



SCHOOLS AFTER KATRINA: A Look at New Orleans Area Schools and Colleges One Year Later

An Issue Brief Prepared by the Democratic Staff of the House Committee on Education and the Workforce
Hon. George Miller, Senior Democratic Member

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Summary

One year after Hurricane Katrina devastated the greater New Orleans area, local schools and colleges still lack the support and resources they need to reach pre-Katrina operational levels or meet demand for services from local communities. The number of school age children seeking to return to the area's elementary and secondary schools is outstripping capacity. Meanwhile, enrollment is down significantly at local colleges and universities, a fact that has implications for the entire recovery given the critical economic role that institutions of higher education play in the local labor market. These ongoing concerns are largely a result of the notable absence of federal leadership in helping the education sector to truly recover. This report renews three conclusions offered earlier this year to finally ensure the true recovery of the education sector: taking responsibility away from FEMA and instead establishing an education recovery leadership role within the U.S. Department of Education; giving local educators more discretion and flexibility in decision-making; and providing new funding to schools and colleges.

Introduction

One year after Hurricane Katrina devastated the greater New Orleans area, school systems and colleges there still lack the resources, support, and flexibility that they need to fully reopen. Elementary and secondary schools are still not able to meet the demand for educational services that has been created by the return of displaced families to their homes, while colleges and universities remain unable to attract enough students to match last year's enrollment.

In March of 2006, Democratic members of the House Committee on Education and the Workforce spent two days in the greater New Orleans area visiting schools and colleges and speaking to students, parents, educators, and administrators. As a result of that trip, in April 2006 the Democratic staff of the Education and the Workforce Committee issued a report that concluded that the Bush administration had largely abdicated its leadership role in helping the education sector to recover from this unprecedented disaster.

In particular, the report faulted the Bush administration for three errors. **First**, the administration was wrong to designate the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) as the agency chiefly responsible for the recovery of the education sector. **Second**, the administration has provided insufficient funding to rebuild schools and restart school operations. **Third**, the administration has severely limited the discretion of local school officials in making decisions to best address local recovery needs.

This report, which provides an update to the April 2006 report, finds that even 12 months after Hurricane Katrina, the Bush administration has yet to offer a concrete plan to assist schools and institutions of higher education in the new education landscape. It is partly a result of this failed federal effort that, while schools and colleges have recovered substantially in the last 12 months thanks to valiant efforts at the local level and limited federal funding, they are still nowhere near their pre-Katrina operational levels.

The April 2006 report made three recommendations for finally ensuring that schools and colleges could fully recover. Those recommendations remain relevant and necessary. They are threefold:

Transferring responsibilities for education sector recovery efforts from FEMA to U.S.

Department of Education. Under the Bush administration, FEMA continues to serve as the foremost responder to disasters. Its failures in the aftermath of the Hurricanes have been widely reported and these failures have been similarly felt in the education community. The Education Department has the experience and expertise in dealing with the education sector to be able to provide the leadership and guidance that schools need to recover. In particular, the U.S. Department of Education could provide technical assistance on school construction issues and direct schools to third party entities that specialize in rebuilding central office operations.

Giving local educational authorities the discretion and flexibility they need to reopen schools and campuses. In anticipation of the new school year, remediating and rebuilding schools has been a priority for Gulf Coast education systems. However, federal requirements prohibiting the use of “restart” funds for school construction have stymied rebuilding efforts. Similarly, few federal education laws provide the necessary flexibility for local administrators to respond to critical emergencies.

Providing additional funding. The funding provided to Gulf Coast schools by the U.S. Department of Education amounted to just short of \$2 billion¹ – which is less than 2% percent of the total federal assistance sent to Gulf Coast communities² and does not approach the needed estimates for education. For New Orleans alone, damage estimates for the K-12 education sector are around \$800 million³ according to the latest figures. At the state level, Louisiana estimates damage for K-12 education at \$1.7 billion just for infrastructure and FEMA-ineligible costs⁴.

- **Elementary and secondary schools.** Public and private elementary and secondary schools were provided \$6,000 per student to pay for teacher salaries, academic services, after-school programs and counseling services. This figure amounts to just two-thirds of what the average school in the U.S. spends per student – and average schools are not facing the tremendous challenges posed by Katrina.

¹ <http://hurricanehelpforschools.gov/030206-factsheet.pdf>

² Based on \$110 billion in federal aid designated for the Gulf Coast region, according to Don Powell Gulf Coast coordinator for the Bush administration through the Department of Homeland Security. Associated Press August 23, 2006.

³ Times-Picayune, “Students are ready, but what about the schools?” August, 6, 2006.

