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Beyond Katrina, Designing A Unique Charter School In New Orleans: Community, Pedagogy, Governance, Finance, and Bureaucracy

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Beyond Katrina, Designing
A Unique Charter School
In New Orleans:
Community, Pedagogy, Governance,
Finance, and Bureaucracy

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
in
Curriculum and Instruction

by

Patty Glaser

B.S. Dominican College, 1976
M.C.D. LSUMC, 1981
December, 2008

DEDICATION

To Sooky,

Fr. T,

and

the many students who have learned to speak and read in my presence.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost I would like to thank my family. My husband, Glen, has supported and encouraged me beyond anyone's wildest imagination. It started with his encouragement for me to do better as a sophomore in college and has gone through undergraduate, graduate, and another graduate school run. He has taken care of our young boys during the first graduate school stint and has cooked and bought meals during successive ones. He loves my learning different population of kids, has helped raise money for my schools, and has attended and assisted at most school events. But his main job is his unending belief in my ability to accomplish things. If I am discouraged or ready to surrender, he convinces me to keep at it until the goal is reached. I thank him for a lifetime of support and love that I am so lucky to be the recipient of.

Next I thank my sons, Brad and Jeff, for their interest and enthusiasm for my many projects as well as their sympathy when things didn't go well. They have moved aquariums, assembled computers, and recruited friends to move textbooks and furniture up steep stairwells. They have each substituted for absent tutors or teachers. They have allowed me to study their language and their literacy and sort of allowed me to talk about their development in the classes and workshops I teach.

My mom and sisters also deserve thanks. My mom is a stalwart of a woman who is a shining example of a lifelong learner. She earned her undergraduate degree in Chemistry when most women didn't attend college and her Master's degree in her 50s. My sister, Marianne, deserves recognition and thanks because I think her literacy development established my interest in this field, and her resolve to be named and talked about in the study gave me a much needed start. My eldest sister, Adrienne, deserves nothing but blame since she earned her PhD after I earned my Master's and challenged me in the dedication of her book to earn this degree. I always listen to my oldest sister, so this is all her fault or all to her credit.

I have a group of friends here who are much like family to me. One is the "fourth" sister, Grace. She and I have been best friends since freshmen year in high school. We talk every morning, and she is an unending stream of humor and support. Valla is my other best friend since we were 9 years old and in 4th grade. She has allowed me to interview her kids, helped with formatting and computer skills in many early projects years ago, and had me over for dinners during hectic and happy times. My Friday Friends deserve thanks because they are my unofficial therapists. We laugh, share, sip wine, and mainly eat Friday lunch together frequently. God bless my friends!

I also need to thank the many families that I have worked with over the years. Your kids are WF, LE, NT, ME, NW, AP, LY, BG, and dozens and dozens of others. You, your children, and your family have been inspirations to me. Thank you for trusting your most valued asset in my care.

I also want to acknowledge and thank the Charter Writers. We worked hard and had fun creating this school. It is in our nature to collaborate and create. You are wonderful educators who live and work in New Orleans. How lucky I was to work with the cream of the crop in this most important project!

I cannot end this without acknowledging and thanking some former colleagues who were an inspiration and made work fun everyday. My dear, departed, pastor, friend, and mentor Fr. Tarantino would have loved seeing this dissertation complete. My colleagues Mike B., Marilyn B., Gina F., and Marie Mc understand kids, development, and learning at a deep level. I appreciate our years together.

Of course, I have to thank Patty Silva individually even though she falls in many of the above categories. She walks me through every task completing all of the details while I focus on the bigger picture.

Lastly, I have to thank my Dissertation Team loudly and strongly. I have known them over many years. Dr. Davis-Haley is warm and stimulating and always challenging one to the next level. Although she is no longer an acting committee member, she made my doctoral program tolerable and even fun at times. Dr. Kieff has been a steady flame of consulting over many years. If I had a pre-school need, a graduate school question, or a committee member vacancy; Dr. Kieff has been available with a smile on her face and a fountain of information. Dr. Barnitz is funny and clever and always has an uplifting comment and an interesting story to share. Dr. Bedford is strong and sure of her point of view and methodology. She was an ongoing support through the doctoral program, dissertation writing, and employment at the university. Dr. Casbergue is last and certainly not least. She is a neighbor and friend and literacy colleague. Dr. Casbergue recruited me to teach at the university level and then recruited me for the doctoral program. She is always just a phone call, e-mail, or short walk away. Dr. C. is smart, modest, and a favorite of all EDCI students and proudly for me, my friend.

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ABSTRACT

This study is a qualitative, autoethnographic study documenting the process of writing and submitting a charter school application in Post-Katrina New Orleans. The focus of the study is my professional journey to this point, and the journey the charter team. The school's mission and curriculum is unique and centered on special needs students who are "at-risk" for learning due to language and learning differences. Particular aspects of curriculum and instruction, climate and culture, professional development, student achievement goals, administration, and operational issues were developed by this team. The aim of the study is for this investigation to contribute to the body of knowledge about educating "at-risk" learners and designing innovative schools. The focus of the study is on the epistemological, methodological, and political insights encountered. The primary question for this investigation is: What are the components of a successful charter school for "at-risk" students? Secondary questions include: How do we determine who is "at-risk"? How do we balance state demands with best practice teaching for these "at-risk" students? Where does appropriate funding come from for such a project? Hopefully this narrow based study will lead to specific program improvement and evolvement.

Keywords: curriculum & instruction, special education, school administration

CHAPTER 1

In the Beginning, There Was a Community with a Need...

Setting: Post-Katrina New Orleans

An e-mail I sent to two nationally recognized athletes and their agents on January 15, 2008.

I am forwarding you the recent article from the Times Picayune about special ed students and charter schools. The school that we are planning will be 75% special ed & 25% regular ed. We are doing a "reverse inclusion." Normally, special ed are included after the fact - our emphasis is on them first. This is unique - the way that we teach and group kids is also unique.

The students in our school will have dyslexia, dysgraphia, language and learning differences. They will also have Asperger's, & PDD, NOS - all special education labels. We will have a low student-teacher ratio, hands-on learning, and arts immersion. Gerrie knows this and understands it - our kids use the arts to understand textbook terminology and concepts. When we study a concept, we create it artistically. This leads the kids to kinesthetic learning, as well as increased visual learning.

I first explained it to Gerrie by comparing how an athlete prepares for a game. They don't take out a textbook and read about the other team. They study films, run plays, discuss strategy, practice, and listen to coaches. Our teachers are more like coaches or facilitators that help the kids learn with proactive involvement.

I am currently finishing my doctorate in Curriculum & Instruction and am a Speech-Language Therapist by degree (Master's). My dissertation is on opening a charter school and should be complete by Dec, 2008. I have worked in schools and with kids with learning issues for

the last 31 years (all in the Greater New Orleans area). I created a private school program in 1994 for kids with differences, revitalized a parochial school program for kids with learning differences in 2001 (and opened a high school portion in 2005), and reopened those 2 schools after Katrina in 2005. With the members of the Fr. T Foundation, I am now headed toward designing and opening a charter school in the city. The other programs are still functioning, but are tuition based. A charter school is public, allowing a greater segment of families to take advantage of our unique style of education. We are most likely modeling the charter school after a similar school in Washington DC that is over 30 years old.

Our target date for opening is August, 2009. This is because of the charter school timelines set by the state. If we could have those timelines adjusted, we would push for an opening of August, 2008. There is talk in the local editorials of a class action lawsuit due to the lack of programs for kids with special needs so maybe that will help our cause. Currently, I have a charter writing team and a planning committee working on school design, needs, and fundraising.

This is a chance for Gerrie and Shay to support innovative education in the city of New Orleans, serving primarily special ed students who are currently way underserved. The kids often are good artists and/or athletes because they are more motoric oriented.

