

THE IMPACT OF TEACHER QUALIFICATIONS ON STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT:
AN EXAMINATION OF SCHOOLS IN NEW ORLEANS PRE-
AND POST-HURRICANE KATRINA

By

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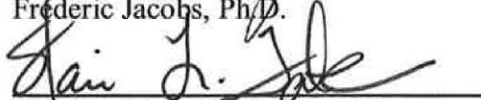
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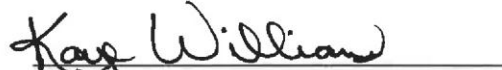
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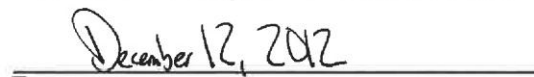

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To my older sister, Deidre Stewart, who tirelessly dedicates her professional
life to the education of children no matter the obstacles.

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ABSTRACT

One important outcome of the restructuring of the New Orleans school system post-Hurricane Katrina, and the subsequent performance of students, was an awareness that some fundamental premises in No Child Left Behind (NCLB) should be revisited. An examination of student performance in the restructured school system, for example, raised questions about the effect of teacher qualifications on students' performance. Implicit in the NCLB legislation was an assumption that teacher qualifications had a positive effect on student performance as measured by standardized tests. Using data from school records and scores on standardized tests, this assumption was examined and analyzed; allowing the researcher to address three research questions.

This quantitative descriptive study of nine New Orleans public schools under the Recovery School District control that existed both before and after Hurricane Katrina, provided evidence that as the number of highly qualified teachers decreased, student performance increased. The results of this study indicate that although NCLB legislation made the issue of teacher qualification a priority in improving student performance, the evidence of this study indicates that the NCLB definition of a highly qualified teacher did not have a strong effect on student performance.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ABELA	Approaching Basic English Language Arts Academic Performance
ABMATH	Approaching Basic Mathematics Academic Performance
AELA	Advanced English Language Arts Academic Performance
AFT	American Federation of Teachers
AMATH	Advanced Mathematics Academic Performance
BELA	Basic English Language Arts Academic Performance
BESE	Board of Elementary and Secondary Education
BMATH	Basic Mathematics Academic Performance
ELA	English Language ArtsHKS Hurricane Katrina Status
LEAP	Louisiana Educational Assessment Program
MELA	Mastery English Language Arts Academic Performance
MMATH	Mastery Mathematics Academic Performance
NCLB	No Child Left Behind Act
NHQT	NCLB Highly Qualified Teacher
OPSB	Orleans Parish School Board
PSD	Orleans Parish School District
RENEWAL	Renewing Education through Attracting America's Leaders
RSD	Recovery School District
SPS	School Performance Score
TFA	Teach for America
UELA	Unsatisfactory English Language Arts Academic Performance
UMATH	Unsatisfactory Mathematics Academic Performance

UTNO	United Teachers of New Orleans
VSC	Valid State Credentials

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In an interview on the cable network show, *Washington Watch with Roland Martin*, aired January 31, 2010, U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan sparked a controversy by claiming that “the best thing that happened to the education system in New Orleans was Hurricane Katrina” (Zehr, 2010, p. 12). Describing the pre-Katrina New Orleans school system as a “disaster,” Duncan commented that “it took Hurricane Katrina to wake up the community to say that we have to do better.” Duncan made it clear that in the years since the natural disaster, New Orleans schools had improved substantially. He praised the resilience of the school communities that were making “unbelievable” progress, concluding that “New Orleans is doing a phenomenal job of getting that system to an entirely new level.”

Duncan subsequently apologized for his poor choice of words in invoking Hurricane Katrina as the “best thing” to happen to the still recovering city. Before the apology, some New Orleans residents found the statement to be insensitive and offensive (Zehr, 2010). However, others came to Duncan’s defense, notably Paul G. Vallas, superintendent of the New Orleans Recovery School District (RSD, which oversees the schools that were taken over by the state before Hurricane Katrina) and Duncan’s former superior at the Chicago public school system. Vallas pointed out that the average standardized test scores of New Orleans students had improved for 2 consecutive years, whereas there was no discernible progress before Hurricane Katrina (Anderson, 2010).

Louisiana superintendent of education Paul Pastorek (2010) also came to Duncan’s defense, saying, “I know it’s a strong statement, but it’s actually quite accurate. It was a pathetic system before the storm” (p. A6). Tulane University President Scott S. Cowan called the pre-Katrina school system “one of the worst school systems in the country” (Schachter, 2006, p. 59).

From Cowen's perspective, "Katrina allowed us to start with a clean sheet of paper, so out of a great tragedy came a great opportunity" (p. 59).

Shannon L. Jones, executive director of the Cowen Institute, took issue with Secretary Duncan's comment that the residents of New Orleans needed a "wake up call" to improve their schools—as if they were apathetic to the state of their schools (Zehr, 2010). According to Jones, it was not a lack of caring but a lack of resources that precluded improving the schools. After Hurricane Katrina, city officials finally received the financial resources that they needed to invest in the school system.

Prior to Hurricane Katrina, "one of the worst school systems in the country" was changing. Due to financial issues, the State of Louisiana took over the school district's financial administration and hired a private contractor to manage the district's finances (Perry, 2006). In the spring of 2005, two thirds of the 127 New Orleans schools had been designated as failing schools (Bratt, Moore, & Reingold, 2008). Furthermore, prior to Hurricane Katrina, the state took over five New Orleans public schools that were considered to be "academically unsuccessful" from the Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB).

Two weeks into the beginning of the 2005–2006 school year, and as the school system geared up for new changes, Hurricane Katrina hit the city of New Orleans on August 29, 2005. In the wake of the storm most of the schools were submerged in water and many were totally ruined. School officials stated that the storm caused the New Orleans K–12 school system an estimated \$800 million in damages (Schachter, 2006). In the school year following Hurricane Katrina, the student population dropped from 60,000 to 12,500 students, the number of teachers who lost their jobs exceeded 7,000, and there was virtually nothing left of a central office of 1,200 employees.

In an effort to reopen the public schools of New Orleans and promote school reform, the Louisiana legislature was called into special session in November of 2005 to address the needs of the school districts severely impacted by Hurricane Katrina. During this special session, the legislature broadened the definition of a “failed” Louisiana school. The new definition, labeled schools as *failing*, if the school failed to achieve a minimum school performance score (SPS) for 4 consecutive years. Under the new classification, only five New Orleans schools remained under the control of the OPSB. The 122 remaining schools were designated as failing and placed under the control of the RSD, which was created by the state legislature in 2003 to manage the schools that were considered failing.

Some scholars envision the restructured New Orleans school system as a model program for other urban school districts throughout the United States (Dillon & Vail, 2006; Schachter, 2006; Vail, 2006). Others, such as Bratt et al. (2008), have criticized the two-system structure of the New Orleans school system as confusing and fragmented. In addition, organized groups, such as the United Teachers of New Orleans (UTNO), have voiced concerns about the lack of preparation and qualifications of teachers who are teaching in the new school system (Stelly, 2007). Also of note, one of the school system’s unique features is the increase in the number of charter schools in the city. Currently, New Orleans has the highest proportion of charter schools in the nation. As of 2009, 61% of New Orleans public-school students were enrolled in charter schools (Cowen, 2010). Before Hurricane Katrina there were about seven charter schools in the entire city (Perry, 2007).

Today, amid socioeconomic challenges worsened by devastating calamity, the new school system in New Orleans is showing signs of increased academic achievement. In fact, by 2008, fourth-graders posted scores that showed across the board growth in all subject matters on

the Louisiana Educational Assessment Program (LEAP) (Maxwell, 2008). Also, high school students taking the state graduation exit exam improved over the previous year (Maxwell, 2008). By 2009, the LEAP scores of RSD students in both charter and traditional schools showed even greater improvement in both English and math. Sixty percent of fourth-graders passed the test in 2009, compared with fifty-five percent the previous school year and forty-eight percent of eighth-graders passed, compared with forty-three percent the previous school year (Carr, 2009).

Statement of Purpose

For many years, a central debate in American education has been over just how much schools can do to improve the low rate of achievement, as measured by various standardized tests nationally, among the nation's poorest children in urban cities. Empirical evidence has shown that the restructuring of the New Orleans school system post-Hurricane Katrina substantially changed the school system, through a restructuring process that led to improved student achievement (Anderson, 2010). In order to understand the restructuring, this study examined how teacher qualifications, as defined by No Child Left Behind (NCLB), influenced student performance during school-reform efforts in New Orleans, Louisiana after Hurricane Katrina. For the purposes of this study, student achievement is measured by student performance results in ELA and mathematics on the LEAP, the instrument used as a state wide measure of academic progress in Louisiana. This study produced results that can help stakeholders, such as education policy makers and school administrators, better understand the restructuring of the school system.

Research Questions

Perhaps the most vital educational resource available to students is the school faculty. Studies have shown that teachers are important for student learning and school reform (e.g.,

Boyd, Lankford, Loeb, Rockoff, & Wyckoff, 2007). This study sought to understand the extent to which teacher qualifications, as determined by NCLB teacher certification provisions, accounted for pre- and post-Hurricane Katrina student achievement reported by Recovery School District (RSD) Schools in 2004 and 2008.

Implicit in the NCLB legislation was an assumption that teacher qualifications had a positive effect on student performance as measured by standardized tests. Using data from school records and scores on standardized tests, this assumption could be examined and analyzed; the research was organized to address the following questions:

1. What differences, if any, were there in the level of teacher qualifications between pre- and post-Hurricane Katrina in the selected schools?
2. What differences, if any, were there in student English Language Arts (ELA) academic performance between pre- and post-Hurricane Katrina, as measured by the LEAP test?
3. What differences, if any, were there in student math academic performance between pre- and post-Hurricane Katrina, as measured by the LEAP test?

Justification for Study

The aftermath of Hurricane Katrina is an extreme example of the need to quickly rebuild the teaching staff of an urban school district. In some respects, New Orleans is a microcosm of the issues that are endemic to urban schools. Although natural disasters are uncommon, administrators in many urban school districts are faced with a situation in which they desperately need to hire teachers but lack a deep pool of qualified candidates. In this way, the results from this study are informative for other urban school districts. Any results that establish a positive connection between changes in teacher composition and student achievement can be

incorporated into how school administrators and policy makers think about certain requirements, such as academic credentials and experience, as they hire prospective teachers.

It is particularly important to address the increase in student performance that occurred during the reform efforts of the New Orleans school system. The massive upheaval in the wake of Hurricane Katrina left the New Orleans school system with no systematic way of comparing standardized testing data from the fall and the spring of 2006-2007 school year (BCG, 2007). Additionally, the high rate of displacement among the community's students precluded comparing achievement data from before and after the hurricane. The 2008-2009 data used in this study serves as a baseline for examining the progress of student performance after that point. Also, the importance of understanding the changes made within the school system that led to student performance improvements should be examined in order to assist other school systems looking to make substantial changes.

It is also important to note that this study evolved from the researcher's personal life experiences and interactions, which have led to the development of her beliefs, ideas, opinions, and associations. As Heilman (2003) has explained, "new developments in theory are products of our intellectual history as well as our current cultures, countercultures, and concerns" (p. 248).

Significance of the Study

There is virtually no dispute that New Orleans educators, community leaders, policy makers, and politicians continue to have a formidable task in transforming a once persistently failing school system that was all but destroyed by Hurricane Katrina. Recent research has shown that the students in New Orleans RSD schools have made substantial gains in academic achievement over the last few years. Because several factors might have contributed to this

achievement growth, an in-depth look at teacher qualifications, as defined by NCLB, may provide some insight into best practices for hiring teachers in urban school systems.

Limitations of the Study

There were various limitations in this study that must be outlined in framing this research process and findings. First, the focus of the study was confined to nine schools in the New Orleans school district. For many, the number of schools may be viewed as a small population sample. Second, the research was limited to the use of secondary data, which left the researcher without control over the data quality. Not having control over the data quality leaves the researcher susceptible to mistakes that the initial researcher may have made. Third, grade specific data was not available for the state averages pertaining to certain school characteristics, which did not allow the researcher to have a complete picture of all characteristics of interest. Fourth, the narrow definition of teacher qualification, as defined by NCLB, is a limitation. Last, the researcher found a significant limitation of the study in terms of her own subjectivity, especially related to her theoretical and ideological goals of pursuing an improved process for school reform.

Definition of Terms

Based on the results from the LEAP test that is administered to students in grades three, five, six, seven and nine, students' *achievement levels* were grouped into five categories (Louisiana Department of Education, 2006). These five categories are used by the State to measure student performance statewide.

- *Unsatisfactory*: A student at this level has not demonstrated the fundamental knowledge and skills needed for the next level of schooling.

- *Approaching basic:* A student at this level has only partially demonstrated the fundamental knowledge and skills needed for the next level of schooling.
- *Basic:* A student at this level has demonstrated only the fundamental knowledge and skills needed for the next level of schooling.
- *Mastery:* A student at this level has demonstrated competency over challenging subject matter and is well prepared for the next level of schooling.
- *Advanced:* A student at this level has demonstrated superior performance beyond the mastery level.

A *failing school* is a school that does not achieve a minimum school-performance score per NCLB standards for 4 consecutive years (Louisiana Department of Education, 2006).

