS letter grades for currently operating schools to ensure that schools from all letter grades were sampled. We also sampled from schools that had closed during our scope.

- Determined the number of each type of charter school operating in Orleans Parish during the 2019-2020 academic year, along with the authorizer for each charter type.
- Determined the number of all schools of each SPS letter grade operating in Orleans Parish during the 2018-2019 academic year.
- Requested charter contracts and application materials from NOLA-PS and LDE for a sample of 32 schools that operated during the 2014-15 to 2019-20 academic years and received 29 contracts and 23 applications. We reviewed the contracts that were provided to us by NOLA-PS and LDE for these schools. Our sample included a variety of schools with different letter grades, closed and open schools.
- Requested the application rubrics used by the authorizers along with their annual review template.
- Obtained the replication approvals for NOLA-PS and LDE from the OPSB and BESE board minutes.
- Created and completed a data collection instrument that reported information found in charter school application materials and contracts.
- Researched quantitative research methods and experimental procedures, especially in the social sciences.
- Reviewed report with NOLA-PS and LDE and allowed both agencies to provide feedback.

**APPENDIX C: LIST OF ORLEANS PARISH CHARTER SCHOOLS
AND SCHOOL PERFORMANCE SCORES IN
ACADEMIC YEARS 2017-18 AND 2018-19**

	School	Type	Authorizer	2018-2019 Grades Served	2018-2019 Number of Students	2017-18 SPS Score	2018-19 SPS Score
1.	Abramson Sci Academy	Type 3B	Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB)	9-12	605	B	B
2.	Akili Academy of New Orleans	Type 3B	OPSB	Pre-K-8	675	C	D
3.	Alice M. Harte Elementary Charter School	Type 3	OPSB	Pre-K-8	798	B	B
4.	Arise Academy	Type 3B	OPSB	K-8	484	D	F
5.	Arthur Ashe Charter School	Type 3B	OPSB	K-8	824	C	C
6.	Audubon Charter School	Type 3	OPSB	Pre-K-8	884	B	B
7.	Audubon Charter School – Gentilly**	Type 1	OPSB	Pre-K-3	188	-	-
8.	Benjamin Franklin Elem. Math and Science	Type 3	OPSB	K-8	759	C	C
9.	Benjamin Franklin High School	Type 3	OPSB	9-12	997	A	A
10.	Bricolage Academy	Type 1	OPSB	Pre-K-6	697	C	B
11.	Dr. Martin Luther King Charter School for Sci/Tech	Type 3B	OPSB	Pre-K-12	916	C	D
12.	Dwight D. Eisenhower Charter School (Operated by InspireNOLA)	Type 1	OPSB	Pre-K-8	680	-	C
13.	Edna Karr High School	Type 3	OPSB	9-12	1073	A	A
14.	Edward Hynes Charter School	Type 3	OPSB	K-8	715	A	A
15.	Edward Hynes Charter School (UNO Campus)**	Type 1	OPSB	K	107	-	-
16.	Einstein Charter at Sherwood Forest	Type 1	OPSB	Pre-K-5	490	D	D
17.	Einstein Charter High School at Sarah Towles Reed	Type 1	OPSB	9-12	401	C	C
18.	Einstein Charter Middle Sch at Sarah Towles Reed	Type 1	OPSB	6-8	441	C	D
19.	Einstein Charter School at Village De L'Est	Type 1	OPSB	Pre-K-5	467	D	D
20.	Elan Academy Charter School**	Type 1	OPSB	Pre-K-4	206	-	-
21.	Eleanor McMain Secondary School	Type 3	OPSB	9-12	887	B	B
22.	ENCORE Academy	Type 1	OPSB	Pre-K-8	622	C	D
23.	Esperanza Charter School	Type 3B	OPSB	K-8	564	C	C

