



THE RETURN MODEL For Local School Governance

Educate Now! Releases Task Force Recommendation for Long-Term Governance

Proposal establishes vision and principals long-term governance should address

Recognizing there is interest in returning public schools to local control, but no consensus on how to get there, the non-profit reform organization Educate Now! convened a Task Force of educators, community, civic and business leaders to discuss the future governance of New Orleans Schools. Their goal: devise a governance model that could provide for the return of public schools currently in the Recovery School District to local control in a manner that would protect the reforms and continue to support school improvement.

The Task Force reviewed the pros and cons of returning to the pre-Katrina system of one school board operating through a central office. "But the old structure failed to produce academically successful schools and is not equipped to handle the new challenges of a system where 71 percent of students attend charter schools," said Educate Now! Founder Leslie Jacobs.

The Task Force developed a framework that any governance model should address, articulating a vision for governance, a set of guiding principles to use in evaluating possible governance solutions and the functions that school governance must perform. "It is my hope that this framework can help inform future discussions around school governance," said Ms. Jacobs.

The Return Model: A New Approach to Governance for Public Schools in Orleans Parish outlines the Task Force's recommended model. Instead of vesting all power in a single board operating through a central office, these powers and responsibilities would be allocated among three inter-dependent boards:

- **An elected Governing Board** with overarching responsibility for the school system as a whole; it would serve as steward of the system of schools, including managing the system's finances and school facilities, developing standards and policies for matters with system-wide implications, and providing the coordination necessary to serve the needs of all students and the public. This Governing Board would not directly run schools, nor could it interfere in the operation of schools.
- **An appointed Direct-run Oversight Board** to operate and manage all non-charter schools.
- **An appointed Charter Oversight Board** to authorize and monitor the performance of charter schools.

The Task Force designed this three-board approach for several reasons, chief among them to avoid the inherent conflict of interest built into a system where a single board operates schools, is responsible for chartering schools that will compete with its directly-run schools, and then must fairly set policy and allocate resources between the schools it directly operates and its charters.

“Having one board in these three roles is like asking a coach to fairly referee a game his team is playing,” said Ms. Jacobs. “It does not work.”

“While there is support for local control of schools, polls show there is little support for returning schools to the same system that failed us for decades. And New Orleans is not alone in this. Evidence from across the country suggests that large urban school districts with a single elected school board do not do a good job creating and maintaining high-performing schools that serve large numbers of students from low-income families,” she said.

The Return Model is designed to protect school autonomy, require individual schools to excel, and provide the coordination and fairness necessary to serve the needs of all students and the public. *The Return Model* is the product of many meetings by a very diverse group of educational stakeholders, but it is not intended to be the definitive piece on governance. It is a framework by which public conversation can seriously begin about the long-term governance of New Orleans public schools.

Public comment is encouraged on the proposal. To download *The Return Model: A New Approach to Governance for Public Schools in Orleans Parish* or to make a comment go to [The Return Model](#) page of the Educate Now! website.

For more information: (504) 897-6110.