Highly qualified teachers, as defined by the NCLB Act, are teachers who have full state certification and have demonstrated content mastery in each core academic subject they teach. . In order to receive certification, all HQTs must pass the state academic subject test (PRAXIS) in each content area he/she is seeking certification.

Core classes include ELA, mathematics, science, social studies, and foreign-language courses in Grades 1 to 12 and arts courses in Grades 9 to 12. Louisiana issues standard teaching certificates (Type A, B or C Certificate; Level one, two or three Professional Certificate and; Out of State Certificate) and practitioner teacher licenses, as well as non-standard certificates (Temporary Authority to Teach, Out-of-Field Authority to Teach, Temporary Emergency Permits) and ancillary certificates, which authorizes the holder to perform only those services specifically stated on the certificate (Louisiana Department of Education, 2006).

A *recovery school district* is a state-run school district that oversees all schools defined as failing schools (Louisiana Department of Education, 2006).

Teachers who have *valid state credentials* are teachers who have obtained standard certificates and practitioner licenses (Louisiana Department of Education, 2006).

Organization of Study

This study examined pre- and post-Hurricane Katrina differences in teacher qualifications and the roles that teacher qualifications play in student achievement in a large urban education system in a recovery period after a natural disaster. Chapter One provided the general context of the issue by presenting the purpose of the study and the issues that it addressed. Chapter Two surveys the literature that provided the background for this study. Chapter Three focuses on the methodology that this study utilized to reveal the roles that teacher qualifications play in student achievement in a large urban education system during a recovery period after a natural disaster. Chapter Four analyzes the information obtained in Chapter Three and presents the findings. Chapter Five summarizes and interprets the key findings from this study. This chapter also presents implications and recommendations for improving policies and programs aimed at recruiting effective teachers.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Background

Bratt et al. (2008) aptly capture the feelings of most educators, researchers, and community members by stating, “New Orleans public schools have never been a model for educational achievement or equity” (p. 412). Just prior to Hurricane Katrina, for the 2004–2005 academic year, Louisiana was 46th in a national ranking of the “smartest” states and New Orleans was the state’s second lowest performing school district. Demographically, the composition of the New Orleans public schools was not representative of the local community. In 2005, Black individuals comprised 65% of the New Orleans population but 94% of the city’s public school students (Cowen, 2008). Nearly three quarters (73%) of the public school students qualified for free or reduced price meals, far surpassing the 40% of the city’s residents living below the poverty level. The proportion of New Orleans students attending private or parochial schools was three times higher than the national average for enrollment in private schools (BCG, 2007). Many New Orleans residents viewed the New Orleans public schools as “a school system of last resort” (Cowen, 2008, p. 9). By the 1990s, the public schools were heavily stratified by race and income with a concurrent gap in academic achievement. The selective admissions schools were among the few high performing public schools. Scott Cowen described pre-Hurricane Katrina New Orleans schools as “a system of haves and have nots” (Vail, 2006, p. 29).

Poor leadership and lax oversight are two factors implicated in the failing school system that existed before Hurricane Katrina (Adamo, 2007; BCG, 2007; Cowen, 2008; Miron, 2008). Between 1998 and 2005, the New Orleans school system had eight superintendents with an average duration of eleven months (BCG, 2007). The turnover rate was three times as high as the national turnover rate for urban superintendents. One reason behind the turnover was

ongoing conflict between the district superintendant and the “vocal and influential” OPSB (p. 8). Principals had minimal authority over building level issues such as staffing, curriculum, and budgeting, which are conventionally the domain of the school principal. Teachers had insufficient resources and the available professional development was largely irrelevant to the skills and competencies needed to advance students’ academic achievement.

In essence, the pre Hurricane Katrina New Orleans public schools were devoid of the qualities that drive high achievement among economically disadvantaged minority students such as excellent leadership, professional development aligned with teaching and learning, collegial collaboration, cohesive school structure, and input from school stakeholder groups (Billig, Jaime, Abrams, Fitzpatrick, & Kendrick, 2005; Chenowith, 2009; Darling-Hammond & Friedlaender, 2008; Stewart, 2008). High expectations for student success are another key feature of successful schools. Alexander (2007) described public perceptions of the New Orleans schools are “depressing and mired in hopelessness” (p. 18).

Further compounding the problem was rampant financial mismanagement. By 2005, the district was threatened with bankruptcy due to \$265 million of debt and annual revenues that fell short of the costs of operating the city’s schools (Cowen, 2008). Amidst the financial problems, the school buildings were rapidly deteriorating. Most had been built before 1950 and were in disrepair before being struck by Hurricane Katrina. In the words of one community member, “Poor-quality teachers, incompetent bureaucratic administration, nonexistent facility maintenance, dangerous environments, and lack of parental involvement all contributed to making New Orleans schools some of the worst in the nation” (BCG, 2007, p. 8). Miron (2008) characterizes the New Orleans public schools since the 1970s as engaged in “chronic educational reform, over and over again” (p. 241). Successive failed attempts at reform left the school

system “chronically broken.” (Miron is among those who share Duncan’s perspective that Hurricane Katrina provided the community with an unparalleled opportunity to overhaul the community’s badly failing schools.)

Ironically, there was some evidence of improvement in the time preceding Hurricane Katrina. Between 2002 and 2005, New Orleans schools experienced a 10-point gain in achievement although the scores were still well below the state average (Cowen, 2009a). At the beginning of 2005, five new members joined the OPSB (BCG, 2007). A substantial 79% of the schools showed improved scores on the 2004–2005 LEAP. A report by the Southern Education Foundation (SEF) called the gains made by fourth- and eighth-grade students for the years 2002–2005 the foundation for the improvements observed post Hurricane Katrina (Suitts, 2009).

The Post Hurricane Katrina New Orleans School System

The New Governance Structure

In November 2005, a special legislative session resulted in Act 35, which called for a state takeover of failing schools. Interestingly, Act 35 did not refer to New Orleans per se but rather to any Louisiana city with a population over 400,000, which focused it on New Orleans by default (Perry, 2007). Out of 128 OPSB schools, one hundred twelve schools were assigned to the state-run RSD (BCG, 2007). Before the passage of Act 35, schools could be taken over by the state if they had at least one of three criteria: (a) the school was “academically unacceptable,” meaning the School Performance Score (SPS) fell below a designated level and the local school board had not established a turnaround plan; (b) the school was academically unacceptable for four years in a row; and (c) the school was located in a district deemed “academically in crisis,” meaning there were more than four academically unacceptable schools or more than 30% of the district students attended schools deemed academically unacceptable. Act 35 expanded the

criteria for state takeovers to include schools with a baseline SPS score below the state average for schools in a district labeled academically in crisis.

In the spring of 2007, New Orleans had 58 public schools (BCG, 2007). The OPSB operated five traditional schools and twelve charters and the RSD operated twenty two traditional schools and seventeen charters. Two charter schools were under the jurisdiction of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE). The BESE charters represent Type 2 charters, one of the five types of charter schools educating New Orleans students. By the 2009–2010 school year there were 88 New Orleans public schools: 37 traditional schools and 51 charters (Cowen, 2010). With 61% of its students enrolled in charter schools, New Orleans far surpasses Washington, D.C., where 36% of the students attend charter schools, for the second highest charter enrollment.

By category, Type 1 New Orleans charter schools are new startups authorized by the local school board (Cowen, 2010). Type 2 charters can be either new startups or converted schools but are authorized by the BESE. Type 3 charters are conversion schools authorized by a local school board. Type 4 can be either startups or conversion schools and are authorized by BESE by the mechanism of a charter with a local school board. Type 5 charters are conversion schools authorized by the BESE through the RSD.

Student Demographics

Inequities based on race and income have historically fueled disparities in academic achievement in U.S. schools (Barton & Coley, 2009; Darling-Hammond, 2007). Between 1970 and 1979, the enrollment of White students in New Orleans public schools dropped by half (Cowen, 2008). Over the next two decades, a burgeoning Black middle class also left the public school system for private and parochial schools. Although Scott Cowen and his colleagues at the

Cowen Institute envision the evolution of an equitable school system, they acknowledge that there are marked demographic differences in the enrollment patterns of students in the OPSB and RSD schools. Researchers at the Institute on Race and Poverty (IRP, 2010) at the University of Minnesota Law School argue that the proliferation of charter schools is simply perpetuating racial segregation in New Orleans schools. Indeed, the question of whether charter schools benefit students who have been historically underserved by the schools or perpetuate existing achievement gaps based on race and class has been a point of heated debate since the 1990s (Frazier-Anderson, 2008; Scott & Villavicencio, 2009).

Writing in the *Times-Picayune*, Chang (2010) noted the disagreement between the IRP and the Cowen Institute over whether charter schools are beneficial or detrimental to economically disadvantaged Black students. The IRP (2010) report includes a detailed rebuttal of the Cowen arguments. However, Chang (2010) points out that the two sides agree on certain critical issues: the overwhelming majority of New Orleans public school students are Black and poor and most attend schools with classmates who share their sociodemographic profiles.

For the 2009–2010 school year, Black students made up 90% of all New Orleans public school students (Cowen, 2010). According to school type, Black students represented 93% of the students in OPSB-run schools, 69% of the students in OPSB charters, 97% of the students in RSD-run schools, 96% of the students in RSD charters, and 68% of the students in Type 2 charters. Poor students, classified according to eligibility for receiving free or reduced price meals accounted for 82% of all New Orleans students. The heaviest concentrations of poor students were in the RSD charter schools (90%) and RSD-run schools (88%). Poor students represented 63% of the students in OPSB charters, 78% of the students in OPSB-run schools, and 70% of the students in Type 2 charter schools.

The IRP (2010) uses the term “tiered” system to describe the New Orleans schools, implying that the schools are not only differently classified but inequitable. Their report points out that in 2009, 87% of the White students were enrolled in an OPSB or BESE charter school versus eighteen (18%) of the Black students. The percentages were reversed for the RSD schools (charter and traditional), which enrolled 75% of the Black students and eleven (11%) of the White students. Furthermore, almost all of the RSD schools were high-poverty schools.

The main argument voiced by the IRP (2010) researchers is that the selective admissions policies of OPSB and BESE schools enable them to choose students who are already academically advantaged and provide them with a superior learning environment. They also claim that the OPSB and BESE schools, as well as the RSD charter schools, maintain their advantage via school discipline and expulsion policies, transportation policies, choice of location, and marketing and recruitment practices. These practices leave the traditional RSD schools as “schools of last resort” (p. 4). The Cowen Institute does not deny that assertion. The 2007 report acknowledged that the RSD-run schools educate students dismissed from OPSB or charter schools due to poor academic performance or expulsion (BCG, 2007). Many community members view the RSD schools as an “unofficial ‘dumping ground’ for students with behavioral or academic challenges” (p. 13). On the other hand, they elaborate on the positive qualities of the OPSB-run schools and charter schools that offer their students specialized and advanced courses lacking in many traditional urban schools.

Ironically, there are many points on which the Cowen Institute and the IRP researchers concur. The role of charter schools in the New Orleans school system is the main point of disagreement. The IRP researchers accuse the charter schools of “predatory expansion” in drawing more desirable students and thus creating a more conducive learning environment (IRB,

2010, p. 5). Interestingly, while charters are often accused of siphoning higher achievers and better behaved students, parents whose children are experiencing difficulties in traditional public schools often seek out charters as a preferable way of addressing their educational needs (Bohte, 2004). Some New Orleans officials reacted to the IRP report by stating that rather than criticizing OPSB schools as “elitist,” lower performing schools should strive to emulate their success (Chang, 2010).

In reality, the New Orleans schools are actually less segregated by race now than they were before Hurricane Katrina, a fact acknowledged in the IRP (2010) report. Nevertheless, the enrollment patterns in the OPSB and RSD schools disclose ongoing differences according to race and income. In 2008, nearly three-quarters of White New Orleans students were enrolled in the OPSB selective admissions schools (Suitts, 2009). Overall, two-thirds of the city’s White students were enrolled in three selective admissions schools: Benjamin Franklin High School, probably the highest performing school in Louisiana and one of the nation’s top ranked high schools, and two new selective admissions charter schools, Lusher Charter School and Audubon Charter School. These three schools were also the only New Orleans schools where less than half the students qualified for free or reduced price meals.

According to Tom Luce, author of the IRP report, the issue of school segregation needs to be addressed directly (Chang, 2010). The SEF also argues that New Orleans may be undermining its own progress by disregarding the practices enabling individual public schools—charter and traditional—to self-select students largely based on their academic achievement, a practice that “primarily translates to race and income” (Suitts, 2009, p. 33). Both sources contend that these practices will further disadvantage students that have been historically underserved by public schools in the South.

Post-Hurricane Katrina Academic Achievement

The massive upheaval in the wake of Hurricane Katrina left the New Orleans schools with no systematic way of comparing LEAP data from the fall and the spring of the 2006–2007 school year (BCG, 2007). Additionally, the high rate of displacement among the community’s students precluded comparing achievement data from before and after Hurricane Katrina. Instead, the 2006–2007 data serve as a baseline for examining progress after that point. According to the authors, “the introduction of school choice, the expansion of school-based autonomy and accountability, and the increased emphasis on capacity building” provide the foundation for improving the city’s public schools (p. 23).

