

*Charter Schools in Poor Urban Areas:  
How Charter Schools Are Shaping the East Baton Rouge Parish*

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*\*See Works Cited for image source*

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## Introduction

This paper will look into the various factors that have led charter schools to become such a movement in American education, the American public's opinion on them, and how they have affected the education system in Baton Rouge as an example of many of the effects of the charter movement nationally. In regards to Baton Rouge, specific attention will be paid to the lowest performing county, the East Baton Rouge Parish, which is home to an extremely high number of schools and students considered to be “underperforming.” Because of this, legislators and organizations have pushed to bring in increasingly more charter schools in hopes that these can better serve students and increase school performance for the better.

The following pages will outline the history and context of the charter school movement in Baton Rouge in order to study the effects of the introduction of charter schools into a city's educational system. In the context of this paper, Baton Rouge serves as a case study for the many American cities of a similar size, university presence, and diverse demographic.

Baton Rouge, Louisiana, is the capitol city of its state and home to Louisiana State University. In the world of education, Louisiana is well known for the city of New Orleans, which became predominately a charter school city when public schools shut down after Katrina. This unique situation—in which an entire city's school system became almost completely charter-based—created an opportunity to study the effectiveness of charter schools quite closely.

In nearby Baton Rouge, which is a little over an hour away from New Orleans, charter schools did not take over due to Katrina, as there was not a public school shutdown at anything near the level that had occurred in New Orleans. However, Baton Rouge is home to one of the poorest performing urban school districts in the country, the East Baton Rouge Parish School District. The charter school presence in Baton Rouge has increased drastically in the past several years, but long after Katrina actually hit and the charter school trend was so largely embraced in New Orleans. This has been largely due to a push for the need to better East Baton Rouge on the part of policymakers and nonprofit organizations.

While New Orleans is not the focus of this paper, context will be provided as to how the charter school movement was highlighted nationally by the unique situation presented by this post-Katrina educational shift. As the proximity guarantees some effect of the system implemented in New Orleans on Baton Rouge's decisions in regards to charter schools, it is important to take note of.

## Part I: Charter Schools: Context

According to the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, charter schools are “unique public schools that are allowed the freedom to be more innovative while being held accountable for advancing student achievement” (National Alliance for Public Charter Schools). Charter schools are open to all children in the state they are placed in and are free to attend. In this way, they are quite similar to public schools except that they are often able to draw from a larger pool of students.

Many Americans are misinformed about what charter schools actually are and what purpose they serve. According to the Gallup poll previously referenced, issues such as if charter schools are public, how they are funded, whether they can charge tuition, whether they can bring religion into their curriculums, and whether they can pick and choose their student body are commonly misperceived. To be clear, charter schools *are* public and they are funded by taxpayers. They *cannot* charge tuition, cannot teach religion, and cannot select students based on academic ability.

## *Public Opinion on Charter Schools*

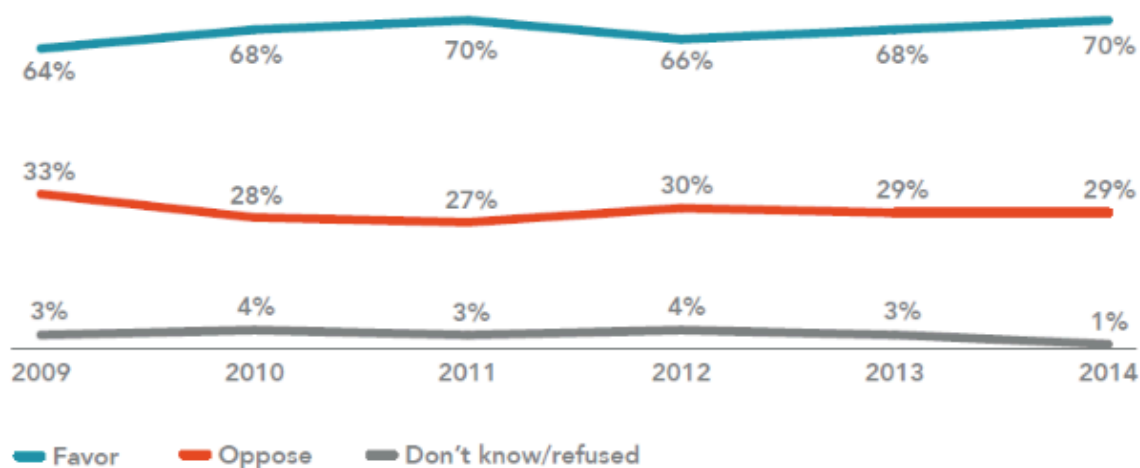
In August 2014, the 46<sup>th</sup> annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll National Alliance of public attitudes towards public schools was released, which revealed that there is deteriorating public support of Common Core standards. These findings are confirmed by the *Education Next* “Program on Education Policy and Governance” 2014 survey. These findings confirmed that Americans “dislike one-size-fits-all solutions when it comes to how their children are educated” (Rees). There is a growing culture of distrust towards federally driven approaches to education betterment. For example, the Education Next survey reveals that 68% of Americans “would favor their state using standards for reading and math that are the same across the states,” but when these standards are labeled as “Common Core,” this number falls to 54%.

How does this relate to charter schools? These polls also found that over two thirds of the American public look towards charter schools as a favorable institution, despite the myths that still exist concerning them. These results show that Americans prefer local control over their children’s education. In the poll, charter schools were defined as “independently operated schools... free of regulation,” and American support was 70%. When charter schools were not defined, there was a 63% support response.