	School	Type	Authorizer	2018-2019 Grades Served	2018-2019 Number of Students	2017-18 SPS Score	2018-19 SPS Score
24.	Fannie C. Williams Charter School	Type 3B	OPSB	Pre-K-8	566	D	D
25.	FirstLine Live Oak	Type 1	OPSB	Pre-K-8	601	-	D
26.	Foundation Preparatory	Type 1	OPSB	K-5	249	C	D
27.	G. W. Carver Collegiate Academy	Type 3B	OPSB	9-12	807	C	C
28.	Harriet Tubman Charter School	Type 3B	OPSB	Pre-K-8	1003	C	D
29.	Homer A. Plessy Community School	Type 1	OPSB	Pre-K-8	467	D	C
30.	IDEA Oscar Dunn**	Type 1	OPSB	K-5	207	-	-
31.	International High School of New Orleans	Type 2	BESE	9-12	456	C	C
32.	International School of Louisiana	Type 2	BESE	K-8	1401	B	B
33.	James M. Singleton Charter School	Type 3B	OPSB	Pre-K-8	392	F	F
34.	John F. Kennedy High School	Type 3B	OPSB	9-12	629	C	C
35.	Joseph A. Craig Charter School	Type 3B	OPSB	Pre-K-8	241	F	F
36.	KIPP Believe College Prep	Type 3B	OPSB	K-8	728	C	C
37.	KIPP Booker T Washington	Type 3B	OPSB	9-12	559	C	D
38.	KIPP Central City Primary	Type 3B	OPSB	Pre-K-8	1002	C	C
39.	KIPP East Community	Type 3B	OPSB	Pre-K-5	649	C	C
40.	KIPP Morial	Type 3B	OPSB	Pre-K-8	1026	C	C
41.	KIPP New Orleans Leadership Academy	Type 3B	OPSB	K-8	883	D	D
42.	KIPP Renaissance High School	Type 3B	OPSB	9-12	623	B	B
43.	Lafayette Academy	Type 3B	OPSB	Pre-K-8	971	C	F
44.	Lake Forest Elementary Charter School	Type 3	OPSB	K-8	660	A	A
45.	Langston Hughes Charter Academy	Type 3B	OPSB	Pre-K-8	811	C	D
46.	Lawrence D. Crocker College Prep	Type 3B	OPSB	Pre-K-8	540	D	F
47.	Living School**	Type 1	OPSB	9	55	-	-
48.	Livingston Collegiate Academy	Type 3B	OPSB	9-12	617	B	C
49.	Lord Beaconsfield Landry-Oliver Perry Walker High	Type 3B	OPSB	9-12	939	F	C
50.	Lusher Charter School	Type 3	OPSB	K-12	1861	A	A
51.	Lycee Francais de la Nouvelle-Orleans	Type 2	BESE	Pre-K-9	1035	B	B
52.	Martin Behrman Charter Acad of Creative Arts & Sci	Type 3B	OPSB	Pre-K-8	843	C	C
53.	Mary Bethune Elementary Literature/Technology	Type 3	OPSB	Pre-K-8	681	C	C
54.	Mary D. Coghill Charter School	Type 3B	OPSB	K-8	541	D	F

	School	Type	Authorizer	2018-2019 Grades Served	2018-2019 Number of Students	2017-18 SPS Score	2018-19 SPS Score
55.	McDonogh 35 Senior High School**	Type 1	OPSB	9	168	-	-
56.	McDonogh 42 Charter School	Type 1	OPSB	Pre-K-8	481	T	T
57.	Mildred Osborne Charter School	Type 3B	OPSB	K-8	538	C	D
58.	Morris Jeff Community School	Type 3B	OPSB	Pre-K-11	1236	C	C
59.	New Harmony High Institute**	Type 2	BESE	9-10	102	-	-
60.	New Orleans Charter Science and Mathematics High School	Type 3	OPSB	9-12	456	B	B
61.	New Orleans Military & Maritime Academy	Type 2	BESE	8-12	939	B	A
62.	Noble Minds**	Type 2	BESE	K-4	94	-	-
63.	Opportunities Academy**	Type 1	OPSB	12	67	-	-
64.	Paul Habans Charter School	Type 3B	OPSB	Pre-K-8	840	C	C
65.	Phillis Wheatley Community School	Type 3B	OPSB	Pre-K-8	855	C	D
66.	Pierre A. Capdau Charter School at Avery Alexander	Type 3B	OPSB	Pre-K-8	707	D	D
67.	ReNEW Accelerated High School West Bank Campus	Type 3B	OPSB	9-12	224	F	C*
68.	ReNEW Dolores T. Aaron Elementary	Type 3B	OPSB	Pre-K-8	780	D	D
69.	ReNEW Schaumburg Elementary	Type 3B	OPSB	Pre-K-8	795	D	F
70.	ReNEW SciTech Academy at Laurel	Type 3B	OPSB	Pre-K-8	879	D	D
71.	Robert Russa Moton Charter School	Type 3	OPSB	Pre-K-8	458	F	D
72.	Rooted School	Type 1	OPSB	9-11	156	B	C
73.	Rosenwald Collegiate Academy	Type 1	OPSB	9-10	259	-	B
74.	Samuel J. Green Charter School	Type 3B	OPSB	Pre-K-8	508	C	C
75.	Sophie B. Wright Institute of Academic Excellence	Type 3B	OPSB	9-12	475	C	B
76.	Success Preparatory Academy	Type 3B	OPSB	K-8	444	C	D
77.	The NET 2 Charter High School	Type 3B	OPSB	8-12	177	F	C*
78.	The NET Charter High School	Type 3B	OPSB	8-12	153	F	C*
79.	Walter L. Cohen College Prep	Type 3B	OPSB	9-12	258	D	F
80.	Warren Easton Senior High School	Type 3	OPSB	9-12	990	A	A
81.	Wilson Charter School	Type 1	OPSB	Pre-K-8	698	C	C

*In 2018-2019, these schools were given SPS letter grades based on a rubric created for alternative schools.

** Schools without SPS scores may be too new or have students that are too young to take the exams upon which SPS scores are based.

Note: These 81 schools do not include the four schools that are not operating as a charter school in Orleans Parish. In addition, SPS scores are not available for the 2019-2020 academic year.

Source: Prepared by legislative auditor's staff using information from LDE enrollment data and SPS spreadsheets.