According to the academic achievement data released by the Cowen Institute (2009a), if New Orleans had remained a unified school district, the district performance of 66.4 for the 2007–2008 academic year would represent a gain of almost ten points over the 56.9 reported for 2004–2005. On the negative side, the score still falls below the state performance score of 86.3, but it nonetheless shows evidence of substantial improvement.

Differences between the performance scores of the RSD schools and the OPSB schools highlight the existing inequities. The 2007–2008 performance score for the RSD schools was 51.4, below the 2004–2005 score for the district, while the OPSB score was an impressive 96.1, surpassing the average score for the state (Cowen, 2009a). With respect to the question of charter schools versus traditional schools, both the OPSB charters and the RSD charters outperformed the traditional schools in their respective districts. While the selective admissions practices of OPSB charters plays a role in their superior performance, the RSD charters have no similar policies, but still outperformed the traditional schools. In addition, parents of students in the RSD charters expressed higher satisfaction with their children’s schools than parents of children in RSD-run schools. Teachers in RSD charters displayed the same pattern of higher

satisfaction. The overall effect implies that the RSD charters are perceived to be doing a better job of educating their students.

Despite the lower overall scores of the RSD schools compared to the OPSB schools, the RSD schools improved at a higher rate between the 2006–2007 and 2007–2008 academic years (Cowen, 2009a). The RSD schools have the challenge of dealing with higher rates of student mobility and educating a higher proportion of students receiving special education services. Most special education students take the same assessment tests as their non-special education peers, but on average earn lower scores. As far as the impact of student mobility, the RSD schools with the most stable school populations had the highest performance scores.

Vallas noted that approximately 85% of the 12,500 RSD students began the 2007–2008 school year reading at least 2 years below grade level (Maxwell, 2008). The most positive progress was made by fourth graders in English/language arts and mathematics LEAP performance scores. Eighth graders also showed improvement on LEAP scores. However, the test scores also revealed ample room for improvement. Roughly one third of the fourth-grade students failed the language arts (32%) and mathematics (35%) assessments. Among eighth graders, 34% failed language arts and 41% failed mathematics. Boosting mathematics scores remains a significant challenge. Mathematics is the only subject for which declines were observed although some RSD-run high schools that had previously had very low math scores exhibited remarkable gains (Carr, 2009). The RSD-run high schools are the lowest performing schools in New Orleans (Cowen, 2009a).

School Stakeholders' Perspectives

Educators

United teachers of New Orleans. Pre Hurricane Katrina, the make-up of the teaching body in New Orleans was comprised of teachers who were members of UTNO. Historically, since the formation of UTNO, a labor union representing teachers and other education workers in New Orleans, in 1937, the relationship between the Union and New Orleans public schools has been strained. For two decades prior to Hurricane Katrina, parents and policy makers began to question the quality of education provided by the members of UTNO. During the 1990s and early 2000s, New Orleans public school students tested among the lowest on mathematics, reading and science standardized tests, as well as low graduation rates and high dropout rates. UTNO countered that New Orleans public school students suffered from the common ills of society and an underfunded school system. However critics of UTNO stated that the Union and its collective bargaining agreement protected bad teachers and hence played a significant role in student achievement.

Post Hurricane Katrina, UTNO, once the largest union in Louisiana, was almost completely destroyed. The Union, in disarray after Hurricane Katrina, and impacted by the implementation of Act 35, which did not enforce the RSD to honor the collective bargaining agreement between OPSB and UTNO, could not prevent OPSB from firing all public school teachers and other city education personnel on January 31 (Shelly, 2007). This provided a deafening blow to the Union. In an effort to revitalize the Union and support its members, the Union's leadership filed lawsuits against the OPSB and issued reports favoring job placements for its members.

Notably, in November 2006, UTNO, the Louisiana Federation of Teachers, and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) issued a report expressing skepticism of the purported

goal of the state takeover of New Orleans schools to turn the RSD into a “world-class school system in which every decision focuses on the best interests of the children” (cited in Stelly, 2007, p. 23). The teachers’ organizations expressed two major points of concern. First, the creation of the two-district system added to the confusion in the first year after Hurricane Katrina. This effect was short-lived. Second, and more important, the report stated that the state takeover of the majority of New Orleans schools was conducted without soliciting input from parents, students, educators, and other constituents. The teachers stated that any attempts to create meaningful, positive change would probably fail unless the new policies reflected the concerns of school stakeholders. Nevertheless, the majority of parents and community members were optimistic about the changes transforming the New Orleans schools (BCG, 2007).

New educators. A particularly sensitive issue for UTNO was the decision to dismiss almost all of the 7,500 New Orleans school personnel (Stelly, 2007). One result was that the RSD-run schools struggled to recruit a sufficient number of teachers, which forced state officials to lower teacher qualifications in order to staff the schools. Another sensitive issue was that before Hurricane Katrina, 85% of the teachers were Black, essentially mirroring the composition of the student population (Perry, 2007). Many teachers were placed on “disaster leave,” a label used to enable the teachers to collect unemployment. More than half the teachers were veterans with more than twenty years of teaching thus making them eligible for retirement. With help from the federal RENEWAL (Renewing Education through Attracting America’s Leaders) legislation, the RSD began hiring teachers from education organizations such as Teach for America (TFA) and the New Teacher Project. According to Dr. Stelly, the replacement of veteran Black teachers with new graduates of TFA and the New Teacher Project (primarily White teachers) would signify a major shift in culture as well as teaching experience.

By fall 2007, TFA had supplied 115 new corps members, 95 of them teaching in New Orleans schools, with plans for bringing close to 200 new teachers the following year (Robelen, 2007). TFA enlists a select group of top ranking college graduates for two-year teaching positions in low-income schools. The inexperience and teaching credentials of the TFA teachers, and their typically short tenure in city schools raises issues of their effectiveness in teaching low-income urban students (Darling-Hammond, Holtzman, Gatlin, & Heilig, 2005). However, evidence from New York City schools suggests that the TFA teachers provide an academic advantage to the students they serve (Boyd et al., 2007).

The New Teacher Project sponsors the TeachNOLA initiative, which brought 177 new teachers (including a sizable number of professionals switching to teaching for a second career) to the New Orleans traditional public and charter schools (Robelen, 2007). The RSD and most of the charter schools also embarked on massive recruitment initiatives. Some of the schools reported a diverse mix of teachers including veterans, young novices, and career changers. For many schools, most of the new hires came from outside of Louisiana, a move criticized by teachers who warned of a mismatch in culture between teachers and students (Perry, 2007).

Unions and new educators. Clashes between the teachers unions and school officials who recruited new teachers were inevitable. While the report by the teachers unions claimed that there is a powerful association between experienced teachers and superior academic performance, Robelen (2007) noted that a state-authorized Louisiana study found that novice teachers can perform at least as effectively as their more experienced colleagues. The report concluded that students taught science, mathematics, and social studies by teachers from three alternative certification programs performed equally well or surpassed students taught by experienced public school teachers. Having good educational preparation is invariably linked

with effective teaching (Darling-Hammond et al., 2005; NCATE, 2006). However, experience per se is an unreliable index of teacher performance. There are numerous factors involved in teachers' effectiveness (Berry, 2010).

Highlighting the ongoing debate over teaching experience, two leaders of traditional New Orleans schools expressed dramatically different opinions. One principal complained that, "A lot of the new teachers have only undergone six weeks of training, and it is unrealistic to ask them to be effective in the classroom. They are not familiar with content and delivery, or with the culture and background of the students" (Cowen, 2010, p. 25). The second principal, who primarily worked with "career veterans," who were highly resistant to adopting new teaching strategies, described TFA teachers as "wonderful, eager to learn, and did whatever it took for kids to succeed" (p. 25). According to this school leader, "New teachers need support but I would rather work with them than with veterans who can't change their ways." Over time, the early reliance on new teachers dissipated.

As the two comments illustrate, for some principals the shift toward more experienced teachers was a welcome change while for others it was a step backwards. Advocates of recruiting new teachers and teachers from alternative certification programs pointed out that staffing New Orleans schools with high quality, credentialed teachers was a serious problem before Hurricane Katrina (Robelen, 2007).

According to the most recent Cowen Institute (2010) survey, more than half of the voting public (54%) and 68% of school parents credit new teachers with improving education in New Orleans schools. Only 17% of each group expressed disagreement. According to the authors, there is anecdotal evidence suggesting that high teacher turnover remains a problem due to

challenging working conditions. However, there are no reliable data on the issue. More schools report having a mixture of teachers with differing levels of experience.

Beabout et al. (2008) conducted a qualitative exploration of New Orleans educators' perceptions of the transformation of New Orleans schools after Hurricane Katrina, augmenting the interview data with archival data. The interview participants were five teachers, four principals, and one school-board member. Notably, the researchers used chaos theory as the framework for their study. While the concept seems uniquely suited to New Orleans in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, Beabout et al. view chaos theory as suited for examining urban school reform in general. In particular, they find the concept of *strange attractors* especially pertinent. A strange attractor is "a picture of a system that bounds its seemingly erratic function" (p. 215). Despite the apparent unpredictability of the system's operation from one minute to the next, "the strange attractor acts as a sort of fence that reins in the system's behavior" (p. 215). Another relevant concept from chaos theory is *morphic fields*, which relates to "culture, vision, and values as fields that shape the behavior of members of organizations" (p. 215). For example, schools that successfully educate economically disadvantaged and minority students have cultures committed to high academic performance and prosocial behavior (Billig et al., 2005). Beabout et al. (2008) noted that with new teachers, principals, and students, most New Orleans schools have a unique opportunity to refashion their fields (or culture) to positive advantage. Fields can either advance or inhibit innovation and change.

Three themes predominated in the participants' comments: the culture of uncertainty that marked New Orleans in 2005 and 2006, a fusion of cynicism and hope for the future, and the absence of revolutionary change (Beabout et al., 2008). A particularly illustrative finding was that beyond the chaos generated by Hurricane Katrina, many of the challenges reported by the

educators paralleled those that existed before Hurricane Katrina. Not surprisingly, the preponderance of charter schools emerged as a cause of uncertainty. The teachers desired the “assurance” and “consistency” they were accustomed to but that no longer existed under the new system (p. 222).

The absence of a cohesive school culture, student discipline problems, and the burden of having to take on additional tasks to aid the school’s survival were prominent concerns that Beabout et al. (2008) observed were common problems before Hurricane Katrina. According to the researchers, the comments of the teachers and principals demonstrate how the focus of educators is altered when a school is in a state of transition. An apparent problem was that the teachers and principals had different views of the situation. To teachers, having to take on extra tasks was symbolic of a workplace in disarray. To a principal, teachers were “stepping up to the plate” (p. 224).

A common perspective among the participants was that the new system would lead to further stratification of New Orleans students, with teachers and higher performing students leaving the RSD-run schools for charters and OPSB schools (Beabout et al., 2008). The charters have to be renewed after the 2010-2011 school year, but the controversy over inequities in the dual system of operating New Orleans schools is unlikely to be resolved in the near future. The inequities were already deeply entrenched in the city’s schools by 2005. Prior to Hurricane Katrina, magnet schools played a similar role to charter schools in drawing higher performing students. One of the IRP (2010) recommendations is to invest more in magnet schools rather than charters.

When the plans were made for rebuilding the New Orleans schools, some educators envisioned a return to the city’s schools by the White and more affluent students who had left the

public schools in the last decades (Beabout et al., 2008). However, it was soon evident that the schools largely reverted to the demographic composition they had before Hurricane Katrina. Based on the comments of many New Orleans stakeholders in the professional literature and the popular media, it is not surprising that many came to Secretary Duncan's defense over his remark about Hurricane Katrina being the "best thing" to happen to New Orleans' troubled schools. Some of the criticism came not from the clumsy choice of words but rather because the problems that plagued the old system (specifically, poverty and low academic performance) could not be eradicated by a new governance structure. According to Beabout et al., teachers who were familiar with the New Orleans school saw unrealistic optimism in the idea that "the literal washing away of the poorly functioning system would allow for a rebirth of a system that had tarnished the city's reputation for decades" (p. 228).

One residual effect of the old school system was that soliciting parents' involvement and forging a partnership between schools and families remained a formidable challenge (Beabout et al., 2008). Schools that successfully involve parents invest heavily in reaching out to families and community members (Sheldon, 2007). Beabout et al. (2008) observed a glaring absence of references suggesting that the schools were making efforts to involve families. According to the researchers, unless the schools actively address weak points, such as parent involvement, they are likely to revert to the entrenched practices of the old school system. Parent involvement has improved somewhat since Hurricane Katrina but still remains low (Suitts, 2009).

One promising change observed by the participants was that there was far more attention to school reform by the general public. Invoking the concept of morphic fields, Beabout et al. (2008) noted that school culture could transcend conventional boundaries and create bonds between teachers and students who came from different schools or communities but who shared

a vision of changing a dysfunctional school system. When Beabout et al. conducted the study, the participants were still recovering from the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina (many had lives disrupted and suffered personal losses) and the new school system was still in its infancy. The study illustrated the challenges faced by educators striving to transform one of the nation's worst school systems. The most recent data on academic performance documenting substantial gains by New Orleans students is still tempered by the reality that despite the impressive progress, sizable proportions of fourth, eighth, and twelfth graders are still performing below grade level and there is a huge gap in performance between the OPSB and the RSD-run schools (Cowen, 2009a, 2010; IRP, 2010; Suitts, 2009).