## Support for charter schools outweighs opposition

Percent of Americans who say they favor or oppose the idea of charter schools after hearing the following statement, over time:

*"Charter schools operate under a charter or contract that frees them from many of the state regulations imposed on public schools and permits them to operate independently."*



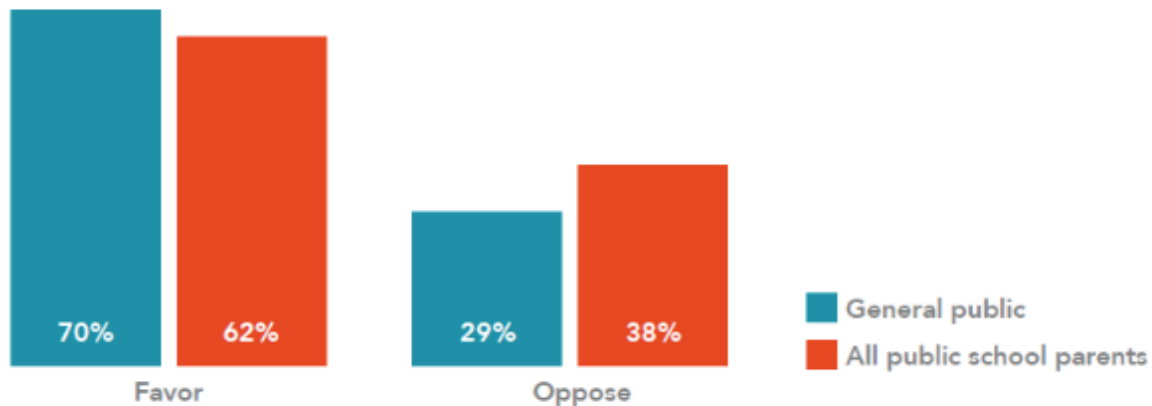
SOURCE: PDK/Gallup, "Annual PDK/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools," 2014.

When parents were asked specifically if they favored charter schools, they were slightly less in favor of charter schools than the general public, and they were less likely to see differences between charter schools and traditional public schools.

## Parents' views on charter schools differ somewhat from those of the general public

Percent of public school parents and the general public who say they favor or oppose the idea of charter schools after hearing the following statement, 2014:

*"Charter schools operate under a charter or contract that frees them from many of the state regulations imposed on public schools and permits them to operate independently."*



SOURCE: PDK/Gallup, "The 46th Annual PDK/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools," 2014.

This difference in opinion may be due to the fact that many view charter schools as a detriment to the funding received by traditional public schools. When Americans were asked if they would "favor or oppose charter schools in their community if funding them means reducing the amount of funds for the regular public schools" in 2005, 65% of Americans surveyed opposed them. While this question has not been asked in a Gallup poll since 2005, in 2013 the American Federation of Teachers (an educators' union) asked parents what they thought about a proposal to "reduce spending on regular public schools... (and) increase spending on charters." 55% of parents strongly disapproved. According to *Charter Schools In Perspective*, these results show that "support for charter schools does not hold stable when charters are framed as a thread to traditional public schools' funding," which they certainly seem to be in the poll taken by the American Federation of Teachers.

## National Context

The first charter school, City Academy High School, was created in 1992 in St. Paul, Minnesota, after former Minnesota State Senator Ember Reichgott Junge created the nation's first charter school law in Minnesota. It was founded by veteran public school teachers who had attempted to create new programs for struggling public school students in the schools they had taught in, but had not been able to be effective due to regulations already in place in the public schools (Sanchez, "Movement Grows"). According to the National Center of Education Statistics, which has the most up-to-date data on charter schools in the U.S., there were 6,079 charter schools as of the 2012-2013 school year.

According to *Charter Schools In Perspective*, a project that seeks to "enlighten and improve the conversation about charter schools in the United States," and the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics, charter school students tend to be predominately African American or Hispanic compared to the demographics of a traditional public school. This pattern can be explained in part by the concentration of charter schools in urban areas where there is a majority of African American and Hispanic students who are also likely to be living in poverty (in comparison to students in suburban and rural areas). In the 2011-2012 school year, 55.4% of charter school were located in cities, while only 21.2% were located in the suburbs, 7.4% in towns, and 16% in rural areas.



A main part of the drive for introducing charter schools to America's public school system is closing the achievement gap. In the United States, there is a wide disparity in academic achievement between various demographics, particularly between Black and White students, White and Hispanic students, and "poor" and "affluent" students. As it is described by Education Week, the educational achievement gap "refers to the disparity in academic performance between groups of students." Along with differences in race, the gap affects students with different levels of English-language proficiency, gender, income, and learning disabilities (Education Week). According to analyses by the National Center for Charitable Statistics in 2009 and 2011, black and Hispanic students were, on average, behind on NAEP math and reading assessments at the 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades by about two grade levels (NCES, 2009, 2011).

Charter schools are viewed as being "uniquely positioned to contribute to (closing the Gap)," according to the U.S. Department of Education's 2006 study entitled "Charter High Schools Closing the Achievement Gap: Innovations in Education." As public schools, they receive public funding, but as charter schools they are not subject to the same or as many regulations that a traditional public school is subjected to. Because of this, charter schools have more autonomy in their operations, greater decision making power over hiring and staffing decisions, greater control over their budgets, and more opportunities to be innovative. According to Nelson Smith, the president of the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, "Charter schools are giving administrators the freedom to innovate, teachers the ability to be creative, parents the

chance to be involved, and students the opportunity to learn—creating a partnership that leads to improved student achievement.”