This network journalist often speaks of being dyslexic. He may relate to this.

Please have Gerrie or Shay or his agent contact me by phone or email if they need additional information. (personal e-mail communication, 2008)

How did this happen? Here I am writing to two well-known professional athletes to give them information they requested about my latest project so that when they are interviewed by a network journalist they can discuss the project. It didn't start like this. It started so much simpler.

It started almost by accident. I am a born and bred New Orleanian and now 31 years into my career as an educator in the Greater New Orleans area. My mission is and always was to help students with speech, language, learning, and academic differences. I never say disabilities, because to me they are very able; we just have to find out how to develop their abilities.

Autobiographical Sketch of Early Life

How did this quest begin? As my dear friend, Peggy, says, “Let me back up.” I am the youngest of three sisters. My middle sister had difficulty learning to talk and read. She also had difficulty through out her school years – especially with test taking. Family folklore maintains that she would say a “mumble-jumble” of words in the morning, and I would turn to my mom and say, “She wants two pieces of toast with grape jelly and grits.” My mom worked with her endless hours and sought tutoring across town with every known specialist. If my journey started there, it continued with my younger cousin who went to a Speech Therapist as a preschooler because he said very few words and what he did say was unintelligible. My aunt brought him uptown (a far ride for a Gentilly family), and in the evening we would watch as she carefully reviewed the speech notebook with him. That therapist could draw! She drew pictures of all the sounds and words he should practice. I was fascinated by that notebook and by watching Mark slowly gain expressive language that was intelligible. If the reader will allow me to jump forward, my sister is now a surgical technician and is passionate about reading while my cousin is a pilot for a commercial airline. These are two kids in the 60s that luckily had strong-willed moms who acted as their advocates and sought help until success was reached. I think that may be where the seed of my career was planted. Later as I meandered aimlessly through the core curriculum in college, I just couldn’t decide on a major. Deciding on a mate for life was far easier. After planning a wedding and taking an interest inventory test, I discovered that my top

two interests were Physical Therapy and Speech Therapy. Physical Therapy interested me more, but once I discovered I needed to be admitted to the local medical school for an allied health master's degree, I decided on Speech Therapy. So I married my college beau and transferred to a local college for my junior year to major in Speech Therapy. Before I finished my undergraduate degree, the profession decided that a Master's Degree was required in this field also, and the only local institution offering that degree was the same local medical school allied health program. So be it – I loved my new spouse and my coursework – Speech Therapy it was! The seed began to sprout and was headed on a long and unanticipated journey.

The seed first grew into a sapling, earned a Master's Degree, grew branches, raised two children, and then grew more into a full grown tree. The tree has blossomed; the blossoms have fallen, and bloomed again in greater numbers for many seasons – slightly improved or reinvented each time. This is the story of my career from seedling to blossoming tree – all concerned with educating “at-risk” learners – all in the metropolitan New Orleans area. The most recent bloom, and possibly my final bloom, has led me to attempt to open a charter school in Post-Katrina New Orleans. A school for students with language and learning differences – for students who have not succeeded in a traditional school setting - for students who need a different way of learning. This has always been my mission and continues to be my mission. The local New Orleans newspaper, the *Times Picayune* (2007), has published several articles recently about the lack of special education services in public and charter schools in Post-Katrina New Orleans. “Two years after charter schools began taking over the city's education landscape, they serve, on average, significantly fewer special education students than traditional schools . . . There's a sense of real urgency,” said Matt Candler, chief executive officer of New Schools for New Orleans, a nonprofit that provides support to many of the city's charter schools and is currently

supporting a survey of the charter schools' special education programs. "We're very emphatic in saying, 'It doesn't matter how well your school runs. If you don't serve children who have special education needs well, you jeopardize the whole charter movement'" (Carr, p. 1).

Of course, it is New Orleans, Post-Katrina, and we also have a lack of housing, a shortage of population, few jobs, bad streets, and luckily a charming, funky, musical town which we stubbornly call home and refuse to leave. I can't help provide housing, or fix streets, but I can educate "at-risk" students. Having a unique and attractive school for an underserved population can help attract people to New Orleans, and it can help provide additional jobs. So I have made a decision to use my gifts (as my friend, mentor, and pastor preached) and help in the rebuilding of our lovely worn-torn city. My contribution is to design a charter school for "at-risk" learners. With this project, I aspire to document the journey of designing and opening a charter school in New Orleans, Post-Katrina. As Shelley Harwayne (1999) started her book, *Going Public*, "When you start a school from scratch, you are conscious on that very first day that no such school existed on the day before" (p. xxi). When asked by parents if she could replicate her Manhattan public school, her answer was,

No, you can never re-create the same school in another setting... the life story of every school is so unique, so dependent on the particular people involved, the history of the world . . . each community's needs, and even the physical space allotted. (p. xxiv)

My goal was to document what led up to designing this new charter school, the planning that went into it, and the final design. I am convinced that no such school will have existed on the day before this school opens.

Overview of Research Plan

I conducted a qualitative, autoethnographic study of the process of designing a K – 13th charter school for “at-risk” learners in post-Katrina New Orleans. According to Mary Louise Pratt (Butz & Bezio, 2004), *autoethnography* refers to research of colonized groups attempting to represent themselves to their participants in ways that engage with participants culturally on their terms while also being true to their own self-understandings. According to Butz and Bezio (2004),

Drawing from research in a village in northern Pakistan, the authors argue that approaching fieldwork with an "autoethnographic sensibility" can yield important epistemological, methodological, and political insights into one's research practices. The paper concludes by suggesting that these insights extend beyond ... to inform more general debates... about how to achieve a critical and reflexive research practice. (p. 350)

Oddly enough, this description of autoethnography written from a geographer's viewpoint struck home with me for several reasons. As a valued colleague said recently, working for public schools in Post-Katrina New Orleans is analogous to working in the “wild, wild West of education.” In reestablishing an entire school system, educational leaders are somewhat colonizing new territories – hopefully in innovative ways to produce academic achievement for students. With that as a goal, the needs of the students and their families and our overall community have to be considered in school redesign, relocation, and reopening. As Maxine Greene (1995) stated, her life project has been to achieve an understanding of teaching, learning, and the many models of education. Mine has had a similar focus. I have tended to act on my understandings to create programs; programs that are needed by the community. My goal with this research was to document the epistemological, methodological, and political insights

encountered during the process of designing and opening a charter school in Post-Katrina New Orleans. I felt this methodology with this specific project would result in careful critical and reflective practice.

Guiding Questions

The primary question for the present investigation is: What are the components of a successful charter school for “at-risk” students? Secondary questions include the following: How do we determine who is “at-risk”? How do we balance state demands with best practice teaching for these “at-risk” students? Where does appropriate funding come from for such a project? The literature review is woven throughout this qualitative story of building programs and schools. The idea to tackle such an enormous task is the result of 31 years of experience in working with at-risk learners and training in two distinct yet overlapping fields, speech-language therapy and curriculum and instruction design for at-risk learners. The motivation is all about community – a committed network of community supporters including students, parents, families, and businesses partners. As Maxine Greene (1995) stated, “Community cannot be produced simply through rational formulation nor through edict. Like freedom, it has to be achieved by persons offered the space in which to discover what they recognize together and appreciate in common” (p. 39). A community recognized what they wanted and in some form or another we have pursued that common goal together over many years now.

The autoethnography portion includes the evolvment of my career and ongoing professional development as related to the programs developed in the past and the impact on the program currently being developed. This study also includes tracking the actual work in progress of the charter writing committee as we wrote and submitted the charter. As Harwayne (1999)

stated, “The remarkable thing about a school is that it has to work on day one” (p. 8). I documented the making of that plan.

I am introducing some terms that may be unfamiliar. I define additional unfamiliar terms as they surface in the text. I define the following terms now because these are certainly going to appear and reappear.

