

Schools' Report Card Improves, Post-Katrina

August 13, 2010 10:45 AM New Wave staff
newwave@tulane.edu

While citizens in the New Orleans area have mixed emotions about the upcoming five-year anniversary of Hurricane Katrina, the Cowen Institute for Public Education Initiatives at Tulane is celebrating the significant improvements that continue to be made in bettering the lives of the city's youth.



In August 2009, Langston Hughes Academy Charter School near the New Orleans Fair Grounds becomes the first newly built campus in New Orleans to open its doors since 2003. The tuition-free public school, part of the Recovery School District, is enrolling students in grades K-8. (Photo by John Barousse)

The Cowen Institute has released [*The State of Public Education in New Orleans: Five Years After Hurricane Katrina*](#), a five-year anniversary publication, to provide journalists, policymakers, community leaders and the public with information about the reform efforts that have taken place in the K-12 public education system since the storm.

"When Hurricane Katrina blew through New Orleans it decimated one of the nation's worst-performing public school systems," says Shannon Jones, [Cowen Institute](#)

executive director. “Never has a failing urban public school system experienced the near total destruction of resources and responded with such radical change.”

A hybrid model where charter schools outnumber district-operated schools two to one has resulted in a newfound emphasis on innovation and school autonomy. While significant challenges remain, Jones says, the new model of delivering education to the city's youth has begun to yield results. Today, the once academically, morally and financially bankrupt system is nationally recognized as a potential model for urban school system transformation, she says.

The new report explains and illustrates the evolution of this radical change in the public education landscape of New Orleans. Jones points out that the city's residents and the state government face a number of open questions about the future of public education in New Orleans. Who will govern and operate schools? Who will teach? How much school choice is optimal?

“We hope that this report will inform the dialogue as the New Orleans community seeks to answer these questions,” Jones says.

Since the Cowen Institute opened its doors at Tulane in 2007, it has published an annual *State of Public Education in New Orleans* report to provide an ongoing chronicle and assessment of the reform efforts.