According to Achievement First, which comprises a network of 30 non profit, college-preparatory, K-12 public charter schools in Connecticut, New York, and Rhode Island, “closing the achievement gap is the civil rights issue of our time.” The education system in the United States has done a poor job of providing access to high-quality education for low-income and minority children. Therefore, these demographics are unable to compete later on in life with those who had more opportunities (mainly, the white and affluent demographic). Achievement First focuses on urban communities, although rural communities are in just as much need. For instance, in the state of Mississippi—a mostly rural state—almost 1/3 of districts suffer from teacher shortages. At least 10% to 15% of those districts’ teachers are not even licensed in their subjects (Wang).

Walton Rural Life Center in Kansas is a charter school that has used innovative techniques to blend effective education with the needs and interests of local students. Formerly a district school, the Center was converted to a charter in 2007 and now scores in the top 5% of Kansas Schools (Fishman). However, according to Education Next, “rural communities have not embraced charter schools with the same gusto as their urban counterparts in part because they fear consolidation... (which could) ultimately force the dissolution of distinct communities.”

Who decides to form a charter school in a community? According to the National Resource Center on Charter School Finance & Governance, many charter schools are established by parents. Charter schools “offer parents a unique form of involvement from the time they decide their child will attend... school.” For example, Herron High School in Indianapolis was formed based on a concept created in 2003 by Joanna Beatty Taft, Executive Director of nearby Harrison Center for the Arts. A mother herself, Taft recognized that Indianapolis’s urban neighborhoods needed a high-quality, tuition-free, college-prep high school option. She brought together many players to create the plan for Herron High School, a classical liberal arts school that and is organized along an art history timeline meant to spawn creativity and engagement to a diverse array of students, who are often referred to as “world class citizens.” Herron was designated a 4 Star School by the Indiana Department of Education, and today it is in the top 5% of schools nationwide as per Newsweek, U.S. News, and the Washington Post rankings.

However, this is not always the case. The Louisiana Recovery School District was originally formed in New Orleans, Louisiana for relief from the steadily declining state of New Orleans’s education system. In 1998, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education established the Louisiana School and District Accountability System, spearheaded by Governor Mike Foster. Although this system placed tough regulations and testing requirements for New Orleans public schools, Louisiana’s public education system continued to perform quite poorly. Even in 2005, 63% of New Orleans public schools were rated “academically unacceptable” and had a 56% graduation rate. Two years prior to Katrina, the “Recovery School District” (RSD) idea was

hatched, and today 66 RSD schools are open in New Orleans, 50 of which are public charter schools (Smith). After Katrina hit, the push for more charters was strong, as the city's public school system largely shut down and children were out of school completely.

There has been some influx of charter schools from New Orleans's main driver of charter school implementation, the Recovery School District, as well as the government and nonprofit organizations (notably, New Schools Baton Rouge, which is similar to but not affiliated with New Schools New Orleans) that have realized this need for change in Baton Rouge's poorest performing school districts. This will be discussed in further sections.

The Louisiana Recovery School District is an example of how charter schools were created because of a legislative push as opposed to a grassroots organization, like the example of Herron High School in Indianapolis. While often a movement begins with grassroots organizers, it can also become up to legislators and larger outside organizations to recognize when a community is in need of the introduction of something that has worked elsewhere.

According to the National School Boards Association, 12% of charter schools are run by for-profit organizations, 20% are run by nonprofit organizations, and 68% are run by parents and local community groups. These numbers are from 2012 (Sanchez, "Game Changer").

### *Charter Schools in New Orleans, Louisiana*

The educational situation in New Orleans is unique in regards to charter schools. When Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans in 2005, the 56,000 student public school system was completely wiped out. It had already been struggling due to abounding issues with corruption and incompetence, according to Thomas Toch of U.S. News.

Before Katrina, the Louisiana School and District Accountability System had already been founded. This was meant to serve as an organization which would mandate higher standards and continued improvements for the schools in the New Orleans Public School System. Once Katrina had hit, however, the need was far greater than this was meeting. The Louisiana legislature turned 80% of New Orleans' schools (of which there were 126) to the Louisiana Recovery School District, which had been born out of the Louisiana School and District Accountability System, mandating that these schools would be recreated as charter schools. Today, over 90% of New Orleans's schools are charter, with 62% of the city's students passing state standardized tests—almost double the percentage ten years ago—and graduation rates are now 73%.

The majority of charter schools in Louisiana are located in Baton Rouge or New Orleans, with growth happening each year. With more than 79% of all New Orleans public school students attending a charter school—which is a higher proportion of charter school attendance than any other city in the nation—this city in particular serves as a unique example of how charter

schools have shaped a city. In 2011, 86% of New Orleans charter school students were black and about 3% were Hispanic, which also allows for an opportunity to study how charter schools might affect minorities that are historically underserved (Credo 38). In addition to this, 80% of the New Orleans charter school population was in poverty in 2011 (Credo 42).

According to the Credo study on charter schools in New Orleans and Louisiana, “a substantial share of Louisiana charter schools appear to outpace (traditional public schools) in how well they support academic learning gains in their students in both reading and math” (47). 41% of charter schools in Louisiana are ahead of traditional public schools with regards to reading improvement, and 42% of charters outpace traditional public schools in math. 14% of charter schools have significantly worse scores than traditional public schools in both reading and math. In New Orleans, 50% of charter schools outpace traditional public schools in reading and 62% of charters do so in math, while 6% of charters have significantly lower learning gains than traditional public schools in reading and 4% in math. This study only looks as far as 2011, as it was conducted in 2013.