Definition of Terms

Students at-risk for academic success come in many shapes and sizes with many diverse ethnic, social, cultural, health, neurological, linguistic and familial backgrounds. These students at-risk for academic success will be referred to as at-risk learners throughout this study. Students with learning disabilities are at-risk learners. Learning disabilities are not easily defined as supported in a research review. According to the National Center for Learning Disabilities (1998), the term, *learning disability*, was coined in 1962 to describe individuals of average intelligence who have difficulty achieving academic skills. Since there is a lack of a consensus for a precise definition of learning disabilities, the Council for Exceptional Children (ERIC) provides the following definition of learning disability.

The term *learning disability* describes a neurobiological disorder in which a person's brain works or is structured differently. These differences interfere with a person's ability to think and remember. Learning disabilities can affect a person's ability to speak, listen, read, write, spell, reason, recall, organize information, and do mathematics. Because learning disabilities cannot be seen, they often go undetected. Recognizing a learning disability is even more difficult because the severity and characteristics vary. A learning disability can't be cured or fixed; it is a lifelong issue. With the right support and intervention, however, children with

learning disabilities can succeed in school and go on to successful, often distinguished careers later in life. Parents can help children with learning disabilities achieve such success by encouraging their strengths, knowing their weaknesses, understanding the educational system, working with professionals and learning about strategies for dealing with specific difficulties. (Source for Definition of Learning Disability)

With the discrepancy in definition and my own experience, I offer that at-risk learners may or may not have reading, writing, math, and/or attention difficulties. They may or may not have concomitant emotional and/or social issues. Students at-risk for learning are diverse learners for various reasons. They tend to have difficulty with linguistic development, time concepts, organizational issues, and memory and recall issues. Any combination of these issues often result in low academic achievement and difficulty performing in a traditional classroom where the emphasis is on teacher lecture, linguistically based assignments, student note taker and responder (passive learner), and paper and pencil testing.

Attention Deficit & Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). ADHD is a problem with inattentiveness, over-activity, impulsivity, or a combination. For these problems to be diagnosed as ADHD, they must be out of the normal range for the child's age and development. The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-IV)* divides the symptoms of ADHD into those of inattentiveness and those of hyperactivity and impulsivity (Medline Plus Website, 2008).

Affective Development. The focus of affective development is the part of the education process that concerns itself with attitudes, feelings, beliefs, and emotions of students. A further important component goes beyond the individual students and concerns the effectiveness of their

relationships with others, thus interpersonal relationships and social skills are recognized as central to affective education (Antikainen & Torres, 2003).

Asperger's Syndrome. Asperger syndrome is a condition marked by impaired social interactions and limited repetitive patterns of behavior. Motor milestones may be delayed and clumsiness is often observed. Asperger syndrome is very similar to or may be the same as high functioning autism (HFA; Medline Plus website, 2008).

Autoethnography. Autoethnography is a form of qualitative study where the author writes in first person and focuses on the generalization of a single case extended over time. The writing includes characters, plot lines, action, and dialogues and discloses hidden details and highlights emotional experiences. The features are relational and/or institutional stories affected by history and social structure. The method helps one understand the past according to contingencies of the present (Ellis, 2004).

Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE). A nine-member state board that sets policy for all Louisiana public schools. Seven members are elected from districts around the state and two members are appointed by the governor (*New Orleans Parents' Guide to Public Schools*, 2007).

Charter School. Charter schools are public schools run independently of the traditional public school system. These schools receive public funding and are held accountable by an agreement (a charter) with either the state or a local school district. All charter schools are tuition free and must be governed by a non-profit board; however, the non-profit board may elect to hire a for-profit education firm to manage its school (*New Orleans Parents' Guide to Public Schools*, 2007).

Differentiated Teaching. Teaching in a fair and developmentally appropriate manner across subject areas and needs of various learners is differentiated teaching. It's a collection of best practices strategically employed to maximize students' learning at every turn, including giving them the tools to handle anything that is undifferentiated (Wormelli, 2006).

Dysgraphia. Dysgraphia is a learning disability that affects writing abilities. It can manifest itself as difficulties with spelling, poor handwriting, and trouble putting thoughts on paper (National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2008).

Dyslexia. Dyslexia is a specific learning disability that is neurological in origin. It is characterized by difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities. These difficulties typically result from a deficit in the phonological component of language that is often unexpected in relation to other cognitive abilities and the provision of effective classroom instruction. Secondary consequences may include problems in reading comprehension and reduced reading experience that can impede the growth of vocabulary and background knowledge (The International Dyslexia Association, 2008).

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). This is a federal law that mandates that all youth between the ages of 3 and 21 with disabilities have access to a free, appropriate public education.

Individual Education Plan (IEP). A plan that is developed by the parents and teachers of a student with special learning needs that outlines the student's program of study and the particular education services. Federal special education law (IDEA) requires that all children with disabilities or exceptional talents have an IEP (*New Orleans Parents' Guide to Public Schools*, 2007).

Integrated Curriculum. An interdisciplinary approach to learning that connects the various academic disciplines where student work focused on problems rather than compartmentalized subjects (Noddings, 1992).

Language Delays/Disorders. When a person has trouble understanding others (*receptive language*), or sharing thoughts, ideas, and feelings completely (*expressive language*), then he or she has a *language disorder* (American Speech and Hearing Association, 2008).

Lottery. A process of randomly selecting students from a pool of applicants. Many charter schools use lotteries if they receive more applications for admission than they have available spaces. (*New Orleans Parents' Guide to Public Schools*, 2007)

Multiple Intelligences. An intelligence is a biopsychological potential to process information that can be activated in a cultural setting to solve problems or create products that are of value in a culture. Humans possess many different intelligences, each of which are socially recognized and valued (Gardner, 1999).

Multiple Literacies. An expanded view of traditional literacy to include making meaning from a variety of text sources which include using various mediums of technology literacy, visual literacy, and informational literacy (Smolin & Lawless, 2003). Multi-literacies help reach at-risk students through use of technology and ability to acknowledge the student's sociocultural perspective (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003).

Nonverbal Learning Disabilities. Children placed in this group display the following profile of skills. Verbal IQ scores, for example, are well within normal limits, whereas nonverbal IQ lags behind. These children have difficulty with nonverbal problem solving, visual-spatial-organizational skills, tactile perception, and complex psychomotor behavior, but, on the surface at least, they appear to have good language skills. They talk (often excessively), they use a

variety of sentence structures, they can memorize and repeat vast amounts of verbal material, and they demonstrate average to above-average abilities in single-word reading and spelling (Volden, 2002).

Pervasive Developmental Disorder-Not Otherwise Specified (PDD-NOS). As first listed in 1980, in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Third Edition (DSM-III)* Atypical PDD encompassed difficulties characterized by problems in social interaction and problems in communication or restricted/unusual interests similar to those observed in autism but which did not meet full criteria for either infantile autism or childhood onset pervasive developmental disorder. By implication, individuals with Atypical PDD had to exhibit some problem in the social area *and* either in communication or unusual interests. In the revised 3rd edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Third Edition, Revised (DSM-III-R)*, the name was changed to *Pervasive Developmental Disorder Not Otherwise Specified* (American Psychiatric Association, 2008).

Speech Delays/Disorders. When a person is unable to produce speech sounds correctly or fluently, or has problems with his or her voice, then he or she has a *speech disorder*. Difficulties pronouncing sounds, or articulation disorders, and stuttering are examples of speech disorders (American Speech and Hearing Association, 2008).

