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QuickPoint! – New Orleans’ Miracle School District

By Kathryn Hickok

Ten years ago, Hurricane Katrina devastated the southeastern United States, displacing more than 372,000 school-aged children. Today, New Orleans’ school population has returned to more than two-thirds its pre-storm level, but [a lot has changed for the better in the public school district](#).

Before Katrina, a Louisiana state legislator called New Orleans “one of the worst-run public school systems in America.” Almost two-thirds of students attended a “failing school.” After Katrina, the state legislature transferred more than 100 low-performing Orleans Parish schools to the Recovery School District. Now, [the district has 57 charter schools](#) operating under nonprofit charter management organizations.

According to [The Washington Examiner](#), barely more than half of New Orleans public school students graduated before Katrina. Today, almost all New Orleans students attend charter schools. In the 2013-14 school year, three out of four students graduated on time, and fewer than seven percent attend a “failing school.”

This amazing turnaround is due to the hard work of teachers, administrators, local and state leaders, and parents who rebuilt New Orleans’ public school system from the ground-up, with the vision and determination to create “an all-choice school district with high-quality schools.” The unprecedented success of New Orleans’ Recovery School District serves as a model for education reform efforts across the country. Parental choice, flexibility for educators, and innovation in management really can achieve the impossible.

Kathryn Hickok is Publications Director and Director of the Children’s Scholarship Fund-Portland program at Cascade Policy Institute. CSF-Portland is a partner program of the New York-based Children’s Scholarship Fund.