However, many do not see the effectiveness of the New Orleans charter school movement; in fact, they would argue that it has had a negative effect on students. Colleen Kimmett’s investigatory feature published by *In These Times*, “10 Years After Katrina, New Orleans’ All-Charter School System Has Proven a Failure,” tells a story of overly-strict schools that treat each student like a delinquent. According to Princeton Doctoral student Joanna Golanne, many of New Orleans charter schools “produce worker-learners to close the achievement gap.” A no-

excuses approach is taken by administrators, extending school days and years, increasing the frequency of testing, and setting extremely strict routines and behavioral codes based on demerit systems. Additionally, those interviewed in the article felt that there were not nearly enough minority teachers to serve as role models to the predominately minority student body. In some cases, charter schools attempted to strategically screen out poor-performing and special needs students in order to keep their scores high, even forgoing funding to do so (as each student brings in additional funding from the state in the charter and public school model).

While these are potentially frightening realities to face, is it true that they are all bad (and all completely true and applicable to each charter school in question)? According to a study of New York City's charter schools done by Caroline Hoxby, a professor of economics at Stanford and senior fellow at the Hoover Institute, the one factor most strongly correlating with a charter school's success was increasing the length of the school year and school day (Dubner). Organizations like the Boys and Girls Clubs serve as a sort of "lengthened" school day as well for students served; in Indiana, the Clubs receive some of their funding based on a program called Indiana Kids, where children are required to complete a certain amount of homework or homework-related activities in the after school program. These students therefore have an advantage, as they are receiving help and encouragement on homework assignments that might otherwise not be completed, and provided a safe environment to be in after school instead of home alone or out on the streets.

While the strictness of these charter schools may also be questionable in its effectiveness, Kimmett also mentions that they are making efforts to address these criticisms. Ben Marcovitz, CEO of Collegiate Academies in New Orleans, explained that they worked with their teachers to adjust enforcement policies towards more lenience and in one year brought “suspension rates from 56 to 12 percent in one year.” Schools have also begun to increase efforts to bring in more minority teachers to serve as role models for the minority student body, and the state has cracked down on schools for selectively admitting students. However, is it possible that these schools are selectively admitting students because they realize that the inevitable initial poor performance of students with a track record of low test scores will eventually run them out of business? Perhaps the strictness of standards held to charter schools, which are predominately located in low income areas where low test scores are largely difficult to avoid, at least in the beginning, are incentivizing such perceivably bad behavior?

While we may not be able to determine the exact reasons for this shift in the way schools are run—whether they be profit-driven, due to misled perceptions of what produces good test scores (and therefore good school grades), or simply truly driven by a desire to better the futures of students in these charter schools—looking at the way charter schools are developing in the nearby city of Baton Rouge may help us begin to understand some of these reasons.



## Part II: Why East Baton Rouge?

According to the New York Times interactive article “The Best and Worst Places to Grow Up: How Your Area Compares,” written in May of 2015, “East Baton Rouge Parish is extremely bad for income mobility for children in poor families.” East Baton Rouge ranks 68<sup>th</sup> out of 2,478 counties in regards to helping poor children in the U.S. climb the income ladder, which means it is better than only approximately 3% of U.S. counties. East Baton Rouge Parish has five school districts: The East Baton Rouge Parish School District, the East Baton Rouge Recovery School District, Zachary Community School District, Central Community School District, and the Baker School District. The East Baton Rouge Parish school system is a poor urban school district, dealing with one of the toughest demographics to educate in the country.

Baton Rouge, the capitol city of Louisiana, is actually currently facing an economic boom, according to the Baton Rouge Area Chamber. According to the Chamber’s Regional Analysis of K-12 Education Performance for the 2013-2014 School Year, a greatly increased workforce need is projected in jobs in the STEM industries (science, technology, engineering, and math). Through the Jump Start initiative, the state of Louisiana has recently begun to move towards career and technical oriented education.

Half of Louisiana’s top ten school districts are located in the Baton Rouge region (commonly referred to as the “Capital Region”). There are 13 Capital school districts, which experienced “significant improvements” in overall performance scores in the 2013-2014 school year. In

2013, the Capital Region had four districts in the top ten districts in the state, and five in the top 25, and in 2014 there were five and six, respectively. This indicates proof of the recent trend towards better education on the part of the city of Baton Rouge as a whole. However, five of the Capital Region's school districts still ranked in the bottom 25 districts in the state. Each of these districts did see an improved score from the previous school year to the most recent, the most drastic improvements being with regards to the full letter grade and 16% increase in its District Performance Score (DPS) on the part of the East Baton Rouge Recovery School District (EBRRSD). In contrast, the East Baton Rouge Parish School System (EBRPSS), which educates 36% of the Capital Region's public school students, only saw a 1% increase in its DPS score.

Like many poor urban areas, the state of education in East Baton Rouge is not optimal. Like cities such as Detroit and struggling areas of Los Angeles, legislators in the district have been continuously looking for ways to better their education system and provide children the tools they need to have the opportunity to better their situation. This school district calls to attention the fact that charters are generally being placed more in poorer urban areas in order to meet the needs of that area. For instance, the East Baton Rouge Parish houses 23 of the 25 charter schools in the Capital Region, while neighboring Livingston Parish—which is predominately white and has a far smaller proportion of students on free or reduced lunch—has none.