Limitations and Delimitations

As with all qualitative and quantitative studies, limitations and delimitations exist and need to be discussed. Information gained in this study cannot automatically assume to generalize to all at-risk learners. The individual nature of at-risk students and their specific difficulty learning may be attributable to a range of disorders including learning disabilities, social/emotional development, attention difficulties, neuroprocessing differences, and/or

linguistic differences. They may respond to different types of educational institutions. The research study may not be representative of the only type of school in which “at-risk” learners will succeed, but it is an important type of school to study since it has worked in other areas of the country and since so few forms of schooling have worked for this population thus far. The range of student differences also makes the study difficult to generalize; however, it is my belief that many of these at-risk learners can best be educated with an integrated, arts-infused, innovative curriculum design. The best use of this investigation is to promote specific program evolution and to lead to larger investigations of similar topics. Additional study is warranted in various cities and settings with additional analogous schools included in future studies.

Summary

In summary, my aim was to write the story of designing and opening a charter school in New Orleans, Post-Katrina, from its inception to its opening. As the intended Head of School and lead of the charter writing team, I documented the significant events in my life and career that have led me to this opportunity, as well as the journey that the charter writing team set sail on. The outcome is yet unknown and will not be known until we obtain charter approval and open the doors for students, but the outcome is not the focus of this study. The focus of this study is the journey that led me to this point and the journey that the charter team took over the next nine months, from first meeting to submission. The mission of the school and curriculum is unique and centered on students who are considered at-risk learners due to language and learning differences. The particular aspects of that curriculum as well as the climate and culture of the school, the professional development planned, the goals for student achievement, and the more mundane issues such as scheduling, job descriptions, and flow chart were developed by this charter writing team. I hope that this investigation contributes to the body of knowledge about

educating “at-risk” learners and opening innovative schools. Specifically, I hope to open some doors and minds about newer, more innovative ways to educate these students than what is currently common practice. It is important to devise a plan that allows these students to use multiple senses and strategies to take charge of their learning. Autoethnography is my chosen methodology due to my rich and unusual career that has led me down this path. As does Shelley Harwayne (1999), I share stories. Harwayne commented that stories remind us to appreciate one another and to cope with and make sense of the world to make it a better place to live. I attempted to weave my stories into the designing of this school and identify and expound on recurring themes. Recurring themes throughout my career include community, lifelong learning, native city, helping the underserved, innovation, synthesis, and new beginnings. Hopefully this narrow based study will lead to specific program improvement and evolution and will also lead to larger scale studies investigating similar topics. Successfully educating at-risk learners will be an asset to our students, families, educational institutions, and communities at large.

CHAPTER 2

From Job to Career; From Practice to Theory...

Autobiographical Career Sketch

This research project is directly related to my professional work. I am currently an educational consultant who has designed, revamped, opened, and administered schools for at-risk students with language and learning differences during the last 15 years. I spent 16 years prior helping students with speech, language, and academic issues in public, private, and parochial schools and in private practice. My career in brief is as follows. I spent five years in public schools as a Speech-Language Therapist. I then spent 16 years in private practice and broadened my interventions to students with learning and academic issues. Twelve years into my private practice career, I was approached by a local foundation to create a school-based program that was modeled after my holistic therapy techniques within an established private school. As Robert Frost (1916) wrote, “Two roads diverged from where I stood” (p. 75). To take one road was to embark on a quest, a quest that was somewhat evolved from my original direction, but it would take me to unknown territories and through unfamiliar landscapes. That is the quest I chose; the one “less traveled” (Frost, p. 75). I chose this path primarily because I felt the community need, but also because I felt I had the talent and innate desire to meet this challenge.

The challenge began in my work experience for the previous 17 years. I had done one-on-one or small group therapy, not classroom instruction. I had worked within classrooms and with small groups, so I thought I should enroll in Curriculum and Instruction coursework if I was going to design a classroom curriculum for students with language and learning differences. I initially completed four classes to earn a Reading Specialist’s certification and two more classes related to literacy development and Social Studies in Elementary Schools. I was granted the

luxury of observing successful schools around the country, particularly in New York. I followed the advice of a long time New York school administrator to “start it small and grow it slowly.” That proved to be sage advice. I was also granted the luxury of attending many Professional Development seminars and workshops around the country. In the end, I created a “school within a school” model for students with language and leaning differences. The model included multiage classrooms, arts infusion, and multisensory teaching. It also included a small student-teacher ratio and thematic teaching. I used synthesis skills to blend my experiences as a language therapist with Curriculum and Instruction coursework, observations of excellent schools, and wide ranging professional development to create the original curriculum. The proposal submitted was far less complex than the state charter application, but it included the program’s mission, curriculum, class schedules, and 5-year projected budget. It was primarily a singular effort in design and writing. Over the first seven years, the “school-within-a-school” grew from five students in 3rd - 5th grade to 83 students in 1st-10th grade. The faculty increased accordingly and being in a newly developed program, the faculty was able to have a strong voice and felt ownership of the growth process. This shared voice has a foreshadowing of things to come. The program grew in popularity due to the great amount of need in the community and the success of the enrolled students. Space at the current facility grew tight. I had to turn away many needy families.

Seven years later, I was recruited to join the parochial school system. I was brought on as the third member of a newly formed administrative team to revitalize a faltering school program. The team included a social worker to look after social and discipline issues, myself to see to academic issues, and a religious member to oversee spiritual development. The school had been a boys’ middle school for students who were unsuccessful in typical schools. As a team, we

sharpened our mission statement and aligned our admissions policy. We accepted girls for the first time, expanded the grades, and introduced multiage classrooms, arts integration, and multisensory learning. We also added social skills development as an active part of the curriculum, integrated with academic success. The deliberate focus on social skills development was important to our student population and important to the overall spirit of the school. In *Going Public*, Harwayne (1999) stated that

it doesn't matter what curriculum decisions we make, what instructional strategies we try, or what assessment tools we select, if student and teachers don't care about each other... these things don't matter at all if the really important stuff isn't in place... we must give top priority to creating a caring school culture. (p.104)

A majority of the original faculty cared enough to make the move to the new school setting. Their input into professional development, melding of two programs into one, and curriculum evolution became larger and more important. A true collaborative approach was taking hold that would develop into a strong model of shared leadership. Some faculty stayed on for years feeling a deep sense of caring and ownership in the program while others eventually moved on to other career choices.

Noddings (1992) took caring a step further and organized curriculums around a continuum of care rather than around traditional subject area coursework. She cites care for self, for intimate others, for distant others, for nonhuman life, for human-made objects and instruments, and for ideas. Although Noddings's ideas represent a total curriculum reorientation, the inclusion of affective development in academic content areas is certainly a start to acknowledging the role that social skills can play in academic success for at-risk learners. More specifically related to "at-risk" learners, Elias (2004) investigated the connection between

students with learning disabilities and the social-emotional areas related to: a) recognizing emotions in self and others, b) regulating and managing strong emotions, and c) recognizing strengths and areas of need. He examined interventions that are comprehensive and academically linked. According to the National Center for Learning Disabilities website,

Research shows that social and emotional skills are the most consistent indicators of success for students with LD, even more so than academic factors. In addition, continued academic struggles can lead to low self-esteem, frustration, and withdrawal from peers, which underscore the importance of strong social and emotional attributes in maintaining overall student achievement. (<http://www.ncld.org/content/view/1029/389/>)

As Harwayne (1999) reminds us, being compassionate does not stop a school from also having rigorous academic standards. Other than character building programs and social skills development, in faith-based schools, religion contributes to the spirit of the overall school. In our three-member administration, religious development was taught traditionally in classrooms, but also by monthly themes and reinforced with hands-on projects presented monthly. These themes reinforced social, moral, character, and religious development, and the beautiful, three-dimensional projects proudly filled the entry hallway. Our goal was to intertwine academic and social skills in a parochial setting. Harwayne (1999) reminds us that when the social tone is positive through out a school, every day is a day of celebration.