Community members and parents. In a collaborative effort, the Orleans Public Education Network (OPEN) and the Loyola Institute for Quality and Equity in Education (2010) issued a report entitled *The Value of Community Voice in Shaping the Future of Public Education*. The authors noted that according to two important public opinion surveys, a majority of community voters felt that the New Orleans schools were better in 2009 than they were before Hurricane Katrina. One survey sponsored by the Council for a Better Louisiana (CABL) asked respondents whether the schools should be returned to the control of the OPSB. The largest segment, 45%, answered no, followed by 21% who thought they should be returned within one to two years and 17% who thought they should be returned within three to five years. The second survey was conducted by the Cowen Institute (2010) and comprised of registered voters and public school parents. While most respondents expressed positive support for the education reforms, they were “still waiting for the reforms to bear significant fruit” (p. 13).

Noting that the five-year period of state control of the RSD ends after the 2010- 2011 school year, OPEN and Loyola (2010) emphasized the importance of including diverse

stakeholder groups in the decisions over school governance. The authors envision a “more inclusive and democratic policymaking process” (p. 8). School choice was a first important step in the process and is supported by virtually all respondents in the Cowen Institute (2009b) survey of how voters and parents perceive public education.

According to the 2008 Cowen Institute report, most focus group members (teachers, principals, students, and community leaders) saw improvements in the quality of teachers and principals and in school learning environment, leading to higher student engagement. The authors described the views of school stakeholders as reflecting a “cautious optimism” (p. 32). Overall, 71% of the respondents felt that the public schools would be better in the future.

While much of the debate over New Orleans schools focuses on the proliferation of charters, the expansion of charter schools occurred within the broader issue of school choice. The new system of governance eliminated the attendance zones that existed before Hurricane Katrina (Cowen, 2009b). A 2009 Cowen Institute survey focused entirely on issues related to school choice. The participants included 600 randomly chosen registered voters and more than 300 parents of children attending public schools (including all types of charter and traditional schools).

Virtually all the parents, 99%, regard it as important to be able to choose their child’s school and 75% felt it was important to have the choice of enrolling their child at the neighborhood school (Cowen, 2009b). Close to two-thirds of the parents, 63%, awarded their child’s school a grade of an A or a B. However, significant differences emerged depending upon the type of the school the child attended. The proportion of charter school parents who gave the school an A or B was significantly higher than the proportion of traditional school parents, 82% versus 48%. Only 3% of charter school parents gave their child’s school a D or F grade versus

17% of traditional school parents. Among the parents who were unsure about how they would grade the child's school 77% were traditional school parents.

Similar proportions of parents agreed that they had access to information about various school options, 62%, and that they had "good options" to choose from when they made the decision, 66%. One distinction was that the least educated parents (without a high school degree) were most likely to feel that sufficient information was available to them, 84%. This may suggest that more educated parents were more critical of the quality or amount of available information.

Two thirds of parents and voters agreed that the state made the right decision in taking control of most of the New Orleans schools (Cowen, 2009b). However, there was a notable difference based on race, with 57% of Black voters agreeing compared to 80% of voters from all other ethnic groups. Although support for charter schools was generally high, Black voters were less likely than other voters to agree that charter schools had improved education in New Orleans, 64% versus seventy 77%. Parents were much more positive than voters that new teachers were improving the quality of education, 68% versus 54%.

Parents and Black voters expressed the most positive support for school choice, with 88% of each group agreeing that school choice was good, and even higher proportions of voters, 99% and parents, 96%, strongly favored the right of families to enroll their children in neighborhood schools (Cowen, 2009b). Despite the positive support for school reforms, there was less endorsement of the idea that schools had improved since Hurricane Katrina. Only 24% of Black voters felt the schools had improved compared to 44% of other voters. More than half the Black voters (56%) felt the schools were about the same as they had been before Hurricane Katrina, and 20% thought the schools were better before Hurricane Katrina. Among parents, 90% of

whom were Black, 31% thought the schools had improved since Hurricane Katrina. Notably, far fewer parents than voters were unsure about whether the schools had improved: 6% versus 20%.

A sizable majority of voters (71%) and the overwhelming majority of parents (80%) disagreed with the statement that the public schools had enough money to provide all students with a good education (Cowen, 2009b). The SEF strongly criticizes the federal government for “delayed and grossly insufficient” support for rebuilding New Orleans schools (Suitts, 2009, p. 31). The Cowen (2009b) survey noted the challenge that arises when there is a need for additional funding: despite the common belief that the schools had inadequate financial resources to educate students, only half the respondents said they would be willing to pay more taxes to support the schools. Blacks were more inclined to agree that the schools needed more money to educate low-income students than other voters: 52% versus 32%. The current level of school spending has been described as unsustainable, but it is still insufficient to cover the costs of rebuilding schools that were physically destroyed and academically failing.

Of importance to note is that the findings of the Cowen Institute (2009b) diverged from a survey conducted by Democracy Corps, in which half the respondents felt the schools were improving, 25% felt the schools were the same, and 17% felt they were getting worse. The difference may be due to the different wording used in each survey: the Cowen survey asked how respondents view the current state of the schools and the Democracy Corps survey asked whether they felt the schools were “getting better.”

Charter Schools

From their roots in Minnesota in 1991, charter schools have since become part of the educational landscape of forty states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico (Scott & Villavicencio, 2009). In 2008, more than one million students attended classes in roughly 4000

charter schools. Yet despite apparently strong support from the general public, charter schools are a major point of contention among educational researchers. The educational progress of charter school students and their comparison to students attending traditional public schools is a consistent focus of research. However, two issues remain unresolved: how the performance of charter schools actually measures up in comparison to traditional schools and how best to undertake such comparisons. These issues drew particular attention in 2004 when the AFT published a report claiming that charter school students performed less well than their traditional school peers. Proponents of charter schools quickly defended them, but educational researchers acknowledged that the overall performance of charter schools has been mixed. There is tremendous diversity among both charter and traditional schools thus making comparisons extremely complicated even with rigorous research methods.

According to Scott and Villavicencio (2009), qualitative studies offer an effective forum for illuminating such factors as why families choose charter schools and what specific features of charters attract them. School culture (including ethnic composition), small size, and safety are among the key reasons that families favor charter schools. For families of school-age children, non-academic factors often outweigh academic performance in the choice of a charter school. The emphasis is not unwarranted. In particular, Black students who feel a sense of belonging to the school and have good relationships with teachers and peers are most inclined to be involved in their schoolwork and earn higher grades (Stewart, 2008). Large class size and an impersonal, uncaring school environment are among the factors implicated in the lower academic achievement of economically disadvantaged students (Barton & Coley, 2009). Despite the rich information provided by qualitative research, some charter school researchers are only interested

in quantitative evidence of academic achievement and tend to downgrade the factors that are important to charter school students and families (Scott & Villavicencio, 2009).

Scott and Villavicencio (2009) conducted an extensive review of the charter school literature, including a synthesis of primarily qualitative and mixed methods studies, in order to create a framework for understanding the myriad of facts that affect student performance. Three key findings emerged from the exploration. First, most of the studies of charter school student achievement used only statistical measures. Second, there is a racial achievement gap within the charter schools sector that is neglected in cross-sector comparison studies. Third, most achievement studies broadly compare “charters” and “traditional public schools,” neglecting the dynamic forces affecting schools within and across each sector.

Since their inception, charter schools have been a topic of heated debate. Critics originally contended that charter schools would draw White and more affluent students seeking to “escape diversity” (Scott & Villavicencio, 2009, p. 228). In reality, charter schools have proved especially attractive to Black and economically disadvantaged families. Issues of race and socioeconomic status are intensified in New Orleans where there are notable differences in the demographics of students attending the RSD traditional public and charter schools and the OPSB schools, which include schools with selective admissions policies based on academic achievement (Suitts, 2009). Roughly twice the proportions of poor and Black students attend the RSD charter and traditional schools as attend the OPSB selective admissions schools. At the same time, the marked improvements in LEAP scores show that these students have made substantial progress over the last three years. While acknowledging that there is still a long way to go, Superintendent Vallas observed that the progress made by the RSD schools is narrowing

the achievement gap between RSD schools and other Louisiana school districts. According to Vallas, “In some cases, the gap is closing dramatically” (Carr, 2009).

One of the issues Scott and Villavicencio (2009) examine is the quality of the charter school teaching force. Research suggests that teachers in charter schools populated by economically disadvantaged and minority students tend to be less experienced and have fewer teaching credentials. However, one can argue that this trend reflects the allocation of teachers in the nation’s public schools in general. Differences in the socioeconomic composition of OPSB and RSD charters parallel the overall pattern in charter school enrollment in the U.S. Scott and Villavicencio’s view of charter schools is especially relevant to the situation in New Orleans. According to the authors, “Charter schools may be one of the few politically viable tools left for improving the outcomes of traditionally disadvantaged students” (p. 240). They call on policy makers to support charter schools in creating “educational environments that are diverse, highly resourced, and of high academic quality.

Frazier-Anderson (2008) expresses a similar perspective with specific respect to the New Orleans charter schools. To Frazier-Anderson, properly managed charter schools offer a vehicle for providing a practical alternative to the academic and accountability issues that marred the city’s schools before Hurricane Katrina. She views the success of charter schools as contingent on several factors including sufficient resources, effective management, a rigorous accountability system, and teaching and learning designed to address the needs of the students and resulting in positive educational outcomes. She also cautions that the individuals entrusted with the task of creating effective charter schools must be resilient and dedicated to their educational vision, and must always keep in mind that their top priority is serving the needs of New Orleans children. According to Frazier-Anderson, the paramount concerns on which all decisions should be based

are the children's "needs and best interests" as opposed to "adults' economic, political, or social agendas" (p. 425).

One of the questions arising in the context of charter schools is the impact of charter schools on the academic performance of traditional public schools. Schools have adopted several strategies for addressing the competition created by charter schools (Bohte, 2004). One response is to replace school superintendents and principals that are resistant to change with others who will act as change agents to implement innovations in the traditional schools. Another prevalent response to charters is changing the school curriculum or developing novel academic programs. Both of these strategies suggest that the presence of charters has a positive impact on traditional schools by stimulating innovation.

Teacher Quality and Effectiveness

According to Berry (2010), defining "quality" and "effectiveness" in teaching and teacher education is far more complicated than the examination of one or two factors. In particular, the drive to improve teaching quality in high-needs schools must consider the teachers' working conditions. Conditions that contribute to effective teaching include ensuring that teachers are not teaching out of field, providing teachers with sufficient time to collaborate with colleagues and discuss educational issues, providing teachers with useful feedback about their teaching, and assuring that teachers can readily access materials, technology, and information.

It is impossible to ignore working conditions in the context of the New Orleans schools. In the first years after Hurricane Katrina, poor working conditions were a major source of stress for teachers (Beabout et al., 2008). Anecdotal reports suggest that poor working conditions are still driving teacher turnover (Cowen, 2010). In a particularly relevant study, Cannata and Penaloza (2008) analyzed the interactions between teachers' working conditions and

qualifications, school choice, and students' academic progress. The data were drawn from a sample of schools that had engaged in collaboration with the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) in order to monitor student achievement via adaptive assessments in mathematics, reading and language arts each spring and fall semester. The sample, in which schools were matched according to characteristics included charter, magnet, private, and traditional public schools. The variables examined included the teachers' certification, experience, degree, professional development, and work context. Work context included the total number of students the teacher taught each week, the percentage of special education students, the proportion of English language learners (ELLs), and the type of class structure (departmental or subject specialist, self-contained classroom typical of elementary school, team teaching, or pull-out class). The researchers also explored the extent that the teachers had input in school decisions.

Overall, the study highlighted the complexity of factors that influence teachers' effectiveness. Relatively few attributes of the teachers, their work contexts, or their assignments were associated with students' academic achievement gains (Cannata & Penaloza, 2008). Teachers who had more influence in school decisions had students who made greater progress in language use. Teachers in self-contained classrooms produced greater achievement gains in reading than teachers whose instruction was departmentalized, even after controlling for the differences in grade level.

A particularly intriguing finding was that the effects of involvement in reform model professional development and active learning professional development activities differed according to school type (Cannata & Penaloza, 2008). Reform model professional development had a favorable influence on mathematics achievement for the students of charter school

teachers, but a negative impact for teachers in non-charter schools. The researchers proposed that charter school teachers may be engaging in activities such as consulting with colleagues, exchanging feedback, or mentorship in a different manner than other teachers, which in turn, results in higher performance gains. In fact, even apart from teachers' professional development activities, the charter school students exhibited the greatest gains in reading, mathematics, and language use compared to students attending magnet, private, or traditional public schools.

Klecker (2008) used data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) to examine the relationship between teachers' qualifications and students' performance on eighth-grade math assessment. Using the framework for teacher quality outlined in NCLB, the analysis showed that the NCLB qualification "major or minor in mathematics" had a small, positive effect on student performance. The difference between having a major or minor in mathematics was negligible. With regard to degree, the only statistically significant ($p < .01$) difference was between possessing a professional degree and an associate degree or vocational certification. The differences between the test performance of students whose teachers had baccalaureate or master's degree or a master's degree and educational specialist degree reached statistical significance but with such small effect sizes that they were practically insignificant.