Unlike New Orleans, Baton Rouge has established charter schools in a way that could be considered “by choice,” as opposed to the emergency situation in New Orleans that brought the predominance of charters into play. Although the proximity of New Orleans has certainly played a role in the introduction of charter schools to the Baton Rouge educational

environment, this decision has been on the part of Baton Rouge in order to help its city's students. This is quite similar to many poor urban areas in which it is quite apparent that education needs to be improved if a change for the better is to be made in that particular city.

The influence of New Orleans' unique educational situation can be seen in the fact that one of Baton Rouge's school districts is the East Baton Rouge Recovery School District. While this is technically independent from the New Orleans Recovery School District, it is very much derived from the Recovery School District of Louisiana (RSDLA), a statewide school district created and presided over by the Louisiana Department of Education. Additionally, New Schools Baton Rouge, a nonprofit organization with the mission to "transform schools citywide to ensure there is an excellent school for every child in our city," is not technically affiliated with New Schools for New Orleans (which has essentially the same mission, but in reference to New Orleans public schools). The New Orleans-affiliated organizations were driven to creation—or at least far further execution of the mission they set out to fulfill—ten years ago when Hurricane Katrina hit. In the case of Baton Rouge, the hurricane did not have this effect. The insurgence of charter schools in the region has been predominately due to the pushes of legislators and nonprofit agencies that believe in the abilities of charter schools to have an effective impact on life outcomes for children being raised in Baton Rouge, with particular attention being paid to East Baton Rouge.

Because of Baton Rouge's geographic isolation—relative to other large influencing urban areas other than New Orleans, which is a little over an hour's drive away—one can assume that Baton

Rouge experiences relatively few external influences due to proximity to other cities. This is in contrast to, for example, cities in California, where if a family is unhappy with the state of education in their city, they can theoretically just move up the coast to a different city. While there can be some mobility within Louisiana's capital city, this is largely hindered by income; someone on food stamps in East Baton Rouge is unlikely to be able to afford to move to Zachary, which ranked number one in the state out of all 74 school districts in 2014 (Baton Rouge Area Chamber, 9).

East Baton Rouge, therefore, makes for an interesting case study for the role of charter schools in a poor urban area. It is demographically similar to many cities in its genre, with a large proportion of students in many of its public schools on free or reduced lunch and a large proportion of minorities (specifically, African American and Hispanic) in its population. The increasing role of charter schools in the potential improvement of the East Baton Rouge school districts is an intriguing one, as this emerging change is one that is currently developing in many communities of its kind throughout the United States. While it may yet be too soon to fully identify and conclude on trends and changes occurring in Baton Rouge due to the insurgence of charter schools (are still a relatively new institution), this paper will serve as a summary of the role of charter schools thus far and how they have been introduced into the public school system of East Baton Rouge.

## Part III: A Closer Look at Charter Schools in East Baton Rouge

### *A Brief History*

When Katrina hit Louisiana, the number charter of schools in the state rose dramatically. The majority of these schools are in New Orleans's main school district, Orleans Parish, but others operate in districts such as Avoyelles, East Baton Rouge, Point Coupee parishes. The main similarity among all of these and those not listed is the demographic makeup and subsequent performance, particularly that of Orleans and East Baton Rouge, which are relatively large, urban areas with a relatively low track record of producing good scores and subsequently successful adults. Much of this can be attributed to low income, which often leads to children having difficulty in school due to lack of many of the resources available to those in higher income households as well as lack of many of the resources available within the schools themselves in these poorer districts.

It was clear that a change was needed in these poor urban (and rural) districts, but many were unclear what this change needed to be. In 1995 charter schools were begun in Louisiana as a pilot program under Louisiana's Charter School Law, under which eight districts were participants. In 1997, this charter school law was revised so that all school districts in Louisiana could participate, but the statewide cap for charter schools allowed to be open was set at 42. This act also allowed for an appeals procedure by which groups (if shown to be eligible) could submit a charter proposal to the Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education

(BESE) if the local school board would not approve it. In 2003, the Recovery School District was created, which authorized BESE to take over failing schools or put these schools under new (and hopefully better) management. According to the state, failing schools were defined as “schools with a School Performance Score (SPS) below 60,” or “low-performing schools that do not meet state-set goals for academic improvement for four or more consecutive years” (Louisiana Public Square).

When Katrina hit in 2005, much of the uncertainty and hesitance about how much stake to put into charter schools as a legitimate form of education in Louisiana shifted. That November, the Louisiana Legislature passed Act 35, which “changed the definition of a failing public school and the terms under which the state could assume control of a school” (Louisiana Public Square). This definition was now “below the state average,” which in the 2004-05 school year was 87.4... increasing the standard for performance by quite a large amount. Under this new criteria, the Recovery District took over 102 of the 118 public schools in New Orleans alone. Today, it controls 68 schools in New Orleans, 8 in East Baton Rouge, 2 in Caddo, 1 in St. Helena, and 1 in Point Coupee (Louisiana Believes, “Recovery School District”). However, this does not account for charter schools run by private organizations or individuals.

### *Types of charter schools*

There are currently five types of charter schools in Louisiana. Type 1 charters are brand new schools, authorized by the local school board. There are 21 of these in the state of Louisiana.