⁴ Louisiana Department of Education

- **Institutions of higher education.** Colleges and universities received just \$250 million. In Louisiana, the most affected state, estimates for damages to facilities and loss of revenue are about \$630 million⁵. This does not include all the need at private colleges and universities – an amount which could double this estimate. These grants assisted in the aftermath of the storms but fall short of the funds that colleges and universities will need to maintain enrollment, recruit faculty, and rebuild facilities.

Update on status of K-12 education in greater New Orleans area

Due to local education leaders and stakeholders, school systems within the Greater New Orleans area are deeply engaged in the rebuilding and recovery process. Faced with severe infrastructure losses and the displacement of nearly the entire population of elementary and secondary students, teachers, and support staff, local education systems have been reconfigured to meet the needs of returning students. The State of Louisiana, national children and youth advocacy organizations and education experts are also partners in this recovery process.

At the state level, the **Louisiana Recovery Authority** has proposed using Community Development Block Grants to assist local school systems in school rebuilding efforts.

New Orleans public schools. Thousands more students are expected to enroll in New Orleans' public schools over the coming school year. Of the 130 schools in the New Orleans public school system operating pre-Katrina, approximately 57 are preparing⁶ to open for the 2006-2007 school year. This number is more than double the number of elementary and secondary schools that were opened last year. However, student enrollment is expected to almost triple in the new school year from 12,000 to 34,000 students. As a result, demand for classroom space is expected to continue to outstrip demand.

Of the more than 4,000 teachers employed by the New Orleans public schools pre-Katrina, approximately 1,000 have been rehired⁷. The absence of affordable housing for teachers and their families has hindered the recruiting process while thousands of teachers have opted to seek employment elsewhere or leave the teaching profession altogether. The need for qualified special education teachers is especially acute.

The Governor of Louisiana enacted legislation allowing for the creation of a **Recovery School District** that would take over responsibility for the majority of public elementary and secondary schools in the New Orleans public school system. Based on the charter school model, the Recovery School District is building a network of elementary and secondary schools to help meet the rapidly increasing student enrollment. Numerous non-profit organizations have also invested resources into the local school district. The **Childrens' Defense Fund** is sponsoring after-school programs and reading activities in the district and has called for increased funding for comprehensive health services to include mental health services for children and youth

⁵ Louisiana Recovery Authority Action Plan Amendment for CDBG Funds.

⁶ www.nolapublicschools.net, "List of available Public Schools 2006-2007"

⁷ American Federation of Teachers

displaced by the hurricane. The **Council of Great City Schools** has been working with New Orleans Public Schools on a variety of education reform initiatives such as academic performance and rebuilding central operations.

St. Bernard Parish public schools. St. Bernard Parish has dissolved its “unified school” structure (that is, one campus serving children in grades K-12) established in the aftermath of the storm. During this school year the St. Bernard Parish public school system plans to reopen a minimum of three schools to accommodate growing enrollments. St. Bernard Parish Public Schools has mandated expenditures such as debt service, property insurance, unemployment and retiree health insurance that cannot be met without additional assistance.

Archdiocese of New Orleans school system. The Archdiocese, which was the first school system to reopen after the storm, has tracked 98 percent of its students enrolled before the storm, is nearing pre-Katrina enrollment figures and continues to hire staff and reopen schools for its returning students.

The efforts of local leaders and state and national partners in rebuilding local school systems are laudable. However, federal leadership will be critical for ensuring that school systems are not simply rebuilt to where they were before the storms hit, but that they are prepared to provide a world class education for students and families who reside in the Greater New Orleans area. Yet FEMA reimbursement and insurance will not cover the full cost of repairs or renovations needed to ensure that students have safe, healthy learning environments.

Besides school construction, the need for basic educational services remains acute⁸. For example, before- and after-school programs are still being formed but have yet to be fully integrated into the system. And counseling and mental health services are in high demand among students, teachers and administrators.

Update on status of institutions of higher education in greater New Orleans area

In the year since Hurricane Katrina, federal efforts have been insufficient to ensure that higher education systems in the affected areas return to pre-hurricane conditions in a timely manner. A year later, the picture is at best slightly improved, but far from what parents, students, higher education professionals, and the communities as a whole rightfully expected.

Operating budgets at New Orleans area colleges and universities have declined precipitously compared with previous years. The decreased operating budgets and overall availability of funding means further delays in opening fully functioning facilities and decent housing; cuts in programs and course offerings; and job losses. The burdens in all of these areas are compounded by the severe decrease in enrollment for first-time students and enrollment overall.

⁸ Recovery School District Legislatively Required Plan, June 7, 2006.