A contradictory finding was that teachers who had no certification, as well as those who had regular or standard certification had students who displayed the highest mathematics performance (Klecker, 2008). Students whose teachers held a temporary certificate had the lowest scores while the effect size was largest for teachers with regular or standard certification. In terms of teachers' experience, veteran teachers (>20 years of teaching experience) elicited the highest test performance from their students. The analysis demonstrated that more years of teaching experience translated into higher eighth-grade mathematics performance.

In contrast to Klecker's (2008) findings, Leana and Pil (2006) found that years of teaching experience was linked with students' performance in reading but not mathematics. The researchers suggested that the numerous reforms math education has undergone may neutralize any advantage for teaching experience. The two studies used very different approaches and datasets. Leana and Pil utilized data from schools of all grade levels and included examination of internal social capital (relationships among teachers) and external social capital (relationships between the principal and external stakeholders). Both internal and external capital proved to be important contributors to student achievement and both were linked with the quality of classroom instruction. Social capital exerted a direct influence on reading achievement but the effect on mathematics achievement was indirect, through the mechanism of instructional quality.

Clotfelter, Ladd, and Vigdor (2010) investigated the effects of teachers' credentials on the academic performance of North Carolina high school students. The study focused on four cohorts of tenth-grade students, spanning the years from the fall of 1999 to the spring of 2003. The analysis revealed that the difference between having a "weak" or a "strong" mathematics teacher was roughly 0.23 standard deviation of the student test score distribution, a figure slightly larger than the 0.20 effect size that is typically classified as small or moderate in educational research.

Of all the credentials of high school teachers examined, subject specific licensure and certification in English and mathematics emerged as the strongest predictor of academic performance on the state assessments (Clotfelter et al., 2010). National Board Certification was also associated with positive outcomes, and at least during the first year of teaching, teachers with regular licenses were more effective than lateral entry teachers. Clotfelter et al. also analyzed the distribution of teachers with different credentials. High-poverty schools had higher

proportions of novice teachers, teachers from less competitive colleges, and teachers with non-standard licenses. Teachers in high-poverty schools were also likely to have the lowest test scores and to lack board certification. In short, the findings confirmed that the students with the greatest need for highly qualified teachers are most likely to be taught by those with the lowest qualifications (Darling-Hammond, 2007).

Teacher Preparation

The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE, 2006) synthesized findings from research on teacher preparation. According to the authors, effective preparation has two key components: “*teacher knowledge of the subject to be taught, and knowledge and skill in how to teach that subject [original emphases]*” (p. 1). In other words, effective teachers have a strong content knowledge base and are adept at applying that knowledge to teaching. The NCATE emphasizes that well-designed field experiences are essential for advancing new teachers’ competence. Strong educational preparation also has an indirect benefit: it increases retention among new teachers. Poorly prepared teachers (such as teachers who have emergency licenses) often become frustrated and may blame their students for poor academic performance. The effects of teacher preparation are most apparent for math education. Schools with higher proportions of teachers that are more experienced, have higher degrees, and subject certification tend to have superior performance on math assessments.

With an emphasis on TFA, Darling-Hammond et al. (2005) examined the relationship between teacher certification and training on the performance of Houston students enrolled in grades three through twelve for the school years 1995-1996 through 2001–2002. The assessments scores analyzed included the TAAS and the Texas Learning Index (TLI). The researchers noted that in Texas, teachers are required to pass tests of core academic skills in

mathematics and communications as well as tests of pedagogical knowledge and specialized subject knowledge in order to attain certification. They must also show evidence of completing requisite coursework in an array of areas related to teaching, human development, meeting the needs of diverse learners, and ethical and legal issues related to teaching.

According to Darling-Hammond et al. (2005), the scope of requirements involved in obtaining certification appear to be a decisive factor in teachers' effectiveness. Consistent with earlier studies, the analysis showed that fourth- and fifth-grade teachers who hold professional certification surpass other teachers in promoting student achievement on the state assessments in reading and mathematics. The effect held across the cohorts of students. Whether the teachers were graduates of TFA or another program was not a decisive factor: regardless of their educational preparation, teachers who completed the requirements leading to successful licensure were more effective than those who did not.

Darling-Hammond et al. (2005) noted that some proponents of TFA contend that the select group of college students who qualify for the program may be capable teachers without professional preparation. However, their findings refuted that claim. There were no indicators on which uncertified TFA teachers performed at the level of teachers with standard certification with the same experience in similar school environments. According to the analysis, being in a classroom taught by an uncertified TFA teacher could result in a student's performing the grade equivalent of one-half month to three months lower than students whose teachers have standard certification. Students of non-TFA uncertified or non-standard certified teachers typically performed at grade levels 0.2 to 1.5 months behind peers taught by teachers with standard certification. Students with a succession of those teachers could be expected to lag behind one to

two years in grade equivalent terms between kindergarten and sixth grade based on extrapolating from the data from fourth and fifth grades.

Overall, certified TFA teachers were equally effective as other certified teachers after controlling for factors such as experience and educational context. Based on these findings, Darling-Hammond et al. (2005) concluded that TFA teachers could be a valuable asset in schools marked by high teacher turnover and teachers with minimal credentials. It is precisely schools with that type of profile that recruit TFA graduates. The researchers also noted that the elite educational preparation of the TFA teachers may provide them with a strong background in mathematics that contributes to higher performance. Nonetheless, that does not downplay the importance of certification, which overrode other factors in predicting the effectiveness of the TFA and other teachers.

Xu, Hannaway, and Taylor (2007) investigated the effects of TFA teachers on the academic performance of North Carolina high school students. The study was based on the academic years 2000–2001 through 2006–2007, the time frame when TFA members were teaching in North Carolina, and restricted to twenty three local education authorities (LEAs) that hired at least one TFA teacher. Xu et al. reached a similar conclusion to Darling-Hammond et al. (2005) in that they found that students who had TFA teachers were more advantaged than if they had been taught by the teachers that would have been in their classrooms if not for the TFA hires (Xu et al., 2007). In other words, in the absence of TFA, the high-poverty North Carolina students would have been taught by inferior teachers, which appears to be commonplace in the state (Clotfelter et al., 2010).

The findings reported by Xu et al. (2007) diverge from those of Darling-Hammond et al. (2005) in that Xu et al. (2007) found that TFA status overrode experience and credentials in

contributing to student performance. They concluded that low-income high school students would actually gain more from TFA teachers, particularly in science and mathematics, than if they were taught by fully credentialed, in-field teachers with at least three years of teaching experience. TFA may be further enhanced by a teaching residency combining sound training and mentoring with additional support for teaching in urban schools (Darling-Hammond, 2008). Darling-Hammond envisions this as a model that goes beyond TFA in supplying excellent teachers to the most disadvantaged schools.

Boyd et al. (2007) examined the effects of teacher qualifications on the academic performance of New York City students. The analysis included the teachers' experience, demographics, undergraduate institution, certification, SAT scores, teacher certification exam performance, pathway to teaching, and whether the teachers completed a college-recommended teacher preparation program. School and student level data included school performance data, school poverty status, racial and ethnic composition, and per pupil expenditures.

Boyd et al. (2007) observed that between 2000 and 2005, the gap in teacher qualifications between high-poverty and low-poverty schools had narrowed to a remarkable extent. The effect was driven by the notable improvements in teacher qualifications in the high-poverty schools. While the effect was most apparent for elementary schools, it occurred at schools of all grade configurations. It was also apparent in terms of the array of variables the researchers used to determine teacher quality. The trend was primarily fueled by the virtual disappearance of newly hired uncertified teachers from the city public schools combined with the arrival of new teachers from TFA and the Teaching Fellows program (whose graduates also have strong academic preparation). In 2005, Teaching Fellows and TFA members accounted for 43% of all new teachers in the most impoverished schools.

The trend toward hiring Teaching Fellows and TFA graduates translated into a boost in student achievement, which was most pronounced in the city's poorest schools (Boyd et al., 2007). Utilizing a value-added model, the analysis suggested that students in the poorest decile of schools would improve on average by .03 standard deviation or roughly half the difference in being taught by a teacher in the first year of teaching and a more experienced teacher. Limiting the analysis to teachers in the first or second year of teaching, the improvement equals two-thirds of the effect of the first year experience.

Boyd et al. (2007) noted that the positive changes were the result of new policies governing the quality of teachers assigned to teach poor, minority, and underperforming New York City students. The city abolished the hiring of uncertified teachers, launched the Teaching Fellows program, and hired TFA teachers. The researchers emphasize that countering the historical policy of assigning the least qualified teachers to the neediest students demands "forceful action" on the part of policy makers, along with a commitment by local hiring agencies to recruit better qualified teachers (p. 18). The analysis suggested that hiring changes could have the most powerful impact on the mathematics performance of fourth and fifth graders in the city's poorest schools.

In a subsequent study, Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Loeb, and Wyckoff (2008) analyzed the qualifications of teachers entering New York City schools from different teacher preparation programs and their effects on student achievement. They found that on average, programs producing teachers who were more effective in teaching mathematics also produced teachers who were more effective in teaching English/language arts. Not surprisingly, however, some programs had an advantage in one subject area over the other. The most decisive finding was that teacher preparation that concentrates more closely on classroom teaching activities and

provides candidates with opportunities to study what they will be performing during their first year of teaching produces superior findings. This effect is largely consistent with the NCATE (2006) recommendations. Having a stronger background in mathematics provided an advantage during the second year of teaching but for the first year the overriding factor in performing was having the ability to apply knowledge to actual classroom activities (Boyd et al., 2008).

Conclusion

In some respects, the New Orleans school system is a microcosm of the issues that are endemic to large urban school systems. The school system has never been a model for educational achievement or equity, but the New Orleans new school structure may change not only how the residents of New Orleans view the city's new school-reform efforts, but it may change how the country views school-reform. The new school system, the changes made, and the improved academic performance further adds to the ongoing debate regarding the relationship between teacher qualifications and student performance. The literature review results are complete with dramatically differing opinions and contradictory findings regarding what requirements, experiences and academic credentials are necessary for teachers to improve student performance. The literature also provides the background on how Hurricane Katrina forced the city of New Orleans and the State of Louisiana to make immediate large scale change to reopen its schools, instead of just continuing with the incremental changes that the city began prior to the Hurricane. The most recent literature, however, does not examine the restructuring of the school system with respect to student performance and teacher qualifications. It is the researcher's hope that her study will encourage administrators, scholars, and policy makers to reexamine not only the necessary qualifications of teachers with respect to student performance, but to also reconsider on how a school system implements school reform.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This study sought to understand the extent to which teacher qualifications, as determined by NCLB teacher certification provisions, accounted for pre- and post-Hurricane Katrina student achievement reported by Recovery School District (RSD) Schools in 2004 and 2008.

“Descriptive statistics are used to summarize data from both preestablished and quantitative self-developed instruments using either graphical or mathematical procedures” (Lodico, Spaulding & Voegtler, 2010, p. 74). This was a quantitative descriptive study. The population of interest was public schools in New Orleans, under RSD control, that existed before Hurricane Katrina (2004) and after Hurricane Katrina (2008) and had identical grade structures during both school years. The primary data source for this research effort was the Louisiana Department of Education’s Office of Student and School Performance, Division of Standards, Assessments and Accountability (www.louisianaschools.net).

The population definition provided the researcher with nine schools (three elementary schools and six senior high schools) that met the study criteria:

- A.P. Tureaud Elementary School (PK, K-6),
- Benjamin Banneker Elementary School (PK, K-8),
- H.C. Schaumburg Elementary School (PK, K-8),
- Frederick A. Douglass High School (8-12),
- G.W. Carver High School (8-12),
- John McDonogh Senior High School (8-12),
- Joseph S. Clark Senior High School (8-12),
- Towles Reed Senior High School (8-12), and

- Walter L. Cohen High School (8-12).

The researcher focused on RSD schools in an effort to better understand the relationship between teacher qualifications and student performance for several reasons. Cowen (2010) found that parents often label RSD schools as the “schools of last resort” or the “unofficial dumping ground” for students with behavioral or academic challenges; however, these schools are improving despite the destruction of Hurricane Katrina and the large number of poor Black students. Cowen’s study further described the study demographics of the New Orleans public schools during the 2009–2010 school year. His study found that:

- Black students made up 90% of all New Orleans public school students (Cowen, 2010).
- By school type, Black students represented 93% of the students in OPSB-run schools, 69% of the students in OPSB charter schools, 97% of the students in RSD-run schools, 96% of the students in RSD charter schools, and 68% of the students in Type 2 charter schools.
- Poor students, classified according to eligibility for receiving free or reduced price meals, accounted for 82% of all New Orleans students.
- The heaviest concentrations of poor students were in the RSD charter schools (90%) and RSD-run schools (88%). Poor students represented 63% of the students in OPSB charter schools, 78% of the students in OPSB-run schools, and 70% of the students in Type 2 charter schools.

