

New Governance Guiding Principles

As part of the New Orleans charter community, we are dedicated to being a quality education option for the children and families of New Orleans. Over the past seven years, we have led our students to substantial academic gains. The achievement gap between New Orleans and the rest of the state has been significantly closed (reduced by 56%, since 2005) and at a faster rate than before the storm. In addition, far fewer students attend academically unsuccessful schools as compared to pre-Katrina. In 2005, 78 percent of schools were considered failing, and in 2011 that number had shrunken to less than half. While there is still room for improvement, these are dramatic gains that suggest charter schools are working in our city.

This success would not be possible without the autonomy and flexibility we've experienced as Type 5 charters. In exchange for accountability and oversight, our schools and school leaders have been allowed to make the financial, personnel, and operational decisions that meet the needs of our students and teachers, and *not* just the needs of political bureaucracies. For example, unlike in the past, school principals no longer have to rely on a central office for hiring decisions and have the freedom to hire the best, most talented teachers for students.

With November quickly approaching, all eyes are on the Orleans Parish School Board (OBPSB) races. Concurrently, the Recovery School District (RSD) and OPSB recently released a timeline and process for the return of Type 5 charter schools to OPSB's control. Yet, to date, the OPSB has not provided these schools or the public any clear plan for how these schools will be managed, including a proposed operating agreement that charter boards could review.

Furthermore, OPSB has yet to provide the public any long-term vision for the district and their plan to manage their unique portfolio of schools, including the various types of charters. While many ask the question should schools be returned to "local control," the charter school community would like to ask the OPSB instead, how they will enhance the principles that have driven the academic success in charter schools, not just protect them. As charters, we want to see a plan that assures us that our school operations will not be impeded so that we can continue to best serve our students, teachers and administrators.

To that end, the New Orleans charter school community has joined together to adopt the following "Guiding Principles" that are the foundation to building excellent public schools. These principles are non-negotiable and will be used as the standard by which we as charters will measure all proposed models, laws and policies relevant to the issue of long-term governance, including any plan for return to the OPSB.

Guiding Principles

Until there are concrete assurances that are aligned with the principles that we know underlie the progress in our schools from Orleans Parish school board members, the Superintendent and other key leadership in the district, we cannot advocate for our parents, students, teachers and the general public for the return to OPSB. These principles are simple, but absolutely essential:

- Choice

No child, family, or circumstance is exactly the same. Thus, every family should have the right to decide what educational environment is the best fit for their child—a privilege long awarded to families who can afford it. Any future governing board must recognize this right and allow it to be the guiding star for its decisions.

- Autonomy

Schools absolutely must retain the autonomy and flexibility to innovate. The 21st century world is one that is rapidly changing, and top-down mandates and ever-present bureaucracy only slow progress. As an authorizer, OPSB should ensure that it respects the operational autonomy of charters and trusts its school leaders to identify their needs and determine the best course of action for the success of their students. Schools must be allowed to continue as autonomous organizations, accountable to their charter boards and authorizer, as they are today.

Autonomy in the following areas is a must:

- Operations
 - School system governance must be separate from school operational governance and include a clear and prescribed degree of authority and decision-making power
- Budgeting
 - All budgeting decisions are made at the school site
 - Grant and federal title funds are relinquished to schools
- Personnel, including hiring and termination decisions, as well as all decisions on how teachers are evaluated
- Curriculum

- ***Accountability***

The focus should not be on inputs; a governing board should instead focus on a school's outcomes. The Board should hold a high bar that is nothing short of quality in regards to academics, financial management, and contractual obligations. If a school fails to meet the bar, there should be significant consequences, including the potential for the closure of their school and the revocation of their charter. "Politics as usual" cannot remain a part of the decision-making process when it comes to measuring school progress. Instead, it is essential that how the charter will be evaluated and what criteria will be used to determine its performance is clearly laid out in the contract between the school and the district.

- ***Transparency***

There must be clearly delineated powers and responsibilities for the new board, and it should be obvious to the community and families how dollars are being spent. Furthermore, in an era of "data-driven decision-making," the board should release more comprehensive information about each school's performance. School test scores do not tell the complete story of a school's performance; including data about a school's growth and the variety of courses the school offers would paint a more complete picture for families and the community.

- ***Equity***

The future governing board should moderate and monitor certain issues such as special education (including equitably distributing funds so that schools can appropriately address the needs of their student population), enrollment, expulsions, and facilities.

New Governance

Again, theoretically, we are not opposed to school return. We are calling for OPSB leadership to aggressively address the above issues. We have an opportunity to be innovative and create a brand new approach to public school governance that embraces these guiding principles. It should be a plan that focuses on academic results and moves New Orleans forward in the mission to provide the best education for all kids. Our schools are prepared to work with you in this effort and bring our experiences, best practices, and data to the table; however, we, the undersigned, will advocate against current governance structure of OPSB, and will only return once such a plan can be crafted and vetted with our school communities.

****All boards who agree to sign on to this petition will be listed here.****