Much like the K-12 education system in the Gulf Region, higher education plays a valuable role not only as a contributor to the economy but as a conduit to a viable community life for residents of the region. Unfortunately, the slow pace of recovery in the Gulf Coast is hampering the ability of education systems, including higher education, from fully returning to that role.

Student enrollments. Enrollment is down in most Gulf Coast higher education institutions, in some places by as much as 50 percent, a fact which contributes significantly to the waning fiscal health of colleges and universities whose budgets and ability to serve students rely in part on tuition revenue.

The decrease in freshman classes is worrisome in particular for four-year institutions that typically rely on these students to come in as freshmen and remain for the duration of their undergraduate studies. This fall, for example, **Tulane University** will have approximately 5,100 undergraduates, a 23% reduction. The school anticipates approximately 1,000 freshmen, a decrease from an average of 1,600. Tulane will be operating in the red as a result of this.⁹ There is a similar story at **Loyola University**. It projects its enrollment at 2,500 for this coming fall. Previous years have averaged 3,500¹⁰. The decrease in enrollment of 1,000 students means that the institution is losing out in approximately \$25 million in tuition and fees¹¹.

Fall Enrollment in New Orleans Schools			
	Est. Enrollment		Percentage change
	<i>Pre-Katrina</i>	<i>Fall '06</i>	
Delgado Community	16,000	13,000	-19%
Dillard University	2,000	1,000	-50%
Loyola University	3,500	2,500	-29%
SUNO	3,600	3,000	-17%
Tulane University	13,200	10,000	-24%
University of New Orleans	13,500	13,000	-4%
Xavier University	4,000	3,000	-25%

Table based on information collected from university and college officials and Inside Higher Ed, July 18, 2006¹².

Program cuts and job losses. Many of the major cuts to programs and faculty layoffs occurred at the beginning of 2006. Job losses are a significant problem both because of the program cuts they necessitate and because colleges and universities are such important employers in the greater New Orleans area. For example, **Tulane University** was the largest employer in New Orleans pre-Katrina. In fact, it remains New Orleans' largest employer despite its layoffs¹³. **Xavier University** will continue to operate with a reduced number of faculty and staff members. Before the hurricane, the university had 250 faculty and 650 staff positions. Currently the University has 176 faculty and 240 staff positions. According to Gene D'Amour with Xavier

⁹ Correspondence with university officials August 10, 2006.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Chronicle of Higher Education, "Loyola U. New Orleans Sues Its Insurer for Failing to Pay Hurricane Related Claims," August 3, 2006

¹² Inside Higher Ed, "Fall Haul," July 18, 2006.

¹³ Correspondence with university officials August 10, 2006.

University, the significant stress on the faculty has resulted in the major challenge of retaining faculty.

Facilities. Total damage to college and university facilities in the New Orleans area alone exceeded \$1 billion¹⁴. Overall losses, including revenue and research dollars, is approximately \$2.5 billion.¹⁵

The Southern University of New Orleans will not have any campus buildings ready to open for the fall term. As the campus most affected by Katrina, SUNO's spring semester was held in trailers on a vacant lot located just north of the main campus. As a public institution, SUNO will be rebuilt with the help of the state and local governments, but it is on a long list of institutions awaiting assistance. Until then, SUNO will continue to operate in trailers and work to expand its class offerings online in order to keep students enrolled at the school¹⁶.

The community colleges in the area are operating with limited use of facilities. **Delgado Community College's City Park campus** is only operating at 50 percent capacity. At **SOWLEA Technical Community College**, three buildings remain unusable, and the college must still use temporary trailers for classroom space. It will be at least 18 months, if not two years, before the campus returns to pre-storm conditions¹⁷.

The lack of fully functioning facilities in higher education has meant a loss of research capabilities for several institutions. **Tulane University** is projecting a \$31 million shortfall in its operating budgets. This is in addition to a loss of approximately \$17 million in research funding as a result of damage to equipment and facilities¹⁸. While some of **Xavier University's** facilities are close to their pre-hurricane condition, the Center for Undergraduate Research was totally destroyed. This facility and many research labs were so affected that years of data have been lost and research will have to be done from scratch.¹⁹

At **Dillard University** the loss of research capabilities has had a negative impact on research funding. Dillard has had to defer several major research initiatives because of the delay in returning to campus and the lack of facilities on campus. Compounding the situation is the loss of several science professors who had NSF/NIH funding. In the words of a university official, "this has set back our research program and capacity to attract new research dollars by at least three to four years²⁰."

