

Scorecard on Public Education Shows Mixed Success

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The results of the second annual assessment of public education in New Orleans by Tulane University's Scott S. Cowen Institute for Public Education Initiatives reveal both successes and challenges for the 2007-2008 school year.



At Benjamin Banneker Elementary School in New Orleans, a Tulane student, left, tutors an eager pupil in geography. (Photo by Marie Gould)

The report, developed in partnership with the Greater New Orleans Education Foundation and the New Orleans City Council Education Committee, analyzes data and public opinion about public education and evaluates the progress of recommendations made by the group last year.

The 2008 report notes strong new leadership at all levels, improved facilities and increased community involvement among the key successes achieved over the past year.

Among the key challenges the report identifies are poor teacher support, unsustainable district spending and a severe lack of special education and mental health services for students.

“There is reason for optimism and also cause for continued concern about the state of public education in New Orleans,” said Tulane University President Scott S. Cowen. “These annual assessments are critical to tracking the progress of our schools from year to year and identifying areas which have improved most, as well as areas that need attention.”

The report credits the leadership of Recovery School District (RSD) Superintendent Paul Vallas and Louisiana Superintendent of Education Paul Pastorek bringing in an experienced team creating a sense of urgency and momentum in the RSD.

Among the key findings of the report are:

â€¢ The teacher shortage that plagued New Orleans public schools last year is largely resolved. However, many schools are relying on new teachers with little experience and a lack of resources.

â€¢ Most students noted that school kitchens and bathrooms have been upgraded and brought up to basic standards, though significant problems remain. Discipline and safety have also improved since last year.

â€¢ The RSD and Orleans Parish School Board are both spending far more this year than they can sustain in the coming years.

â€¢ Community involvement in schools is at an all-time high, mainly through the proliferation of charter school boards. Schools also are benefiting from a new group of nonprofit organizations that are supporting public education innovation and entrepreneurship in New Orleans.

â€¢ Special education students and students with mental health issues are not being adequately identified or served. Sixty-four percent of surveyed teachers said their school does not have adequate resources to serve special education students.

Bob Reily, co-chair of the Greater New Orleans Education Foundation, said, “This

report provides a good foundation for the community to learn about what is going on in New Orleans public education and to get engaged in improving our public schools.”

The report is based on a widespread and in-depth analysis of public schools in New Orleans including more than 50 interviews with community leaders, public officials, education experts and school principals; more than 25 focus groups with students, teachers and community members; and 1,850 survey responses from parents, teachers and community members.

The full [report](#) can be viewed online. To receive a printed copy, which will be available April 25, call 504-274-3690, e-mail [Steve Cruz](#) or pick up one at the Cowen Institute's office, located at 200 Broadway, Suite 108, in New Orleans.