On opening day, we celebrated as we doubled the school's previous enrollment. By the third year we added a Pre-K/K class and continued through 8th grade. With collaboration from local high school admissions colleagues, we changed from hand-scored standardized testing to machine-scored standardized testing used by the entire system. We also succeeded in placing students in various highly respected high schools across the city. By the fourth year, we

celebrated even more as we had quadrupled the original enrollment and were named an exemplary program by the Council for Exceptional Children, which brought worldwide visitors to our school for three days. In the fifth year, at the invitation of the superintendent of schools, we planned for a high school. In order to plan the high school, duties at the elementary school were revisited and reassigned. Our long-term, invested faculty took on extra responsibilities to give high school planners some free time. A city-wide task force was assembled with expertise in education, technology, finance, marketing, and technology. Subcommittees were formed and a high school proposal was hammered out after many, many task force meetings. While data was gathered by each Task Force Subcommittee, the proposal writers were a core of four educators who collaborated often. We spent nine months huddling together collecting data, speaking with community experts and leaders, writing, revising, amending, and writing some more. Eventually the proposal was tweaked and ready, presented, and approved. The high school would open in August, 2005. What we didn't plan was for Hurricane Katrina to strike eight days after the new high school opened, but that story will be told later.

Most recently, I authored an amended charter for a New Orleans charter school that opened in August, 2006, one year Post-Katrina. By July, 2007, due to vast administrative changes, their charter needed to be rewritten. The new Head of School first had access to the school building on July 1, 2007. While he was trying to hire a Chief Financial Officer (CFO) and figure out how many faculty he had to hire, he found out that the charter would have to be rewritten for the school to remain open. He and I had known each other for years. I was hired for the job over the phone with no interview and no resume submitted. We negotiated salary, benefits, job description, and schedule some months later.

Although it was officially a charter amendment request, the majority of the charter had to

be rewritten. State education officials worked with us to make only the Executive Summary, Education and Finance portions due in August and the remaining Governance piece due in December. In July we had three identified employees, all potential administrative team members who were taking some time off, and a handful of returning teachers, although contracts were not finalized. The Head of School had a disorganized, filthy and poorly maintained building to attend to, had a faculty of 65 to hire, and most urgently had 700 Pre-K – 7th grade students arriving September 4, 2007. In addition, the school had no stated curriculum, no master schedule, no business office, no employee benefits program, and no contracted student services for transportation and nutrition.

There was plenty of work to keep the few of us employed extremely busy. I brought my personal laptop to the school, set up at a different table every day and started to rewrite the charter amendment as I thought best. The Head of School and I had similar educational philosophies so I felt free to move ahead and send him frequent e-mail updates for editing and revisions. I did not know the charter application process. I was not totally familiar with state regulations for charter schools. I did know schools, schedules, curriculum, pedagogy, and school culture. I did know how to design schools on paper and in reality. Luckily our new CFO knew charter school finances, facility, and personnel issues. I basically took the old charter, did endless amounts of research on the state website, and began rewriting. The Head of School made himself available for questions as they arose. He spoke to me often about his vision for the school, and I went back to my laptop and wrote. In August, two of the three administrative team members decided to stay. I interviewed them several times about the school culture, the selected textbooks, and annual testing. Again they spoke, and I wrote. I wrote and researched day and night during July and August. We submitted the charter application July 30th and defended it August 19,

2007. This was not an ideal way to write a charter. As the Head of School said, “We were flying the plane while it was being built.” There were 700 reasons that it was urgent and necessary to complete this charter amendment in this manner. However this is not the chosen way to go about writing a charter proposal. Writing a charter needs to be a community and collaborative process.

A charter school should respond to a community need. It should be supported by a group of diverse community members who have a vision and mission and have the ability to become active board members. The Education portion of the proposal should be written collaboratively by a team of educators. The board should have varying areas of expertise and be ready to share that expertise with the charter writers. In a letter to charter applicants, the State Superintendent of Education and president of the BESE board stated,

In some cases, charter schools are established to transform underperforming public schools, and in these instances, charter schools must demonstrate capacity and expertise to administer effective education programs that will improve academic performance as well as address the social and emotional needs of all students.

(RFA) Community partners need to be sought out and given a voice in a school proposal.

This story shows there is a lot of education work to be done down here in New Orleans. This town keeps its educators very busy – especially since Katrina! As Paul Tough (2008) wrote,

The city’s disastrously low-performing school system was almost entirely washed away in the flood – many of the buildings were destroyed, the school board was taken over and all the teachers were fired. What is being built in its place is an educational landscape unlike any other, a radical experiment in reform. More than half of the city’s public school students are now being educated in charter schools, publicly financed but privately run, and most of the rest are enrolled in schools

run by an unusually decentralized and rapidly changing school district. (p. 2)

The public education system is being reinvented since it all but disappeared after August 29, 2005. New Orleans currently has more charter schools than any city in the country. According to The State of Public Education in New Orleans (2008) report, there are 80 public schools in the city that are run by 29 different operators. These operators include the New Orleans Public School Board (NOPB) and the Recovery School District (RSD) as well as 27 charter operators. In the city of New Orleans, 57% of public school students now attend charter schools, more than in any other urban school district in the country. There are five types of charter in the state of Louisiana. A more detailed explanation of the charter types will be included later in this study.

The history of my career is important to understand how I came to open schools, earn a doctoral degree, and actively help rebuild my forsaken little city. My career path and research interests are a direct result of true praxis, thoughtful reflection and interaction of practice and theory. My practice has driven my quest for additional theory and additional theory has caused my practice to grow and evolve over time. My desire for more knowledge has led to lifelong learning so much so that my current goal is to earn this doctoral degree before I retire! In New Orleans, we can truly say – not hell or high water will stop me now. I am quite sure we have experienced both in these Post-Katrina years. So onward I move toward a Ph.D. and retirement, somewhat simultaneously.

Relevant Research Throughout Career

Now that the chronology of my career has been established, I will discuss philosophically what was important in my lifelong learning quest and how that impacted my school-based choices. The specific events that have influenced my research topic are my training as a Speech-Language clinician in the 70s and 80s with the focus of language therapy

transitioning from B. F. Skinner stimulus-response behaviorist methodology to an emphasis on holistic language intervention through narratives and story telling. (Koegel, O'Dell & Koegel, 1987) This was a major shift in clinical practice that impacted the manner in which we assessed students and facilitated therapy. Shepard (2000) quoted Skinner,

The whole process of becoming competent in any field must be divided into a very large number of very small steps, and reinforcement must be contingent upon the accomplishment of each step... By making each step as small as possible, the frequency of reinforcement can be raised to a maximum, while the possibly aversive consequences of being wrong are reduced to a minimum. (p. 5)

In the therapy room, this meant that the more utterances of a sound or phrase the better the session went. The more discrete the task was the better the planning. So a successful 30-minute session may have 250 discrete sound or word responses which were intermittently reinforced.

Diagnostically, the emphasis shifted from one-word vocabulary tests to spontaneous 50-utterance expressive language samples (Brassard & Boehm, 2007). Language samples reflected the young child as s/he engaged in familiar activities, which were considered an appropriate alternative to formal testing (Brassard & Boehm). Formal diagnostics, which often included skills and checklists of typical milestones, focused on the child's level of achievement, not on the strategies the child was using. Language sample analysis considered the child's use of language across authentic language context (Brassard & Boehm). With the shift in philosophy for diagnostics, a shift in therapy also occurred. Therapy moved from flash cards based on diagnostic test results to play therapy based on complex interpretations of a child's current level of performance from authentic language samples combined with diagnostic test results. Without fully realizing it at the time, as a language therapist I employed scaffolding interventions for my

clients, teaching in their zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1985). According to Vygotsky (Schuz, 2002), this zone includes all the functions and activities that a child or a learner can perform only with the assistance of someone else. The therapeutic paradigm shifted from part to whole to holistic and authentic. As we worked in our brand new therapy rooms at our new graduate school clinic, our Academic Dean would anxiously ask, with a wink in his eye, “Why were flash cards considered good therapy in the old barracks building and now making pudding is good therapy in my brand new clinic? Just my luck.” Being that my speech-language program was within a medical school setting, neuroprocessing skills were taught and emphasized in course work. The primary focus was on neuroprocessing issues for post-stroke patients since language therapy was often a required treatment. This course work intrigued me and years later I often recognized some analogous neuroprocessing issues with language delayed clients. I used some of the suggested techniques and materials with language delayed preschoolers and elementary students that I had obtained for post-stroke patients. It worked well.