Type 2 charters are new or conversion schools authorized by BESE. Conversion school is one that converted from public to charter, such as was the case with Capitol Sr. High School. There are 21 type 2 charters in Louisiana. Type 3 charters are only conversion schools, authorized by the local school board. There are 12 of these in Louisiana. Type 4 charters are new or conversion schools authorized by the local school board *and* BESE. There is only one school like this in the state. Finally, type 5 charter schools are Recovery School District schools which are authorized by BESE. There are 59 of these in the state. There is also the option of a Type 3B charter school, which is a former type 5 charter which transferred from Recovery School District oversight back to that of the local school system. While none of these exist, they may in the future (Louisiana Believes, “Expanding Quality Options”).

### *Charter Schools in East Baton Rouge*

There are many examples of the movement of charter schools in East Baton Rouge, which is the second largest school district by enrollment in Louisiana. It is located in East Baton Rouge Parish, which was home to 445,227 according to the last census. East Baton Rouge’s demographic makeup is around 46% African America, 49% white, 2% Asian, and 3% Hispanic or Latino (Ballotpedia). As of May 2014, James Bernard Taylor Jr. is the superintendent of East Baton Rouge Parish School System, and has served in this position since 2012. The school system operates 85 schools, which includes 12 high schools and about 25 charter schools.

Friendship Capitol High School in East Baton Rouge operates under the Friendship Public Charter School Model, meaning its curriculum and resources are based out of a charter school organization in Washington, D.C. Friendship Capitol High School has undergone many different forms of schooling. It was founded as a traditional public school in the mid 1900s as Capitol Sr. High School and converted to two different schools, Capitol Pre-College Academy for Boys and Capitol Pre-College Academy for Girls, in 2005. These came under management of the East Baton Rouge Recovery School District in 2008 and then they were converted back to Capitol Sr. High School in 2011. Shortly after, Capitol Sr. High came under management of Friendship Public Charter Schools.

Other notable charters include Mentorship Academy of Digital Arts (MADA) and Mentorship Academy of Science and Technology (MAST), which were begun in 2012. These schools are managed under the same roof, and prepare students for very specific fields. MADA's goal is "to prepare students for engagement in the growing fields of film making, video game design, and digital media through a collaboration with many media companies contributing to this growing economy and in coordination with Baton Rouge Area Digital Industries Consortium."

Conversely, MAST "seeks to prepare Baton Rouge students for engagement in the petrochemical industry through projects, internships, and collaboration with organizations such as BP in America" (Mentorship Academy).

Thrive Academy is a charter elementary school which hopes to build up the student body to become a high school. Founded by Teach for America alumnus Sarah Broome in 2011, Thrive



fuels its mission on the belief that “education is the ultimate empowerment,” that, “all children have the potential to be independent thinkers,” that “children learn better when they are healthy, well rested, safe, and secure,” and that “the cycle of poverty can be broken by promoting independence and self-sufficiency” (Thrive). The school houses its students during the school week—feeding them breakfast, lunch, and dinner and ensuring they have sufficient support to complete assignments and get to bed by a decent time—and sends them home on the weekends. While it currently only serves 80 students in grades 6-8, its students are 100% minority—and 100% are eligible for free or reduced lunch—and the leaders of the school plan to continue to grow until Thrive serves grades 6-12.

Istrouma High School, one of East Baton Rouge’s oldest traditional public schools (having been founded in 1917), came under management of the Recovery School District in 2012 after school size began to dwindle and scores came back consistently below average (Jones). However, no charter organizations wanted to take over Istrouma so the Recovery School District decided to close the school in 2013. Instead, students would be transferring to Capitol High (now a charter, as previously mentioned) until Istrouma’s campus became a home for a new charter school (Naquin).

Other solutions to the education problem in Baton Rouge have included creating new school districts within the East Baton Rouge Parish. These include the Zachary Public School District (which was ranked best in the state in 2013 according to local news source WBRZ), Central Community School District, and City of Baker Public Schools. While rankings have gone up for

these school districts, concentrations of students eligible for free or reduced lunch in East Baton Rouge Parish School District schools have increased according to data on the Louisiana Believes school report card database. This could imply that while new and better schools are being formed elsewhere, these cater predominately to students who could *afford* to go elsewhere... leaving behind the students who need the most help.

### *Regression Analysis*

While there is still rather little data on charter schools in East Baton Rouge—as they are still such an emerging institution in this educational community—I chose to run a regression analysis on the effects of charter or public high school attendance on subsequent college attendance. To take things a step further, I then regressed this upon the proportion of those students who did attend college who remained in good standing after one year (meaning, they were still enrolled and not on academic probation due to bad academic performance or disciplinary issues). Other independent variables were considered, including the percent of students in each high school eligible for free or reduced lunch, size of school, the amount that graduated high school, the School Performance Scores of the high school, and district their high school was in within the East Baton Rouge Parish. Both the district variable and size of school variable were omitted (due to multicollinearity) by STATA, which I used to produce the regression. I utilized data from the Louisiana Believes database in the years spanning from the 2005-2006 school year to the 2012-2013 school year.