Also, it is useful in order to have a complete picture of the study’s population to compare the study schools to other schools in the State of Louisiana. Of particular importance to this study, Tables 1 and 2 demonstrate the following:

- Eight of the nine schools, except for Sarah Towles Reed Senior High School in 2004, had a higher percentage of students on free and reduced lunch roles than the state's average of 62%.
- Eight of the nine schools, except Benjamin Banneker Elementary School in 2004, had a lower number of HQTs during both the 2004 and 2008 school years as compared to the state average of 91% and 86%, respectively.
- All three elementary study schools were rated as performing at a lower percentage rate for basic or higher than the state average on the administered ELA 4th grade LEAP tests during the 2004 and 2008 school years. The state average during the 2004 and 2008 years was 64% and 72%, respectively.
- Two of the three elementary study schools, except Benjamin Banneker Elementary School in 2004, were rated as performing at a lower percentage rate for basic or higher than the state average on the administered math 4th grade LEAP tests during the 2004 and 2008 school years. The state average during the 2004 and 2008 years was 61% and 69%, respectively.

Additional school characteristics not directly related to the study's methodology, but of interest in order to better understand the characteristics of the study population, include:

- The dropout rate for 7th-12th grades for the study population in 2004 was higher for the applicable schools of this study when compared to the state average dropout rate, which was 5%.
- All six secondary schools of this study had a substantially lower percentage of students rated as performing at basic or higher on both the ELA and math components of the Graduate Exit Examination (GEE) during the 2004 and 2008

school years. The GEE is Louisiana's criterion-referenced test that measures how well a student has mastered the state content standards.

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for the three elementary schools that were used in this study. Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics for the six high schools in this study.)

Data Analysis

In an effort to provide simple summaries about the sample and the measures, the researcher performed all statistical analyses using PASW (formerly SPSS) for Windows (PASW 18.0, SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL). The next chapter provides the means, standard deviations, minimums, and maximums separately for the pre-Hurricane Katrina (2004) and 4 years after Hurricane Katrina (2008) for the percentage of classes taught by HQTs and the percentages of students for each performance measure. Although the sample size was small ($n = 9$ schools), Pearson's correlation statistic, and paired t-tests were performed for exploratory data analysis purposes.

Measures

The administered standardized test used as a measuring tool for this study is the Louisiana Educational Assessment Program (LEAP). The LEAP test is Louisiana's Criterion-Referenced Test that measures how well a student has mastered the state content standards.

NCLB Highly Qualified Teacher

This variable was measured on a continuous scale, with a range of 0 to 100. For each of the nine New Orleans public schools in existence in both 2004 and 2008, the percentage of classes taught by a NCLB highly qualified teachers (NHQTs) was recorded.

Table 1

Demographic Data for the Study Elementary Schools

RSD school characteristics	AP Tureaud		Benjamin Banneker		HC Schaumburg	
	2004	2008	2004	2008	2004	2008
School type	OPSB	Traditional	OPSB	Traditional	OPSB	Traditional
<u>Teacher qualifications</u>						
Classes taught by NCLB HQ teacher	57.7%	50.0%	93.9%	85.0%	76.3%	78.0%
<u>School characteristics</u>						
Grade structure	PK, K–6	PK, K–6	PK, K–8	PK, K–8	PK, K–8	PK, K–8
% free & reduced lunch program	90.0%	94.0%	97.0%	95.0%	80.0%	92.0%
<u>Student Pop ELA standardized test results</u>						
Unsatisfactory	46.7%	18.6%	22.8%	21.3%	17.1%	20.0%
Approaching basic	23.3%	26.5%	52.6%	37.0%	26.3%	35.3%
Basic	16.7%	39.8%	15.8%	35.2%	40.8%	35.7%
Mastery	0.0%	15.0%	8.8%	5.1%	14.5%	9.0%
Advanced	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	1.4%	1.3%	0.0%
<u>Student Pop math standardized test results</u>						
Unsatisfactory	63.3%	27.0%	43.9%	27.8%	23.7%	25.5%
Approaching basic	20.0%	17.4%	26.3%	31.9%	19.7%	28.2%
Basic	16.7%	42.6%	21.1%	35.2%	47.4%	43.1%
Mastery	0.0%	7.8%	8.8%	4.2%	9.2%	3.1%
Advanced	0.0%	5.2%	0.0%	0.9%	0.0%	0.0%

Table 2

Demographic Data for the Study High Schools

RSD school characteristics	FA Douglass HS		GW Carver HS		McDonogh SHS	
	2004	2008	2004	2008	2004	2008
School type	OPSB	Traditional	OPSB	Traditional	OPSB	Traditional
<u>Teacher qualifications</u>						
Classes taught by NCLB HQ teacher	85.9%	49.0%	78.3%	41.8%	67.7%	43.8%
<u>School characteristics</u>						
Grade structure	8–12	8–12	8–12	8–12	8–12	8–12
% free & reduced lunch program	86.0%	77.0%	75.0%	82.0%	63.0%	90.0%
<u>Student Pop ELA standardized test results</u>						
Unsatisfactory	63.3%	54.1%	57.6%	51.8%	55.6%	51.6%
Approaching basic	22.8%	23.0%	28.5%	30.4%	27.3%	20.3%
Basic	13.3%	21.3%	13.3%	15.2%	15.7%	26.6%
Mastery	0.6%	1.6%	0.6%	2.7%	1.5%	1.6%
Advanced	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
<u>Student Pop math standardized test results</u>						
Unsatisfactory	81.5%	38.3%	64.8%	51.8%	58.9%	50.8%
Approaching basic	12.1%	28.3%	18.2%	29.5%	13.0%	21.3%
Basic	5.7%	26.7%	15.8%	15.2%	26.0%	24.6%
Mastery	0.6%	1.7%	1.2%	3.6%	2.1%	3.3%
Advanced	0.0%	5.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%

RSD school characteristics	JS Clark HS		ST Reed SHS		W L Cohen HS	
	2004	2008	2004	2008	2004	2008
School type	OPSB	Traditional	OPSB	Traditional	OPSB	Traditional
<u>Teacher qualifications</u>						
Classes taught by NCLB HQ teacher	72.6%	47.6%	74%	42.8%	80.5%	53.5%
<u>School characteristics</u>						
Grade structure	8–12	8–12	8–12	8–12	8–12	8–12
% free & reduced lunch program	63.0%	71.0%	54.0%	73.0%	75.0%	76.0%
<u>Student Pop ELA standardized test results</u>						
Unsatisfactory	53.6%	51.5%	44.3%	40.5%	52.2%	54.3%
Approaching basic	29.6%	37.4%	29.9%	34.4%	25%	30.5%
Basic	16.8%	11.1%	20.3%	22.9%	17.6%	15.2%
Mastery	0.0%	0.0%	4.1%	2.3%	4.4%	0.0%
Advanced	0.0%	0.0%	1.4%	0.0%	0.7%	0.0%
<u>Student Pop math standardized test results</u>						
Unsatisfactory	68.3%	59.4%	60.4%	42.6%	58.3%	51.5%
Approaching basic	14.3%	19.8%	15.4%	19.9%	19.7%	30.3%
Basic	17.5%	18.9%	17.7%	30.9%	18.2%	17.2%
Mastery	0.0%	1.9%	5.1%	4.4%	3.0%	1.0%
Advanced	0.0%	0.0%	1.4%	2.2%	0.8%	0%

Unsatisfactory English Language Arts Academic Performance

Unsatisfactory ELA academic performance (UELA) was measured on a continuous scale, with a range of 0 to 100. For each of the nine New Orleans public schools in existence in both 2004 and 2008, the percentage of students in the UELA group was recorded.

Approaching Basic English Language Arts Academic Performance

This variable was measured on a continuous scale, with a range of 0 to 100. For each of the nine New Orleans public schools in existence in both 2004 and 2008, the percentage of students approaching basic ELA academic performance (ABELA) was recorded.

Basic English Language Arts Academic Performance

This variable was measured on a continuous scale, with a range of 0 to 100. For each of the nine New Orleans public schools in existence in both 2004 and 2008, the percentage of students in the basic ELA academic (BELA) performance group was recorded.

Mastery English Language Arts Academic Performance

This variable was measured on a continuous scale, with a range of 0 to 100. For each of the nine New Orleans public schools in existence in both 2004 and 2008, the percentage of students in the mastery ELA (MELA) performance group was recorded.

Advanced English Language Arts Academic Performance

This variable was measured on a continuous scale, with a range of 0 to 100. For each of the nine New Orleans public schools in existence in both 2004 and 2008, the percentage of students in the advanced ELA academic (AELAA) performance group was recorded.

Unsatisfactory Mathematics Academic Performance

This variable was measured on a continuous scale, with a range of 0 to 100. For each of the nine New Orleans public schools in existence in both 2004 and 2008, the percentage of students in the unsatisfactory mathematics (UMATH) performance group was recorded.

Approaching Basic Mathematics Academic Performance

This variable was measured on a continuous scale, with a range of 0 to 100. For each of the nine New Orleans public schools in existence in both 2004 and 2008, the percentages of students in the approaching basic mathematics (ABMATH) academic performance group was recorded.

Basic Mathematics Academic Performance

This variable was measured on a continuous scale, with a range of 0 to 100. For each of the nine New Orleans public schools in existence in both 2004 and 2008, the percentage of students in the basic mathematics (BMATH) academic performance group was recorded.

Mastery Mathematics Academic Performance

This variable was measured on a continuous scale, with a range of 0 to 100. For each of the nine New Orleans public schools in existence in both 2004 and 2008, the percentage of students in the mastery mathematics (MMATH) academic performance group was recorded.

Advanced Mathematics Academic Performance

This variable was measured on a continuous scale, with a range of 0 to 100. For each of the nine New Orleans public schools in existence in both 2004 and 2008, the percentage of students in the advanced mathematics (AMATH) performance group was recorded.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to compare and analyze differences in teacher qualifications, in the context of NCLB. This was accomplished by comparing student achievement in selected New Orleans schools during the pre- and post-Hurricane Katrina periods. Through this analysis, the researcher examined and analyzed the effect of teacher qualification on students' performance.

The examination of the newly reorganized New Orleans school system will hopefully contribute to the ongoing debate concerning which reforms are likely to increase academic achievement in school populations characterized by high minority populations, high poverty rates, and low student achievement.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS

This study examined whether differences in teacher qualifications, as defined by NCLB, affected the performance of students in New Orleans public schools before and after Hurricane Katrina. The researcher examined the effect of teacher qualifications on student performance during school-reform efforts in the city of New Orleans, Louisiana after Hurricane Katrina. Three research questions were addressed. The study, a quantitative descriptive study with nine New Orleans public schools under RSD control that existed both before and after Hurricane Katrina, provided results demonstrating a simultaneous decrease in teacher qualifications and an increase in student performance. The results of this study indicate that although NCLB legislation made the issue of teacher qualification a priority in improving student performance, the evidence of this study indicates that the definition of a highly qualified teacher did not have a strong effect on student performance.

This chapter describes the results of the research questions that were explored and includes tables and figures that present quantitative data from each of the statistical analyses that were performed.

During an initial examination of student performance in the restructured school system, questions were raised by the researcher about the effect of teacher qualifications on student performance as measured by standardized tests. Table 3 and Figure 1 of this study indicate that though NCLB legislation made the issue of teacher qualification a priority in improving student performance, teacher qualifications are not as important of a determining factor in increasing student performance as might be expected. Together, Table 3 and Figure 1 show that while the number of highly qualified teachers decreased, student achievement, as measured by both English and math standardized tests, increased at the nine schools examined in this study.

Table 3

Percentage of Classes Taught by a No Child Left Behind Highly-Qualified Teacher Pre- and Post-Hurricane Katrina

Pre-Hurricane 2004	Post-Hurricane 2008
76%	55%

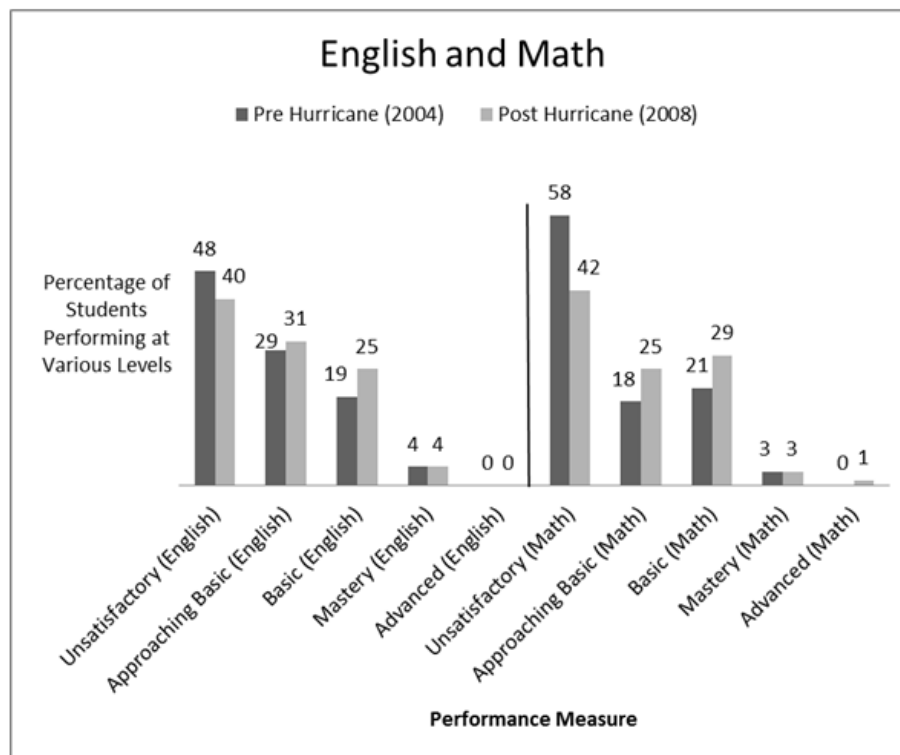


Figure 1. Percentage of Students Performing at Various Performance Measures on the English Language Arts and Math Tests Pre- and Post-Hurricane Katrina.