In recent years, MRI studies have made it possible to study neuroimaging in a more explicit manner. What my allied health/medical professors knew through good research and application, MRI studies can now prove by following stimulated neural pathways. Neuroimaging studies show how and where the brain processes different kinds of stimuli. Neuroimaging studies represent a growing and promising field connecting medical research to educational theory. Posner (2003) linked recent neuroimaging studies to support Howard Gardner’s theory that different types of tasks activate different areas of the brain. The study also shows that networks do not perform in isolation, but overlap and communicate with each other, as the task requires. If certain types of tasks activate various areas of the brain, then presenting academic information in multiple modalities would activate more areas of the brain and cause the overlap that Posner

spoke of. Stimulating various areas of the brain with multiple modality input leads to the possibility of a greater ability to process and/or recall the information presented. For at-risk students with short-term memory issues this could have great significance. This implies that multiple senses should be used as stimuli and response in classroom activities.

Zadina (2003) studied a small group of dyslexics in her neuroanatomical dissertation study. Her findings, which are a combination of highly technical writing, excellent visual aids, and complex MRI results, indicated that dyslexics are heterogeneous groups which use various reading and processing strategies, therefore educationally, Zadina recommended teaching reading in a developmental fashion. Since phonological deficits are not responsive to remediation in high school or college, compensation strategies should be taught early in the educational process. Compensatory strategies include, but are not limited to audio recordings, pairing with another student, orthographic assistance, semantic strategies, and spatial strategies. If a dyslexic's right hemisphere is used more readily to process information, educators could capitalize on methods that utilize right hemisphere processing. Zadina reinforced those models of teaching that focus on a student's strengths rather than deficits as more reinforcing and motivating thus encouraging the student to continue to pursue the process of reading and learning. The study was small and Zadina says only a beginning in the neurobiological processing of dyslexics that should lead to more accurate diagnosis, treatment, and prevention. Zadina's study indicates that activities that stimulate right brain processing should be a standard part of curriculum for at-risk learners.

In the early years of my private practice, my clients were primarily young language delayed children who experienced great growth in receptive and expressive language skills with the therapeutic narrative, story-telling, multimodality methods I used as a language therapist. I

adopted a play-oriented, holistic approach that I evolved into academic tutoring in later years. One mom said the reason her child needed to come to therapy was because her Weebles at home didn't do what my Weebles did. The children and I would sit on the floor and play out narrative stories that were typical of their daily experiences. Parents were participants in the process. They either sat in the room and observed or acted as a stenographer recording their child's utterances for my analysis later. This allowed parents to enact some of these same techniques at home for even greater language learning. Elish-Piper (2000) and Morrow and Young (1997) emphasized the importance of connecting theory to practice and creating family literacy programs with a social-contextual approach, which maintains the dignity, respect, and culture of the families and communities involved.

What I later learned is that my holistic, narrative, play therapy was activating their schema. The clients were learning using the mental structures (schema) they had developed from various experiences and adding or changing those existing structures based on our holistic language use (McGee & Richgels, 2008). According to Dewey (1902), there is an organic relationship between what is learned and experienced. Dewey stated that it is essential to forge connections between subject matter and student experiences. Von Glaserfeld (1995) referenced many primary research studies in regard to children learning through the active construction of knowledge. He references Piaget often and states that truly knowing an object requires us to incorporate it into action schemes. This is what I did with these young language delayed students; we incorporated objects into action schemes paired with narrative expressive language (Norris & Hoffman, 1990).

Several years after being dismissed from language therapy, my young clients often returned to my office because they had difficulty learning to read. Most of these students were

enrolled in traditional schools with 25-35 students in a class using traditional phonics workbooks, seat work, and skill and drill approaches to reading. One neighborhood private school actually presented first graders with a list of 44 phonics rules to master during the school year. Comprehension goals were not mentioned on this sheet or in this classroom. As long as the kids mastered the phonics rules, the teacher was happy, and the kids were considered good readers. When the clients returned to my office, parents would say to me whatever you did years ago, this is somehow related – so we are back. With these young literacy students, I employed many of the holistic multisensory approaches to literacy that I had previously used in language development, and their literacy ease, comfort, and skill began to grow and blossom. We read stories for which children had a schema and retold those stories through drama, pictures, or felt board characters (Wolf & Heath, 1992). We used graphic organizer webs to depict character traits (Tompkins, 2001). We wrote summaries on Post-it notes to limit the amount written. We wrote sequence sentence strips to retell stories at the start of each new session. Magically, the kids learned to read. They decoded words, they remembered and connected facts, and they passed tests at school. But better than all, they became curious learners, and they learned to love to read. They learned that through reading they could investigate all of their idiosyncratic interests, which intrigued and encouraged them to continue to read.

In the early 90s, I was asked to create a school curriculum that utilized such strategies for a group of at-risk students. The funding source that requested my assistance also paid for multiple opportunities for me to engage in professional development across the country and observe in schools operating unique programs for at-risk learners during the next 8 years. In the 90s, my training as a Reading Specialist with an emphasis on the multiple reasons we choose to read and the final line of reading being understanding gave me further reason to focus on the

holistic aspects of reading. The success of the students enrolled (5 students to 240 students in 10 years) in the curriculums also reinforced the multisensory, holistic, integrated curriculum. That is further reinforced currently as a C & I doctoral student at UNO with an emphasis in multiple literacies (Schofield & Rogers, 2004), holistic approaches to learning, learning in context, and making use of your schema. I experienced interdisciplinary learning in high school with an arts immersion and had a very positive experience with that style of learning. My work as a language therapist was much more successful when I incorporated language play as opposed to systematic drill in the therapy setting. When the “therapy” world moved from systematic skill and drill to story building and telling; I could see the great advances the youngsters made in language expression when their schema and context became an integral part of therapy.

Maxine Greene (1995) stated

I view my own writing in terms of stages in a quest... The quest involves me as a woman, as teacher, as mother, as citizen, as New Yorker, as arts-lover, as activist, as philosopher, as white middle-class American. Neither myself nor my narrative can have a single strand. (p. 1)

Personal Bias

Similarly, I view my career path as a quest. The quest involves me as a woman, therapist, educator, mother, wife, daughter, sister, a New Orleanian, an arts-lover, a blossoming philosopher, and as white middle-class American. Naturally, my age and work role affect my beliefs. I have a vast array of work experience in two fields –as a clinician/academic tutor and as a school administrator. During my 31-year career, I have seen basic philosophies in both fields shift and shift again. I do not think gender affects my research directly except that I am proud to be a woman and a recognized educational leader in a city for which I care so deeply. In that role,

I have been lucky enough to mentor many young women who have chosen to be a Speech Therapist or educator and asked for my guidance. I encourage them all to have a strong voice in their community, represent women with pride and dignity, and defend children wherever their career path takes them. I believe this is the extent to which gender impacts my project. As a committee member pointed out to me, I am an advocate for children and young educators. In my advocacy role for children, I have fought for innovative curriculum design for at-risk learners. My advocacy role for young educators is one of the most rewarding aspects of my long career. Without fully realizing the advocacy role at the time, the shift in my career from therapist to school leader is largely due to the desire to advocate for a larger group of students and young professionals.