The following is the output from this analysis:

Source	SS	df	MS	Number of obs	=	142
				F(33, 108)	=	154.91
Model	518526.082	33	15712.9116	Prob > F	=	0.0000
Residual	10954.6572	108	101.432011	R-squared	=	0.9793
				Adj R-squared	=	0.9730
Total	529480.739	141	3755.18255	Root MSE	=	10.071

depvarattendedcollege	Coef.	Std. Err.	t	P> t	[95% Conf. Interval]	
p_freelunch	-9.42955	19.21271	-0.49	0.625	-47.51247	28.65337
indepvarcharterlorpublic0	-4.543445	6.361483	-0.71	0.477	-17.15301	8.066118
highschoolcompletionrategradu-e	.5830784	.0365032	15.97	0.000	.5107226	.6554341
par	0	(omitted)				
schoolspsscores	.0726939	.0951168	0.76	0.446	-.1158441	.2612319
actscoresavg	4.484353	1.639497	2.74	0.007	1.234585	7.73412
high						
Baton Rouge High School	31.92493	16.13522	1.98	0.050	-.0578657	63.90773
Belaire HS	-15.9763	5.855972	-2.73	0.007	-27.58386	-4.368753
Broadmoor Sr. HS	-13.90394	6.288918	-2.21	0.029	-26.36967	-1.438216
Capitol Pre-Col. Acad. For B..	16.03665	7.126747	2.25	0.026	1.9102	30.1631
Capitol Pre-Col. Acad. For G..	13.81877	6.846262	2.02	0.046	.2482898	27.38925
Capitol Sr. HS	-6.515477	9.144071	-0.71	0.478	-24.64061	11.60966
Central HS	-5.894668	10.56535	-0.56	0.578	-26.83703	15.04769
EBR Lab Academy	5.743109	8.40026	0.68	0.496	-10.90766	22.39388
Glen Oaks Sr. HS	-1.063048	5.688146	-0.19	0.852	-12.33794	10.21184
Istrouma Sr. HS	-15.27372	6.304229	-2.42	0.017	-27.76979	-2.77764
Louisiana Connections Academy	-9.039186	12.89812	-0.70	0.485	-34.60549	16.52712
Madison Preparatory Academy	17.36094	9.817333	1.77	0.080	-2.098716	36.8206
McKinley Sr. HS	-6.871574	8.480849	-0.81	0.420	-23.68209	9.93894
Northeast HS	-4.697229	4.965216	-0.95	0.346	-14.53915	5.144691
Robert E. Lee HS	-9.400706	6.043054	-1.56	0.123	-21.37909	2.577675
Scotlandville Magnet HS	5.125484	6.598152	0.78	0.439	-7.953197	18.20417
Tara HS	-16.15056	6.051827	-2.67	0.009	-28.14633	-4.154785
Woodlawn HS	-6.516152	7.792936	-0.84	0.405	-21.9631	8.930799
Zachary High School	1.305016	10.46982	0.12	0.901	-19.44799	22.05802
yr						
2005-2006	1.891418	4.262052	0.44	0.658	-6.556708	10.33954
2006-2007	-2.320978	3.764796	-0.62	0.539	-9.783457	5.141501
2007-2008	-2.018934	4.08539	-0.49	0.622	-10.11689	6.079018
2008-2009	-.5287987	4.685066	-0.11	0.910	-9.815413	8.757815
2009-2010	-2.207819	4.544371	-0.49	0.628	-11.21555	6.799912
2010-2011	16.74069	4.739623	3.53	0.001	7.345937	26.13545
2011-2012	23.23932	5.138491	4.52	0.000	13.05394	33.4247
2012-2013	26.91676	6.10298	4.41	0.000	14.8196	39.01393

As we can see, ACT scores have the most significant effect on the dependent variable (college attendance) based on a 5% significance level. While charter schools seem to have a negative effect on college attendance, the P variable is relatively insignificant (being much higher than 0.05), therefore telling us that this effect is perhaps not very strong. Understandably, the proportion of students eligible for free or reduced lunch had a negative impact on college attendance, but this variable was very insignificant for the same reasons as the main independent variable, charter school status. One interesting (and significant) trend was the very positive change in college attendance during the last three years of data collected.

I then compared this to the following output, which regressed the previous independent variables as well as the dependent variable, college attendance, against the proportion of students in good standing after one year of attending college.

Source	SS	df	MS	Number of obs	=	142
Model	2.36675888	34	.069610555	F(34, 107)	=	10.05
Residual	.741197966	107	.006927084	Prob > F	=	0.0000
				R-squared	=	0.7615
				Adj R-squared	=	0.6857
Total	3.10795685	141	.022042247	Root MSE	=	.08323

