

Teach for America Enlists New Graduates

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“Criss-cross applesauce.” Rachel Kohn, a 2008 Tulane University graduate and new Teach for America corps member, has found the words to appeal to her class of 15 jittery kindergarteners to quietly sit cross-legged on the reading carpet. A native of Statesboro, Ga., Kohn is among the 25 Tulane graduates who have been selected to serve this fall as full-time teachers with Teach for America.



Rachel Kohn teaches kindergarten at Arthur Ashe Charter School in New Orleans. Kohn is among 25 Tulane graduates this year who have committed to teaching through Teach for America in under-resourced school systems across the country. (Photo by Tricia Travis)

The organization places recent college graduates and young professionals in public school teaching positions in urban and rural communities across the nation.

The mission for [Teach for America](#) is to eliminate educational inequity by building a highly selective corps of new graduates ? of all academic majors ? to commit to two years of teaching and in the process to become lifelong learners in pursuit of

educational excellence and equity.

“The most difficult thing is working with children who are on all different levels,” said Kohn, of her students at Arthur Ashe Charter School in uptown New Orleans. “We have some who can't recognize their own names and we have others who are pretty close to reading.”

Seven of the Tulane graduates accepted into Teach for America this year were assigned to public schools in the Greater New Orleans area, while others were placed in schools in low-income communities in other states. For example, Tulane alumni Gina Sequeira from Katy, Texas, and Amy Collins from Cutoff, La., are teaching at the same school, Robert E. Lee High School in Jacksonville, Fla.

“When I heard about this county's high dropout rate I knew that I should be in a place that really needed the help,” said Sequeira, who teaches honors geometry and algebra II to 9th- and 10th-grade students. “I'm here because I want to instill a passion for education, and I want to set high expectations for my students.”

As the public schools in New Orleans have struggled to rebuild their academic programming following Hurricane Katrina, Teach for America has helped to supply well-trained, highly qualified instructors. Teach for America is rapidly scaling up its presence in New Orleans through recruiting, selecting, training, placing and providing ongoing support to approximately 250 new teachers each year for the next three years.

The [Scott S. Cowen Institute for Public Education Initiatives](#) at Tulane has partnered with Teach for America to help reform public schools in New Orleans. Shannon Jones, the institute's executive director, said, “The Cowen Institute has developed a strong partnership with Teach for America because we are all working toward the same goal: providing every child with the opportunity to receive an excellent education.

“The commitment of Teach for America to work in our region is remarkable,” Jones added. “The opportunity that Teach for America provides to Tulane graduates and graduates from across the country is a hands-on experience in catalyzing significant change in our public schools. We are currently working with TFA on incentives to increase the number of grads who participate in the program.”

Reinforcing that focus on public school partnerships, the founder and chief executive officer of Teach for America, Wendy Kopp, will be at Tulane next month to give a speech on "Eliminating Educational Inequity." She will speak at 7 p.m. on Oct. 7 in

McAlister Auditorium as part of Perspectives: A Leadership Speaker Series.