I have made a lifetime of working and learning with the goal of teaching at-risk kids to speak, read, and write. I continued my education at various points in my career as a result of a thirst for more knowledge about ways to help children, ways to think outside of the traditional education box. My career and education is a shining example of praxis, interaction of theory and practice, at its best so in some sense – yes - my research is biased by my background. However my quest for learning and designing innovative programs for at-risk learners continues and is stronger than ever. So with this research project, I am committed to continued research, continued input from colleagues, and continued revisiting of concepts to follow the development of this charter school. It will be different from the other programs I have created with a sameness in its commitment to innovative education for at-risk learners. Since my experience of rewriting a charter last year, I expect to have some compromises to reach between what is expected and required by the state and our own ideas as Curriculum and Instruction experts. I am telling my story so my bias will impact the outcome, but I feel my story is unique and worth telling. Just as

the curriculum at my previous schools was a constant “work in progress” evolving because of faculty, administrative, student, parent, and professional input, so will this charter school development be a work in progress.

This research study is actually a more formal attempt to actively participate in reflective practice and record the development of yet another new educational program in our city. I was keenly interested in studying what program components our charter writing team selected as necessary, which ones we argued over, and which ones ended up in the final school charter application. The results of this study could be used in three manners: a) to inform our school’s continued evolution and decision making in regard to curriculum development; b) to encourage research beyond the scope of this school to identify successful components in other schools for at-risk learners; and c) to give other educators and even students and parents a voice in what they see as valuable for the academic success of at-risk learners. Although I am personally invested in my city’s revitalization and my school’s success, I do not see this as preventing me from presenting a realistic view of the development of this school from the first meeting to its opening day. My main goal is to continue to synthesize curriculum components for at-risk learners that will result in optimal teaching and learning experiences resulting in academic success and lifelong learning.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

Introduction

As stated earlier, my chosen methodology is autoethnography. Why autoethnography, my readers might ask? I asked myself that same question when several of my graduate professors suggested it to me. At first I resisted the urge thinking it wasn't scientific enough, thinking how would I justify this to my quantitative researcher older sister? My next reason for resisting the suggestion is because I was not eager to relive the opening of the high school and all that Katrina brought with it. Then two things happened. I embarked on a new and fresh course, and modified my research proposal to focus on the opening of a tuition-free, charter school for "at-risk" kids because of the great need to serve special needs kids in Post-Katrina New Orleans. Next, I read Linden West's (2006) article where the rigors of autoethnography are described with such clarity.

Such an aspiration assumes no monopoly of knowing but attempts, through collaboration and mutuality, to name more of what is difficult to say or articulate, and to think about its meaning collaboratively. This is a process that strives to surface power relationships, discomforts, dead ends and uncertainties. Rather than an absence of rigor, or truth, such auto/biographical methods ask much of the researcher, in terms of self-awareness, social and emotional intelligence, sensitivity, integrity, courage and openness. (p. 3)

I center my schools on shared leadership, collaboration, and sharing important stories. According to Max DePree (2003), movements thrive on their stories – about giants and failures. Their stories teach and preserve traditions, practices, policies, and values. I am a social,

gregarious person. I am a storyteller. So in the end, how could I not use this methodology? I want to, should, and need to tell the story of my lived experience in creating school-based programs for kids with language and learning differences. I hope to look inward and learn from this process. "Failing to grasp that looking inward can lead to a more intelligent and useful outward gaze is to seriously misunderstand the method and potential of narrative and autobiographical forms of inquiry" (Mitchell, Weber, & Reilly-Scanlon, 2005, p. 4). It is an important story of growth, evolvment, and collaboration that can possibly lead to more growth, evolvment, and collaboration long after my retirement. That is what I hope for.

I have spent a career in one city helping at-risk students succeed academically. My goal is not only to summarize and document my 31-year career, but more importantly to focus on the current process of writing and applying for a charter school in Post-Katrina New Orleans. As Carolyn Ellis (1999) described autoethnography, she said, "I start with my personal life. I pay attention to my physical feelings, thoughts, and emotions. I use what I call systematic sociological introspection and emotional recall to try to understand an experience I've lived through. Then I write my experience as a story" (p. 3). It is not unlike the narrative story telling used with my young clients many years ago. It is making use of my schema (McGee & Richgels, 2008) to tell a story. So in the end, autoethnography seems quite natural for me. As Reed-Danahay (1997) said, "By exploring a particular life, I hope to understand a way of life" (p. 3). I certainly hope to understand the many and vast changes that have hit our city, the educational community, and at-risk kids since August 29, 2005. I believe it is a story worth telling.

Again, Ellis (1999) said,

The self-questioning autoethnography demands are extremely difficult . . . Believe me, honest auto ethnographic exploration generates a lot of fears and self-doubts—and

emotional pain. Just when you think you can't stand the pain anymore, well that's when the real work has only begun. Then there's the vulnerability of revealing yourself, not being able to take back what you've written or having any control over how readers interpret it. It's hard not to feel your life is being critiqued as well as your work. (p. 4)

This quote both intrigues and haunts me a bit. I know recalling and writing about some of the last three years will be painful and difficult. Professionally, I have never worked harder since Hurricane Katrina descended on our fair city, and I have never experienced such great agony and joy mixed together. I have never made harder decisions, expanded my knowledge more to unknown territories, worked so feverishly at reuniting a community, and asked so many favors of complete strangers as I have since the storm. When everyone known to your immediate world suffers such great losses, it becomes necessary to depend "on the kindness of strangers" (Williams, 1947, p. 142). Although it is necessary, it is still difficult to ask those strangers for help.

My final speech delivered to students and their families in May, 2006, demonstrated the physical and emotional road we had traveled:

Whew! We made it – we finally got here – to the last day of school in this most unusual of years. As far as I can recall, we have opened 2 schools, closed both, moved 1, reopened 2 schools, and now are moving 2 schools all within a 9 month period. It makes me tired just saying it. We have run the gamut of emotions – exuberance, tranquility, worry, grief, anxiety, concern, peace, excitement, thankfulness, sorrow, happiness, worry again, and celebration. I hope today we can share some moments of joy. Joyful that we have reached the end of a year in which we have learned about what we truly value in life. Joyful in the unity of

our community – its strength and power that drove us collectively to accomplish great things this school year. Joyful in our celebration of our students who are so special to all of us. Joyful that our city is rebuilding and looking better with each passing day. Joyful to be home again.

Rereading the speech and reliving this time will certainly be an exploration of fear, self-doubts, and emotion. So I know Carolyn Ellis's (1999) description and warning of autoethnography will apply to my journey.

Phenomena to Be Documented

Looking beyond the vulnerability of autoethnography, Carolyn Ellis (1999) said, "Of course, there are rewards, too: For example, you come to understand yourself in deeper ways. And with understanding yourself comes understanding others. Autoethnography provides an avenue for doing something meaningful for yourself and the world" (p. 4). In the end, I only hope to reach the rewards - the tangible rewards being the obvious of attaining a doctoral degree and gaining charter approval. But more than tangible rewards, I hope that by charting my course through these muddy waters it may help inspire others to design and open innovative schools – charter or not – in New Orleans or anywhere in the world. Then I will reap the real rewards. I will reap the rewards if one person reads this dissertation and writes to me to let me know that I inspired or guided them to open an innovative school or redesign an existing school. In the spring before Katrina, a Head of School from a private school in the mid-west enrolled one of my former students. He learned of our school from the child's parents. He looked on our website and sent me an e-mail saying he was trying to evolve his traditional school to one more like ours. He asked how I got there and if he could come visit in the fall. I responded to his e-mail with some information on our transformation and invited him to come in the fall. Instead, Katrina

came, I cannot resurrect the e-mail, and he did not contact me again. Just his acknowledgment and request was rewarding. This is what I hope to create – an innovative school that educators will want to visit, where parents will volunteer, and where children will thrive. Then I will know that I have made a difference and to me that is the greatest reward of all. That is my hope in pursuing this project using this methodology.

