

EDUCATIONAL INEQUITIES IN THE NEW ORLEANS CHARTER SCHOOL SYSTEM

In 2005, Hurricane Katrina ravaged the city of New Orleans, costing lives, destroying property, and displacing many people, most of them low-income people of color. Following this tragedy, the state of Louisiana combined with the Recovery School District (RSD, created in 2003 before Katrina) to take an entirely different approach to education, including:

- Taking over most of the city's schools and placing them in the statewide Recovery School District (RSD);
- Terminating the contracts of almost all teachers (over 7,000);
- Eventually closing all of the district-run schools and replacing them with charter schools.

A new study examines the outcomes of the New Orleans experiment in terms of student and family experiences as they navigate their way through a confusing set of primarily standard education options. We asked:

- How does this system affect student choices and experiences for different students?
- How effective is the system in providing equitable school experiences for students across the city?
- What are the outcomes of the system in terms of student achievement and attainment?

In answering these questions, our research produced some key findings:



The most advantaged students attend the best performing schools, while the neediest students attend lowest performing schools.

The New Orleans Recovery School District (RSD) also continues to struggle with poor overall performance, posting among the lowest achievement and graduation rates in the state. Based on these rates, the New Orleans RSD continues to be one of the lowest performing districts in one of the lowest performing states in the U.S.



New Orleans reforms have created a set of schools highly stratified by race, class, and educational advantage.

Schools operate in a hierarchy that provides very different types of schools to different children. The most selective, highest achieving, best-resourced, and most sought after schools within this system remain out of reach of the large majority of students in the public schools in New Orleans.



Students' access to schools can be determined by their:

- Neighborhood
- Past academic history (skill level, grades, test score performance)
- Specific talents
- Behavioral history (previous disciplinary actions, contact with juvenile justice system, truancy)
- Special education designation (gifted or talented vs. physical, emotional, or cognitive disability)



SHINING A LIGHT ON THE PATH TO PRIVATIZATION IN THE NEW ORLEANS EDUCATION SYSTEM

PHASE 1 2002-2004

SETTING UP THE RSD



President Bush enacts NCLB, including an accountability system that includes school closure or reconstitution if schools do not show adequate yearly progress (AYP)

Recovery School District (RSD) established in Louisiana in 2003, *before Katrina*, as a state response to turn around failing schools



PHASE 2 2005-2006

POST-KATRINA TAKEOVER



Hurricane Katrina, August 29th, 2005



Over 7,000 teachers fired without due process after Katrina

Act 35 passed in emergency state session, allowing easier RSD takeover of schools



Influx of charter schools of varying quality with inequitable access for students



PHASE 3 2007-2011

DEREGULATED PERIOD

Suspensions, expulsions, and arrests of students decided by principals



Low-performing, sub-standard charter schools evade accountability by closing and reopening to always stay inside a 3-year grace period for reporting

Selection and exclusion strategies used for low-performing, disciplinary related, or learning disabled students



PHASE 4 2012-2015

CENTRALIZED STUDENT PLACEMENT

Community impact: students enrolled in school tiers based on race/ethnicity, achievement, and special education status



OneApp placement system includes loopholes for segregating students by neighborhoods, test scores, and other practices



Students enrolled in lower tier schools bused citywide, often into remote or hostile neighborhoods



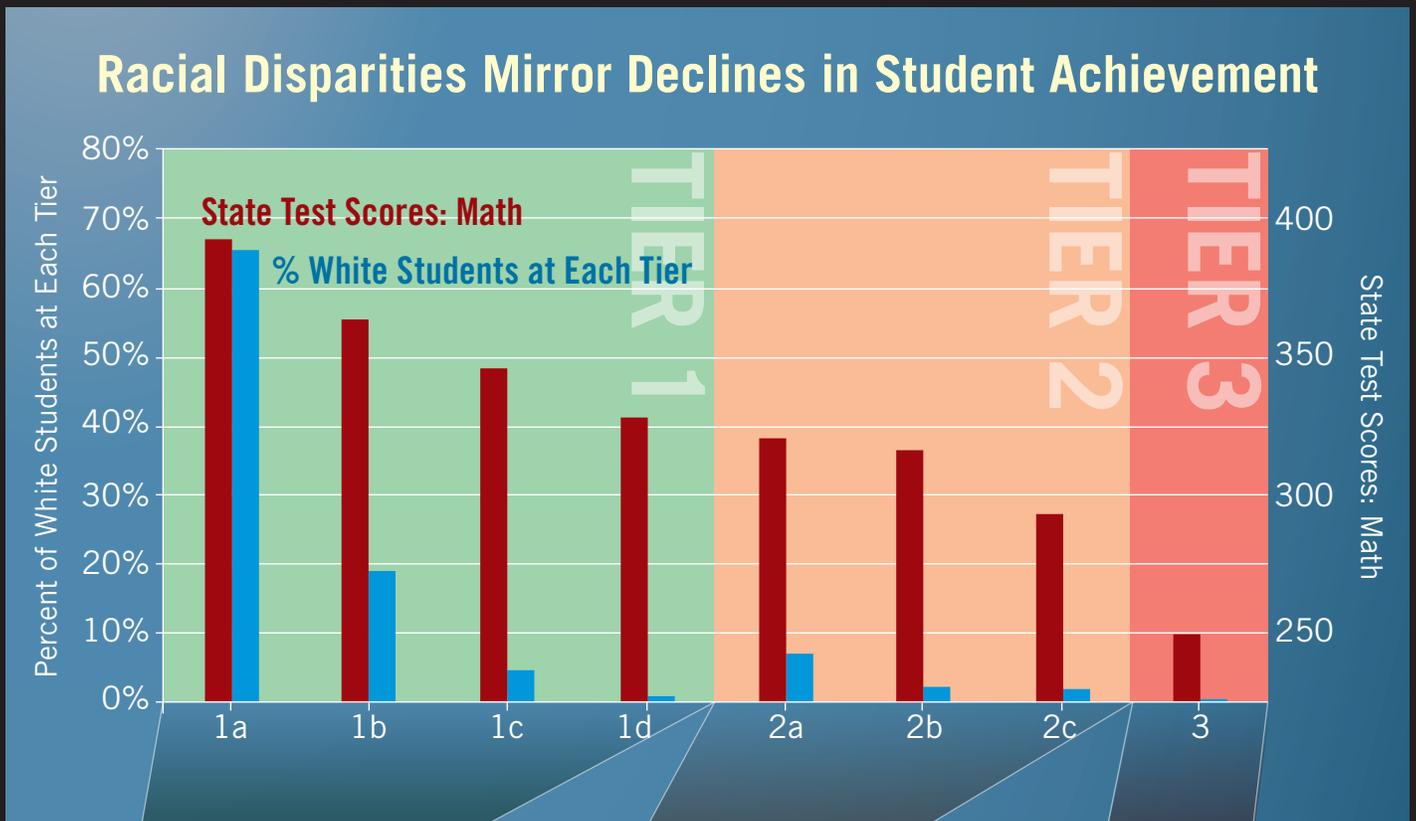
Act 2 allows more charters and private-school vouchers using public per-pupil funds