Additionally, Figure 1 demonstrates that in both subjects, the number of students rated as performing at an unsatisfactory level decreased, whereas the number of students rated as performing at a basic level increased. Although the number of students at the mastery level remained the same, there was a small increase in the performance rate at the advanced performance measure for math. One can determine from this that student performance levels shifted from the lowest performance level to higher performance levels. After Hurricane

Katrina, students performing at the unsatisfactory level on standardized tests began to improve in performance, mostly shifting to the approaching-basic and basic performance levels, but improving nonetheless.

A paired t-test showed the difference was statistically significant (See Tables 4, 5 and 6). The average (and standard deviation) percentage of classes taught by a NCLB HQT was 76 (10.4) versus 54.6 (15.8) for pre and post Hurricane Katrina, respectively, $t(8) = 4.77$; $p = .001$.

Table 4 shows the average (and standard deviation) percentage of students performing at each level, separately for pre- and post-Hurricane Katrina. Table 5 shows there was a statistically significant decrease in the percentage of students performing at the unsatisfactory level in math ($p = .009$) and a statistically significant increase in the percentage of students approaching basic level in math ($p = .003$). None of the other performance levels were statistically significantly different between pre- and post-Hurricane Katrina. Table 6 shows there was a statistically significant, positive correlation between the pre- and post- percentage of students performing at the unsatisfactory level in English. There was not a statistically significant correlation between any of the other performance levels.

Analysis of Research Question 1

The purpose of this research question was to determine what differences, if any, existed in the level of teacher qualifications from pre- to post-Hurricane Katrina in the study schools.

Table 3 shows the average percentage of classes taught by a NCLB HQ teacher. As illustrated earlier, there was a decrease of NCLB HQ teachers from pre- to post-Hurricane Katrina. These data allowed the researcher to demonstrate that the number of teachers meeting the HQT standard decreased between 2004- 2008 (See Table 3). A paired t-test showed the difference was statistically significant (See Tables 4, 5, and 6).

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics for the Percentage of Students Performing at Each Level in Math and English Pre- and Post-Hurricane Katrina

		Paired Samples Statistics			
		<i>M</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>SE</i>
Pair 1	Percentage of Students Performing Unsatisfactorily on ELA Test (OPSB)	45.911	9	15.8073	5.2691
	Percentage of Students Performing Unsatisfactorily on ELA Test (RSD)	40.411	9	15.8734	5.2911
Pair 2	Percentage of Students Approaching Basic on ELA Test (OPSB)	29.478	9	9.0377	3.0126
	Percentage of Students Approaching Basic on ELA Test (RSD)	30.533	9	6.1685	2.0562
Pair 3	Percentage of Students Performing at Basic Level on ELA Test (OPSB)	18.922	9	8.4785	2.8262
	Percentage of Students Performing at Basic Level on ELA Test (RSD)	24.778	9	10.2657	3.4219
Pair 4	Percentage of Students Performing at Mastery Level on ELA Test (OPSB)	3.833	9	4.9318	1.6439
	Percentage of Students Performing at Mastery Level on ELA Test (RSD)	4.144	9	4.9387	1.6462
Pair 5	Percentage of Students Performing at Advanced Level on ELA Test (OPSB)	.378	9	.5974	.1991
	Percentage of Students Performing at Advanced Level on ELA Test (RSD)	.156	9	.4667	.1556
Pair 6	Percentage of Students Performing Unsatisfactorily on Math Test (OPSB)	58.122	9	16.2577	5.4192
	Percentage of Students Performing Unsatisfactorily on Math Test (RSD)	41.633	9	12.6403	4.2134
Pair 7	Percentage of Students Approaching Basic on Math Test (OPSB)	17.633	9	4.4407	1.4802
	Percentage of Students Approaching Basic on Math Test (RSD)	25.178	9	5.4920	1.8307
Pair 8	Percentage of Students Performing at Basic Level on Math Test (OPSB)	20.678	9	11.3558	3.7853

		Paired Samples Statistics			
		<i>M</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>SE</i>
	Percentage of Students Performing at Basic Level on Math Test (RSD)	28.267	9	10.4721	3.4907
Pair 9	Percentage of Students Performing at Mastery Level on Math Test (OPSB)	3.333	9	3.5934	1.1978
	Percentage of Students Performing at Mastery Level on Math Test (RSD)	3.444	9	2.0007	.6669
Pair 10	Percentage of Students Performing at Advanced Level on Math Test (OPSB)	.244	9	.5077	.1692
	Percentage of Students Performing at Advanced Level on Math Test (RSD)	1.478	9	2.1805	.7268

Analysis of Research Question 2

The purpose of this research question was to determine what differences, if any, existed in students' ELA academic performance from pre- to post-Hurricane Katrina, as measured by the LEAP test.

There were five measures of ELA performance: unsatisfactory, approaching basic, basic, mastery, and advanced. Therefore, the analysis was repeated separately for each measure. Figure 2 shows the average percentage of students performing at all five measures on the ELA test. Over three quarters of the student population did not perform at the basic skill level on the administered ELA test before Hurricane Katrina. Specifically, 48% of student performances were rated as unsatisfactory and 29% were rated as having performed at the approaching basic level. However, after Hurricane Katrina, nearly 30% of students were rated as having performed at the basic or mastery level, which demonstrates a positive shift of 6 percentage points (see Figure 2). This shift resulted in a decline in the number of students who were rated as performing at the unsatisfactory level and an increase in the number of students who were rated as approaching basic or basic. In addition, before Hurricane Katrina, there was a 21% gap (see

Table 5

Paired t-Tests to Compare the Percentage of Students Performing at Each Level in Math and English Pre- and Post-Hurricane Katrina

		Paired Samples Test		
		<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pair 1	Percentage of Students Performing Unsatisfactorily on ELA Test (OPSB) - Percentage of Students Performing Unsatisfactorily on ELA Test (RSD)	1.782	8	.113
Pair 2	Percentage of Students Approaching Basic on ELA Test (OPSB) - Percentage of Students Approaching Basic on ELA Test (RSD)	-.405	8	.696
Pair 3	Percentage of Students Performing at Basic Level on ELA Test (OPSB) - Percentage of Students Performing at Basic Level on ELA Test (RSD)	-1.695	8	.128
Pair 4	Percentage of Students Performing at Mastery Level on ELA Test (OPSB) - Percentage of Students Performing at Mastery Level on ELA Test (RSD)	-.153	8	.882
Pair 5	Percentage of Students Performing at Advanced Level on ELA Test (OPSB) - Percentage of Students Performing at Advanced Level on ELA Test (RSD)	.793	8	.451
Pair 6	Percentage of Students Performing Unsatisfactorily on Math Test (OPSB) - Percentage of Students Performing Unsatisfactorily on Math Test (RSD)	3.417	8	.009
Pair 7	Percentage of Students Approaching Basic on Math Test (OPSB) - Percentage of Students Approaching Basic on Math Test (RSD)	-4.316	8	.003
Pair 8	Percentage of Students Performing at Basic Level on Math Test (OPSB) - Percentage of Students Performing at Basic Level on Math Test (RSD)	-2.046	8	.075
Pair 9	Percentage of Students Performing at Mastery Level on Math Test (OPSB) - Percentage of Students Performing at Mastery Level on Math Test (RSD)	-.081	8	.937
Pair 10	Percentage of Students Performing at Advanced Level on Math Test (OPSB) - Percentage of Students Performing at Advanced Level on Math Test (RSD)	-1.646	8	.138

Table 6

Pearson's Correlation Statistic to Compare the Percentage of Students Performing at Each Level in Math and English Pre- and Post-Hurricane Katrina

		Paired samples correlations		
		<i>N</i>	<i>r</i>	Sig.
Pair 1	Percentage of Students Performing Unsatisfactorily on ELA Test (OPSB) & Percentage of Students Performing Unsatisfactorily on ELA Test (RSD)	9	.829	.006
Pair 2	Percentage of Students Approaching Basic on ELA Test (OPSB) & Percentage of Students Approaching Basic on ELA Test (RSD)	9	.526	.146
Pair 3	Percentage of Students Performing at Basic Level on ELA Test (OPSB) & Percentage of Students Performing at Basic Level on ELA Test (RSD)	9	.402	.284
Pair 4	Percentage of Students Performing at Mastery Level on ELA Test (OPSB) & Percentage of Students Performing at Mastery Level on ELA Test (RSD)	9	.240	.534
Pair 5	Percentage of Students Performing at Advanced Level on ELA Test (OPSB) & Percentage of Students Performing at Advanced Level on ELA Test (RSD)	9	-.237	.539
Pair 6	Percentage of Students Performing Unsatisfactorily on Math Test (OPSB) & Percentage of Students Performing Unsatisfactorily on Math Test (RSD)	9	.522	.149
Pair 7	Percentage of Students Approaching Basic on Math Test (OPSB) & Percentage of Students Approaching Basic on Math Test (RSD)	9	.459	.214
Pair 8	Percentage of Students Performing at Basic Level on Math Test (OPSB) & Percentage of Students Performing at Basic Level on Math Test (RSD)	9	.483	.188
Pair 9	Percentage of Students Performing at Mastery Level on Math Test (OPSB) & Percentage of Students Performing at Mastery Level on Math Test (RSD)	9	-.002	.995
Pair 10	Percentage of Students Performing at Advanced Level on Math Test (OPSB) & Percentage of Students Performing at Advanced Level on Math Test (RSD)	9	-.019	.961

Figure 2) between students rated as performing at an unsatisfactory level and those rated as performing at a basic level on the ELA test. After Hurricane Katrina, the gap decreased by 8 percentage points, which demonstrates an improvement in student ELA academic performance from pre- to post-Katrina. Though an improvement occurred, student performance at the mastery level remained flat and there were no cases of students performing at the advanced level.

Analysis of Research Question 3

The purpose of this research question was to determine what differences, if any, existed in students' math academic performance from pre- to post-Hurricane Katrina, as measured by the LEAP test. The measures for math performance were the same as those for English performance (unsatisfactory, approaching basic, basic, mastery, and advanced).

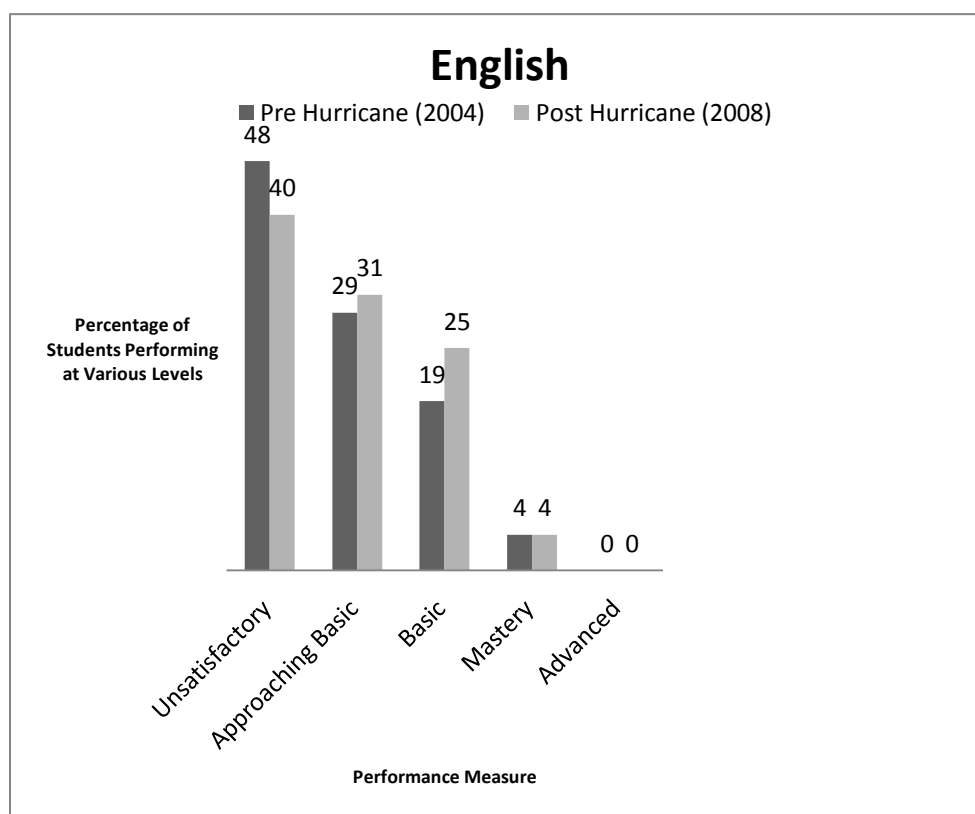


Figure 2. Percentage of Students Performing at All Five Performance Measures on the English Language Arts Test Pre- and Post-Hurricane Katrina.