good_stand	Coef.	Std. Err.	t	P> t	[95% Conf. Interval]	
depvarattendedcollege	.0015971	.0007952	2.01	0.047	.0000207	.0031735
p_freelunch	-.1600436	.1589498	-1.01	0.316	-.4751431	.1550559
indepvarcharterlorpublic0	.03788	.052695	0.72	0.474	-.0665816	.1423417
highschoolcompletionrategradu-e	-.0008948	.0005532	-1.62	0.109	-.0019914	.0002017
par	0	(omitted)				
schoolspsscores	.0004769	.0007882	0.61	0.546	-.0010856	.0020393
actscoresavg	-.0008177	.0140101	-0.06	0.954	-.0285912	.0269557
high						
Baton Rouge High School	.0527084	.1357358	0.39	0.699	-.216372	.3217888
Belaire HS	.0832039	.0500333	1.66	0.099	-.0159812	.182389
Broadmoor Sr. HS	.1048909	.0531344	1.97	0.051	-.0004417	.2102236
Capitol Pre-Col. Acad. For B..	-.1795944	.0602599	-2.98	0.004	-.2990526	-.0601362
Capitol Pre-Col. Acad. For G..	.0227406	.0576344	0.39	0.694	-.0915129	.1369941
Capitol Sr. HS	-.1584	.0757436	-2.09	0.039	-.3085527	-.0082472
Central HS	.1369739	.0874373	1.57	0.120	-.0363603	.310308
EBR Lab Academy	.1671637	.0695694	2.40	0.018	.0292505	.3050769
Glen Oaks Sr. HS	.0816101	.0470142	1.74	0.085	-.01159	.1748102
Istrouma Sr. HS	.0741901	.0534949	1.39	0.168	-.0318572	.1802375
Louisiana Connections Academy	-.3595825	.1068315	-3.37	0.001	-.5713634	-.1478015
Madison Preparatory Academy	-.0205271	.0822962	-0.25	0.804	-.1836697	.1426154
McKinley Sr. HS	.0818918	.070298	1.16	0.247	-.0574658	.2212494
Northeast HS	.0664504	.041202	1.61	0.110	-.0152277	.1481285
Robert E. Lee HS	.0519269	.0504959	1.03	0.306	-.0481754	.1520291
Scotlandville Magnet HS	.0939707	.0546789	1.72	0.089	-.0144239	.2023653
Tara HS	.1010505	.0516347	1.96	0.053	-.0013092	.2034102
Woodlawn HS	.0411833	.0646086	0.64	0.525	-.0868956	.1692623
Zachary High School	.0237246	.0865283	0.27	0.784	-.1478077	.1952569
yr						
2005-2006	.0273219	.0352535	0.78	0.440	-.042564	.0972079
2006-2007	-.0743896	.0311668	-2.39	0.019	-.1361741	-.0126051
2007-2008	.101503	.0337996	3.00	0.003	.0344992	.1685068
2008-2009	.1652479	.0387194	4.27	0.000	.0884911	.2420046
2009-2010	.0963931	.0375955	2.56	0.012	.0218645	.1709218
2010-2011	-.0975897	.0413684	-2.36	0.020	-.1795978	-.0155816
2011-2012	-.0562991	.0463111	-1.22	0.227	-.1481054	.0355073
2012-2013	-.0918004	.0547887	-1.68	0.097	-.2004125	.0168118

As you can see, ACT scores decrease in their significance and begin to show a slight negative effect on students' tendency to remain in college. Charter schools begin to have a slight positive effect, although this variable remains insignificant at a 5% significance level, and throughout

each year students tend to be remaining in college at fairly regular and significant rates, but rates which become negative in the last three years of data. While this output could use some fine-tuning, it gives us a general idea of the effects of these covariates and independent variables on college attendance and subsequent student success in college.

## Conclusions

From looking at both of the regressions shown in the last section, one might begin to suspect that while many schools are getting more students into college in recent years, they aren't necessarily keeping them there. Could this be more a question of who is teaching to the test and creating an imbalanced curriculum which does not also teach important lifelong habits—those which enable students' success in a suddenly independent college environment? While more students are getting into college, less students are staying (proportionately). While charters do not show to have a strong positive relationship with sending students to college initially, they do show to be beginning to have a positive effect on students' ability to remain in college.

Perhaps some of these charters' curriculums are indeed teaching lifelong skills that enable students to be successful after the bubble of high school. However, this may not be a question of charter versus public at all. A "good" school may simply be a good school, and while other studies have shown that the experimental techniques charters can try—such as extended school days and unconventional curriculums—are effective and give charters a leg up as compared to traditional public schools, perhaps we cannot say that it is simply this. Certain schools simply have more of a college-and-onwards oriented culture than others. Often it can be the culture of the school and the care of the teachers that makes a difference in a child's life beyond high school. So while these results may not show results that overwhelmingly support

or oppose charter schools' right to exist, they may show that, one, there simply is not enough data yet to show, and two, it may not be an argument of charter versus public at all.

While they have not been completely well-received, charter schools are shaping the culture of education in East Baton Rouge towards a desire for holding schools to extremely high standards and pushing students towards attending college or learning a trade. All of the charter schools we have studied in EBR have a mission oriented towards closing the achievement gap by increasing their students' professionalism and helping those become college-ready who might otherwise not have known how to do so or had the opportunity (or knowledge of the opportunity) to begin with.

While some have argued that "effectiveness" is not up to par as per certain measures of such, like SPS scores and school grade, charter schools' increasing presence in East Baton Rouge is highlighting more and more the potential for students to achieve a professional career regardless of their background.

Since most are privately funded and run, they are often seen as relatively unregulated. Some have argued, as we have seen from authorities such as No Child Left Behind, that this is an advantage because the lack of extreme regulation allows for more room to implement new tools for success. However, others argue that this is unfair to students because it makes them the "guinea pigs" of the educational system. While this is indeed true, how else can we learn what is more effective than what we already have? For better or for worse, there is no way we



can set up a “controlled experiment” (other than to look at the educational practices utilized in other countries) to observe the effects of various educational before trying them out on the students in question themselves. Perhaps must accept that this may simply be necessary in order to determine new and innovative ways to drive success in the classroom and after high school.

Many students interviewed have given mixed reviews. While some have said they felt restricted and treated like delinquents, others have reported that they feel heard and valued for the first time in an educational setting. While we cannot determine the *true* effectiveness of charter schools in regards to sending more students to college and, subsequently, successful professional careers, as compared to traditional public, we can see that there are people who put a tremendous amount of time, effort, and care into attempting to ensure good lives for the students they serve by offering them an alternative when the current choice isn’t working for them.

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