SHINING A LIGHT ON RACIAL & ACHIEVEMENT DISPARITIES IN NEW ORLEANS SCHOOLS

Racial Disparities Mirror Declines in Student Achievement



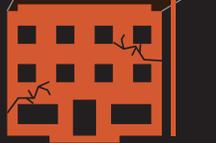
Tier 1 SCHOOLS



Interviewee:

“They picked the best students. You were either rich enough or you were smart enough to get into the school... your parents either got a big enough paycheck or knew enough people, or you were just that doggone brilliant you can offset all the rich students, that’s the two [types of] students.”

Tier 2 SCHOOLS



Interviewees:

“[The principal] said that they were going to have NOPD [police] on campus so that if anything happened, it’s straight to jail. ‘Don’t cross ‘Go,’ don’t collect \$200.’ So the kid of course is like, ‘I don’t want to go back there.’”

“I was bribed [to enroll]... I didn’t really have nowhere else to go, but Coach X told me that we was gonna go to the [football] championships.”

Tier 3 SCHOOLS



Interviewees:

“As far as the student population, New Orleans has a lot of undiagnosed but deep-end trauma... from after the storm... It’s an intensely violent place. There are a lot of students here who know people who are killed or incarcerated.”

“The teachers make you... sit at our computers all day. They just walk around and if we need help they will help us, but... we’re just at our computer all day... Some students want to have fun but they can’t just sitting in a chair all day long.”

While 9 out of 10 white students attend top tier schools, the charter school system inverts that ratio in Tier 2 and 3 schools.

Students also have different day-to-day experiences within these different tiers of schools.

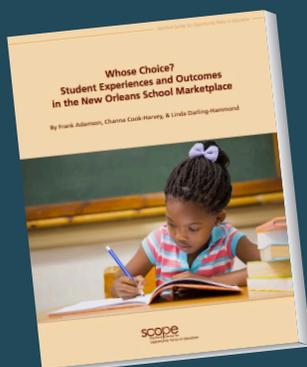
In top tier schools, students move freely in and around the building and have a variety of curricular options.

In the Tier 2 schools, students often enter through metal detectors, are subject to zero-tolerance discipline policies (such as walking on lines painted on the floor in the hallways), and have classes oriented towards test preparation.

In Tier 3 schools, some students study for tests on computers with a teacher functioning as a monitor while others attend schools behind barbed-wire fences operated by companies who run correctional facilities in other states.

The combination of student segregation, limited access to better schools, and declining test scores shows that the New Orleans charter system does not equitably serve all African American students.

ABOUT THE PUBLICATIONS



The report and research brief explain the tiered systems of charter schools produced over the last decade in New Orleans. This change to a nearly all-charter district model provides higher quality education opportunities to more advantaged students, including those who are white, while most of the city's majority African American population attends lower performing schools that focus on lower-level skills and often use strict discipline policies to exclude students from school. Schools compete for the most able students: The highest-need students have little or no choice and are often assigned to failing schools they do not want to attend. The study draws on quantitative and qualitative data from nearly 100 students, educators, parents, and leaders across the New Orleans education landscape to evaluate the experiences of students in the New Orleans school marketplace.

Adamson, F., Cook-Harvey, C., & Darling-Hammond, L. (2015). *Whose Choice? Student Experiences and Outcomes in the New Orleans School Marketplace*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University, Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education. <https://edpolicy.stanford.edu/publications/pubs/1374>

The switch to a charter school system in New Orleans is part of an international experiment in education, including the transfer of public education resources and management from public schools to private or market-based entities.

A new book, *Global Education Reform: How Privatization and Public Investment Influence Education Outcomes*, provides a powerful analysis of these different ends of an ideological spectrum – from market-based experiments to strong state investments in public education.

Written by education researchers, the authors compare the differences between the privatization and public investment approaches to education in three pairs of countries: Chile and Cuba, Sweden and Finland, and the U.S. and Canada.

The book consolidates the best available evidence on the implementation issues and specific results of these different approaches.

With contributions from Michael Fullan, Pasi Sahlberg, Linda Darling-Hammond, and Martin Carnoy, *Global Education Reform* is an eye-opening analysis of national educational reforms and the types of high-achieving systems needed to serve all students equitably.

<https://edpolicy.stanford.edu/GlobalEdReform>

