



THE RETURN MODEL

A New Approach to Governance for Public Schools in New Orleans

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

BESE has approved a plan for Orleans Parish schools. Why don't we just see how that works?

Under the plan approved by BESE, New Orleans will keep the current governance structure for at least five more years. The plan does allow for the transfer of individual RSD schools back to the OPSB if:

1. The school meets the required performance standard and votes to return to OPSB.
2. The OPSB successfully submits a plan to take back and turn around a failing school.

This plan remains in place unless new legislation is passed or BESE decides to amend its policy.

Continuing under the same governance structure we have now is an option. There are some inherent problems, however, including voter preference for local control and the confusion, conflict, and lack of coordination associated with having governing bodies with overlapping or redundant responsibilities.

Why not return to the traditional governing system with one locally elected school board?

The Return Model includes a locally elected board with overarching authority, but it addresses the inherent conflicts of interest built into a system wherein a single board – whether elected or appointed – manages some schools, charters others, and then must fairly allocate resources between the schools it oversees and charters.

Why not just convert all schools to charters?

New Orleans has traditional schools that are high-achieving. The Task Force recommended a blended model that allows for both charter and direct-run schools, rather than limiting our options to either all charter or all traditional.

With three Boards, how will the public know who is responsible for what?

The three boards would have very distinct responsibilities. If the issue is about a charter school, the Charter Oversight Board would be responsible. If it involves a non-charter school, the Direct-run Oversight Board would be responsible. If the issue applies to all schools, the Governing Board would be responsible. Additionally, the Governing Board would be responsible for communications, including a guide outlining roles and responsibilities and methods of problem resolution.

This structure seems complicated. How will decisions ever get made? What about duplication of effort?

The Task Force looked at many different possible governance structures. One governing entity appears simple and could be assigned responsibility for all governance functions, but imbedded within this model is the internal conflict of having the same entity run schools, charter schools and allocate the resources.

With three boards, the clear definition of roles and responsibilities and funding will reduce sources of conflict. Further, the opportunity for each board to recommend policies is an incentive for cooperation, and in many cases the interests of the two Oversight Boards will be aligned. For example, they will have a shared interest in how facilities are managed and what rent is being charged.

What will ensure that funding is equitable for all schools and students?

The dollars will continue to follow the student. A weighted student formula, adopted by the elected Governing Board, would reflect that some students, such as students with disabilities, are more expensive to educate than others. The amount of money that will follow a particular student is the same, whether it flows to a charter or direct-run school. The Direct-run Oversight Board would receive the money for its students and set the budget for its portfolio of schools. Each charter operator would directly receive the funds for its students and would control its own budget. The Direct-run Oversight Board and the charter schools would receive their federal title funds directly from the state.

Will the system be more expensive to operate?

No, it will not. Eliminating the currently redundant system in which both BESE and OPSB operate and charter schools will save money. Placing management of all direct-run schools under a single administrative structure (the Direct-run Oversight Board) should reduce costs now incurred by the duplicate administrative structures currently in place – one for RSD’s direct-run schools and the other for OPSB’s direct-run schools – and allow more money to go directly to the classroom. Likewise, the Charter Oversight function will also be more efficient, eliminating duplicate oversight systems. The cost to the charter schools to cover the expenses of the Governing Board and the Charter Oversight Board will not exceed the 2% limit currently in law.

What about school performance standards?

The Governing Board may set performance standards for schools higher (but not lower) than those established by BESE. These standards must apply to both Oversight Boards and all schools, with the possible exception of alternative or special-needs schools. Each Oversight Board would be permitted to adopt standards for its schools higher than those established by BESE and the Governing Board, but not lower.

How will these school performance standards be upheld?

If either type of school has not met the Governing Board’s standards and the responsible Oversight Board has not addressed the problem, the Governing Board would have the right, based upon approved policy, to: (1) close the school, (2) require the existing Oversight Board to change school management, or (3) select the other Oversight Board to take over the school (either to run directly or to charter).

How will we be sure that all students are served inclusively? What if a parent or student can't find a school in which to enroll?

The Governing Board would oversee the common enrollment process, determine the number and types of schools needed, and manage an integrated Student Information System. In addition, in compliance with an approved policy, the Governing Board would have the right to assign students to schools in the case of mid-year enrollees, special needs or an unanticipated surge in the student population.

What if a parent believes a school has violated enrollment rules?

Each Oversight Board would be required to have a student placement/advocate office to provide immediate access for parents and students encountering problems. Parents who believe their problem has not been appropriately resolved by the Oversight Board, would have the right to appeal to the Governing Board. The Governing Board would review the case to ensure that the appeal process at the Oversight Board was properly implemented. The review would be to determine adherence to process and not to reconsider the facts of the case.

What if a school wants to convert from direct-run to charter?

State law allows any traditional, direct-run school to apply to convert to a charter. The power to approve or reject a conversion charter application would reside with the Charter Oversight Board.

What if a school wants to convert from charter to direct-run?

A charter board could turn in its charter and request that the Direct-run Oversight Board operate the school.

How will rules and policies be enforced?

The Governing Board would have authority to issue warnings, require remediation plans, and impose sanctions on Oversight Boards. The strongest sanction would be to request the appointing authority to seat a new Oversight Board. Such a request would require the support of a two-thirds majority of the Governing Board.

In addition, all official board actions, whether by the Governing Board or one of the Oversight Boards, would take place in public. Public pressure is a strong motivator, and in the Return Model, citizens would have a better understanding of where responsibility for action or inaction resides than they do in the current system.

How will the Governing Board determine compliance with its rules and policies?

The Governing Board would evaluate the Oversight Boards' compliance with its rules and policies based on the overall performance of the portfolio of schools under each Oversight Board and not on the performance of one particular school.

What would the process be for reorganizing in compliance with the new model?

OPSB and RSD direct-run schools would come under the Direct-run Oversight Board. Charter schools, including OPSB types 1, 3, and 4 and RSD type 5s, would be transferred to the Charter Oversight Board, which would assume oversight of existing charter contracts.

The new model would become effective the year following legislation, e.g., if passed in 2012, it would take effect starting July 1, 2013.

What will become of the Recovery School District (RSD)?

The RSD will continue to exist as a state mechanism for taking over chronically failing schools, *i.e.*, schools that have been failing for four or more consecutive years. As such, it will continue to be empowered to take over chronically failing schools in any district, including Orleans.

Is there a way I can provide feedback on the Return Model?

Yes, go to the Return Model page of the Educate Now! website and [post a comment](#).