Student and faculty housing. Higher education institutions have made considerable strides in restoring on-campus housing for students; however, off-campus housing and housing for employees of the colleges and universities remain largely inadequate or wholly unavailable.

¹⁴ Democratic Proposal to Open and Rebuild Gulf Coast Schools and Colleges, April 2006.

¹⁵ Figure based on self-reported data from colleges and universities collected in November 2005.

¹⁶ Chronicle of Higher Education, "Still Without a Campus," May 26, 2006.

¹⁷ Correspondence with college officials August, 17, 2006.

¹⁸ Correspondence with university officials August 10, 2006.

¹⁹ Correspondence with university officials August 17, 2006.

²⁰ Ibid.

Even where dorms are ready for students, housing problems persist at many of the institutions. The **Southern University of New Orleans** was housing some of its students at the Marriot hotel²¹ until mid-April when FEMA trailer housing was made available to students and employees of the university. SUNO will likely remain a trailer community for some time: The university indicated to students that the FEMA housing could be made available for up to two years²².

Even though the student dorms are ready at **Xavier**, there are still FEMA trailers on campus to accommodate faculty and staff who are unable to live in their homes. With the slow pace of recovery in the city, Xavier cites faculty housing as a very serious challenge and one of the reasons they are having difficulty retaining faculty and staff²³. **Tulane** is in a similar situation. Having housed all undergraduates, it still has two trailer sites that are home to faculty and staff who remain without a permanent home.

Dillard University indicates that while there may be some housing available in the city of New Orleans, prices for properties available for rent have virtually doubled. In many cases, landlords and management companies are requiring an individual's monthly income to equal four times the monthly rent before they will even be considered. This is nearly impossible for students and a significant burden for faculty and staff still paying mortgages on houses²⁴.

Federal government support. Higher education institutions in the Gulf Coast region are not only battling with their insurance companies for payouts but also facing severe delays in the receipt of promised FEMA assistance. Several institutions indicate that they had anticipated more support and funding from FEMA, but a year later it has not yet arrived and they expect it to take longer still.

To date, a mere \$250 million has been provided for higher education recovery. Most recently, in mid-June Congress provided \$50 million in additional grants. However, a request for \$200 million in loan assistance was not made available to institutions. Two local university presidents, while testifying before the House Committee on Education and the Workforce in April 2006, requested a federal loan program that would help institutions while they await payouts from their insurance companies and FEMA.

At the hearing, Scott Cowan, the President of Tulane, said that "in order to open in January, we borrowed \$150 million ... which maxed out our borrowing capacity²⁵." While Tulane has received some FEMA support recently, at the time of the hearing, the University had not received any funding from FEMA. It is unclear when they will receive any future support.

²¹ www.suno.edu/faq.htm FAQ No. 22

²² Chronicle of Higher Education, "Still Without a Campus," May, 26,2006.

²³ Correspondence with university officials August 17,2006.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Chronicle of Higher Education, "College Presidents Seek More Hurricane Relief," May 5, 2006.

Conclusion

The Brookings Institution notes that the New Orleans area suffered a loss of nearly 200,000 workers as a result of the Hurricanes “with the health and education services industries suffering the largest percentage declines.”²⁶ These same industries are part of economic engine that are critical to ensuring that New Orleans recovers from these disasters. The Bush Administration’s failure to take aggressive action in addressing the concerns highlighted in our initial report and the subsequent absence of federal leadership in helping local school systems to prepare for the upcoming school year and beyond calls into question the administration’s commitment to the recovery of Gulf Coast education systems. In order to ensure that New Orleans returns to the lively and vibrant community it once was, we again call upon the Congress and the administration to:

- Transfer responsibilities for education sector recovery efforts from FEMA to U.S. Department of Education.
- Give local educational authorities the discretion and flexibility they need to reopen schools and campuses.
- Provide additional funding for:
 - Rebuilding schools and campuses and replacing school resources, such as computers and other critical research equipment;
 - Retaining and recruit faculty and staff;
 - Retaining and recruiting college students; and
 - Providing housing for students, faculty and staff.

Methodology

The collection of data in this report is based on information taken from news articles and communications with representatives of the relevant state agencies, as well as representatives of colleges and universities. The communications were both through telephone calls and electronic mail. The fact finding occurred over the course of a month and represents the best available statistics and dollar figures to date.

With respect to the higher education section of the report, some of the data is self-reported by colleges and universities and could vary depending on other factors that may not have been considered at the time.

²⁶ Brookings Institute, “Special Edition of the Katrina Index: A One-Year Review of Key Indicators of Recovery in Post-Storm New Orleans,” by Amy Liu, Matt Fellows and Mia Mabanta, August 2006.