Therefore, the analysis was repeated separately for each measure. Figure 3 shows the average percentage of students performing at all five measures on the math test. Before Hurricane Katrina, 76% of students were not rated as performing at the basic skill level; specifically, 58% were rated as performing at an unsatisfactory level and 18% were rated as performing at the approaching-basic level. However, after Hurricane Katrina, these numbers shifted significantly (See Figure 3). The percentage of students not performing at the basic skill level on the administered math test decreased to 67% (a drop of 9 percentage points), and 33% of students performed at the basic, mastery, or advanced levels (an improvement of 9 percentage points). This change occurred due to a series of events, which will be explored next (see Figure 3).

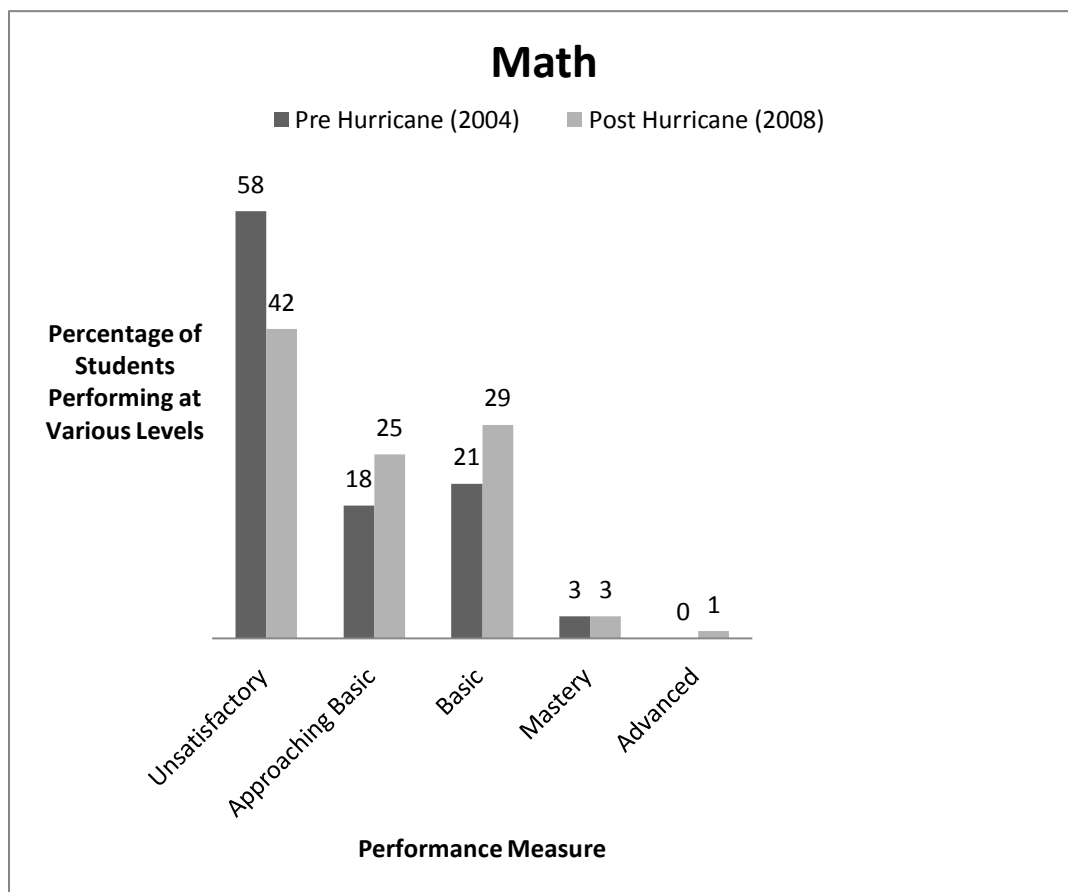


Figure 3. Percentage of Students Performing at all Five Performance Measures on the Math Test Pre- and Post-Hurricane Katrina.

There was a 16-percentage-point decrease in the number of students rated as performing at the unsatisfactory performance level; a 7-percentage-point increase in the number of students rated as performing at the approaching-basic performance level; an 8-percentage-point increase in the number of students rated as performing at the basic performance level; and a 1-percentage-point increase of students rated as performing at the advanced performance level. This series of shifts indicates a positive change in student performance on the administered standardized tests.

In addition, before Hurricane Katrina, there was a 40% gap between students rated as performing at an unsatisfactory level and those rated as performing at a basic level on the math test. After, Hurricane Katrina, the gap decreased by 24 percentage points, demonstrating a substantial improvement in student math academic performance from pre- to post-Hurricane Katrina. Although a substantial improvement occurred, student performance at the mastery level remained flat and there was little movement at the advanced level.

Conclusion

This study, with a sample population of nine New Orleans public schools under RSD control that existed both before and after Hurricane Katrina, provided results demonstrating a decrease in teacher qualifications and an increase in student performance. The overall results of this study indicate that although NCLB legislation made the issue of teacher qualification a priority in improving student performance, the evidence of this study does not support that premise. Implications for these findings are discussed in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Overview of the Results

Chapters 1 through 4 reviewed the recent history of the New Orleans public school system and the major literature addressing teacher quality, effectiveness, and preparation; outlined the methodology used to address the research questions; and reported the results of the statistical analyses that were conducted. Chapter 5 summarizes and interprets the key findings from this study. The chapter begins with an overview of the study; moves to a discussion about the ways in which the results inform the research questions; addresses implications for policy, practice, and future research; and concludes by providing recommendations for school reform and related research.

This study examined what differences in teacher qualifications could be accounted for before and after Hurricane Katrina in reforming the public school system of New Orleans, Louisiana. In the pursuit of improving the efforts of school reform, this study sought to determine if teacher qualifications, as defined by NCLB, were important in increasing student performance. The results of this study indicate that although NCLB legislation made the issue of teacher qualification a priority in improving student performance, the evidence of this study indicates that the NCLB definition of a highly qualified teacher did not have a strong effect on student performance. Teacher qualifications, as defined under NCLB, did not appear to have a measured impact on increased student achievement in mathematics and ELA in the nine schools examined in this study. For many school systems, teacher qualifications are a priority, but given the circumstances post-Hurricane Katrina, the need for stability and continuity within the New Orleans school system became a priority due to the national, state, and local pressures to enroll students in schools.

This study focused on determining whether teacher qualifications, as defined by NCLB, made a difference in student performance. NCLB indicates that each state education agency must develop a plan to ensure that all teachers are highly qualified. In general, a highly qualified teacher is a teacher with full certification, a bachelor's degree, and demonstrated competence in subject knowledge and teaching. Individual teacher's subject matter competency is measured by the PRAXIS exam in Louisiana. All teachers in Louisiana must pass this exam in order to be considered a highly qualified teacher; therefore, this study is limited to teacher scores on the PRAXIS. The findings from the study may impact the hiring practices of teachers, teacher composition, student performance, and national education policy and standards.

The study population comprised nine New Orleans public schools under RSD control that existed both before Hurricane Katrina (2004) and after Hurricane Katrina (2008) and maintained the same grade structure during both school years. Data were used from the 2004 and 2008 school years.

Review of the Research Questions

Question 1

This question examined what differences, if any, existed in the level of teacher qualifications from pre- to post-Hurricane Katrina in the selected schools. To do so, this study presented the average percentage of classes taught by a NHQ teacher. This number decreased by 21 percentage points from 2004 to 2008.

Question 2

This question examined what differences, if any, existed in student ELA academic performance from pre- to post-Hurricane Katrina, as measured by the LEAP test. In determining the differences in student ELA academic performance from pre- to post-Hurricane Katrina, as

measured by the LEAP test, this study indicated an improvement in student ELA academic performance from pre- to post-Hurricane Katrina.

Question 3

This question examined what differences, if any, existed in student math academic performance from pre- to post-Hurricane Katrina, as measured by the LEAP test. In determining the differences in student math academic performance from pre- to post-Hurricane Katrina, as measured by the LEAP test, this study indicated a substantial improvement in student math academic performance from pre- to post-Hurricane Katrina.

Implications for Policy, Practice, and Future Research

It is reasonable to ascertain from this study, for the research sample, that although NCLB legislation made the issue of teacher qualification a priority in improving student performance, the evidence of this study does not support that premise. Policy makers and practitioners who are considering and implementing school reform should consider detouring from reform efforts that place teachers in higher regard based on their NCLB rating. The results of this study indicate that the HQT rating is not a guarantee for improved student performance. Below, I have provided a series of recommendations for policy makers and practitioners who are considering and implementing school reform:

- Redefine the definition of a high-quality teacher so that the focal point is not certification, but classroom engagement.
- Modify hiring practices to ensure that prospective teachers spend more time in classrooms conducting field experiments and observations, and increasing student-teaching requirements. In addition, a minimum number of classroom visits should be

required to ensure that the prospective teacher can successfully work in a classroom environment prior to hiring.

- Review the process of making teachers accountable for student performance. Amend the process of terminating teachers by decreasing the amount of time teachers can be terminated for underperformance. Amend contract periods for teachers with renewal every 2 years. For students who are taught by teachers found to be underperforming, offer additional educational assistance.
- Develop an organizational chart that mandates a district-wide strategy to improving student achievement. This strategy should focus on teacher accountability and progress. The strategies must be submitted and reviewed by a statewide board and subsequently reviewed by a national roundtable, which will consist solely of education scholars and practitioners.
- Align evaluation tools to support the district strategy by providing all teachers with the needed support to reach the desired goals of increased student achievement.
- Amend the professional-development process by encouraging teachers to evaluate one another during classroom observations.
- Better address the constantly changing classroom environment by acknowledging individual learning styles and not test-taking skills.
- Discontinue the politicizing of pitting unions against student performance.
- Require school-board candidates meet minimum standard qualifications directly related to early childhood, elementary and secondary education.
- Require policy makers serving on committees with jurisdiction over education policy meet minimum standard qualifications directly related to education.

- Allow for continued modifications with consistent reviews of school-reform efforts.
- Celebrate accomplishments and recognize success.

Although important findings were noted, there were some limitations to this study. As addressed in chapter 1, this study was limited due to the researcher's lack of control over data quality and the small size of the sample. Below, I have provided a series of recommendations for further research pertaining to teacher qualifications and student performance. Research is encouraged in the following areas:

- The impact on teacher qualifications and student performance for all content areas.
- The actions prospective teachers take when they are unable to meet the credentials, which define a high-quality teacher. Do these prospective teachers continue to work toward receiving the needed credentials? Do these prospective teachers teach at private schools where they are not required to meet the qualifications of a high-quality teacher? If so, what are the learning outcomes of the students they teach?
- Comparison of hiring practices of successful private schools compared to the hiring practices of public schools.
- Do private-school students, who are often taught by teachers with lower formal qualifications, outperform public-school students taught by NHQTs on average? If so, why or why not?
- What are the contributing factors as to why RSD students are making improvements in the areas of reading and math?
- Qualitative exploration of the attitudes of teachers and parents about the new school system in New Orleans, Louisiana since student performance has increased.

Conclusion

A decade after the implementation of NCLB, 48% of U.S. schools are still considered failing schools. During this decade, the New Orleans public-school system was devastated by Hurricane Katrina. When Hurricane Katrina struck New Orleans in the summer of 2005, the city's school system was already almost irreparably damaged by years of mismanagement and poor academic performance. As the city began to recover, there was a sense of optimism among educators and community members that the natural disaster provided an unparalleled opportunity to completely transform the failing school system.

The devastation caused by the hurricane led to efforts by the state government to make immediate, wholesale changes to the school system. The efforts taken by policy makers and administrators were criticized by some and praised by others. This study examined the pre- and post-Hurricane Katrina differences in teacher qualifications, as defined by NCLB, and summarized the importance that those qualifications have had on student performance. In addition, this study serves two purposes. First, it builds upon the existing research base regarding teacher qualifications and student performance. Second, it introduces policy makers and administrators to a systematic approach of how to completely and successfully overhaul a failing school system.

In the current era of school reform, policy makers and administrators continue to attack reform in a piecemeal fashion. This has resulted in few results worth duplicating. The latest school-reform effort that centered on policy, NCLB, was due for reauthorization in 2007. It is currently 2012, and minimal changes have occurred. Larger changes have not occurred, not because of an overwhelming success of the legislation, but because ideologies between political parties have caused unnecessary barriers. The ideological arguments range from defending teachers from too much accountability to a call of action to remove the federal government from

the education process completely. The intended purpose of this study was not to justify either ideology, but to focus on school-reform and bring attention to what has worked for an urban school system that was considered one of the worst in the country. If America's policy makers are truly committed to ensuring that children receive an education second to none, then they must take a serious look at the current system that prioritizes a prospective teacher's credentials over that person's success in the classroom. After all, teachers can change the trajectory of a student's life. How many more lives will go unfulfilled if this country's education system continues to fail to meet the needs of its most vulnerable population?

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