Context of Phenomena

Oddly enough when speaking about autoethnography as a methodology, Ellis (1999) spoke of viewing one's "project as closer to art than science" (p. 6). She then says that the goal would be more to convey meanings and evoke a response rather than just report facts. What is odd about that is I have included an arts immersed curriculum in all the programs I have designed since 1994. I use art as a vehicle to promote academic knowledge for these "at-risk" learners. Going back to my roots during high school, I participated in an integrated History/English/Art program junior year called American Experience. That type of integrated learning had a profound effect on me. So I always view academia as part art and part academics. My handwriting is half print and half cursive, and my style of writing is often interspersed with story telling; stories that convey meaning and evoke responses. I write with "voice", my voice. Ralph Fletcher said, "Writing with voice has the same quirky cadence that makes speech so impossible to resist listening to" (Romano, 1993, p. 68). I want my writing to be impossible to resist reading and to evoke a response.

I love and support the arts. The arts evoke responses. Through graduate coursework and research, I learned I was not alone in believing the arts provide an impetus for academic learning and expression. Howard Gardner (1999), a lifelong lover of the arts, believed the highest end product of cognitive thinking may occur in different expressions for different folks. After

working extensively with brain-damaged adults, Gardner concluded that people have a wide range of abilities and neurologically the brain is organized to process this information in various regions. Some may express their cognitive ability in scientific thinking, some in artistic expression, some in motoric performance, some in working with nature and the environment. He introduced his “stretched” definition of intelligence in *Kinds of Minds*. According to Gardner, intelligence is “the ability to solve problems or to create products that are valued within one or more cultural settings” (p. 33). Gardner’s stretching of the definition of intelligence broadens the view of who should be educated and how. Many students perform poorly on standardized tests because of linguistic deficits or learning or cultural differences. Perhaps these students can show their knowledge through performance assessments. Perhaps, I can share my knowledge for my “terminal” degree in an artistic manner, through personal story telling and autoethnography. Hopefully, I will demonstrate intelligence and evolve from my clinical beginnings to my researcher stance by solving problems and creating a product with this project. Eisner (2003) reminded us that dance, music, and visual arts are languages promoting mind and meaning. Art offers a means of expression for that which is ineffable. Art provides multimedia opportunity for unique and special messages. Art challenges students to think of content areas in terms of cultures and civilizations. Art gives the language impaired another medium of expression. My curriculums are arts-immersed. So it should come as no surprise that my research project and chosen methodology is closer to art than science. In the end, I challenge educators to think of the education of at-risk students in innovative programs that do not pull them out of the classroom and down the hall. I accomplished this through authentic story telling of a career and a developing plan. I think this methodology is a good match for my lived experience, my interests, and my personal writing style.

Personal Project Strategies and Technology Used

Just how did I create this story of myself, my career, and the planning of this charter school? For my initial proposal defense I traced my history from young girl through the choosing of a career and the evolution of that career. My main tool is my trusty laptop computer, word processor, and my love of writing. Initially, I depended on family stories – the legendary ones that are passed down and retold at every family gathering. I depended on family members to confirm, deny, or add to these stories. I also depended on artifacts from my career. These artifacts include notes taken in various classes, written therapy plans, planning notes for programs created, speeches given, and e-mails written. Conference presentations and awards are included as artifacts. All of my many textbooks and journals are starred, highlighted, dog-eared, and tabbed to mark important phenomena, ideas, or techniques. These were reviewed and included throughout the writing process. I also have many hands-on artifacts such as notes from parents and school visitors, projects created by kids and teachers, and graduation invitations telling me where kids have been and are going. Woven into these personal stories are the professional development that most impacted my thoughts at the time: educators, philosophers, books, conferences, and articles that made me stop and take a deep breath; ideas that were woven into the very core of the next project on which I embarked. Although this list is not inclusive, my greatest influences include first and foremost my academic crush, Howard Gardner, along with Nel Noddings, Lev Vygotsky, Shirley Brice Heath, Shelby Wolf, Elliot Eisner, Maxine Greene, Shelley Harwayne, and William Pinar. These people and their ideas emerge and reemerge throughout this project. New ones come to the forefront as the research is ongoing.

Once I got beyond my proposal defense and permission from the university Institutional Review Board, I turned to my journal, which I kept during the charter writing process. Journal

topics led me to new and pertinent research. I also referred to my own charter writing, meeting notes taken, agendas set, phone calls made, and e-mails sent. Intermittently, I checked with the charter writing team for concurment, disagreement, or comments of any kind. According to Pinar (2004), curriculum study is a serious undertaking that should lead to complicated conversations and promote teachers as public intellectuals. I believe my study involved both of these processes. My final submission included a summarized version of the submitted plan for the charter school.

Because autoethnography is a personal account of reflective practice, people and places are sometimes implicated. Self-censorship was used by assigning pseudonyms to people and places included within this study. Compilation of characters and events was also used to protect personal identification of particular persons. In Chapter 4, charter writers are identified by their own choice. They readily participated in member checks and shared resumes and favorite authors so I could not only name them but also describe them as educators and as community members.

Timeline

My timeline included the following. In December, 2007, I met with my two major professors and received approval to follow this project from start to opening day for my dissertation. In December and January, I focused on the methodology. What is autoethnography and why is it a good fit for this project and for me? The charter team was first assembled for a “getting to know you meeting” in mid-January. We met every two weeks and produced a finished product by August, 2008. I hosted the meetings and set the agenda. During meetings, I took notes and after kept a journal of my thoughts and concerns. By early February, I completed the first three chapters and distributed them to my Dissertation Committee. In late February, I defended my proposal to my committee, and in early March filed for permission from the Institutional Review Board. Throughout this process, I continued to write, read, and research. I

supplemented my story with research that impacted my decisions. The charter proposal was scheduled to be submitted in September, 2008. I scheduled my final defense for November, 2008. Charter approval and graduation will occur in December, 2008.

Trustworthiness

But with autoethnography – I ask and I’m sure the reader does too – what criteria are used to measure the soundness and dependability of the study. In quantitative studies, validity and reliability are the standard measure of research strength and consistency. Lincoln and Guba (1985) use the term *trustworthiness* to evaluate a qualitative study. The term encompasses credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The authors believe these criteria should be considered at the outset of the study before data collection begins. I considered them at the outset and reconsidered them throughout the study.

Credibility asks such questions as: Do the findings make sense? Are they credible to both study participants and readers? Qualitative researchers admit the existence of multiple realities so they must check their design and their findings with the participants for confirmation.

Transferability asks such questions as: How well do the findings fit into the theoretical framework? How well can the findings be transferred to other contexts? Researchers must provide enough description that readers can make a judgment about the similarities between a reader’s situation and the research possible. Dependability asks such questions as: Is the process of the study consistent, reasonably stable over time and across researchers? Researchers must describe enough detail about data collection and analysis that readers could easily follow the same steps. Although replication is not a goal of qualitative study, without dependability there can be no credibility. Confirmability asks such questions as: Do the conclusions depend on the

subjects and conditions of the inquiry rather than on the inquirer? A continuing and clear audit of steps taken throughout the research helps create confirmability.

I believe I took appropriate steps to establish trustworthiness. I established credibility through several techniques recommended by Lincoln and Guba (1985). I incorporated triangulation, which involves using multiple sources of data. Multiple authors were used for similar topics. Multiple types of references were used including journals, textbooks, government documents, newspapers, magazines, and radio interviews. I also pulled these references from multiple sources including the university library, my personal professional book collection, Questia Online Library, and Google Scholar. Prolonged engagement and persistent observation were practiced. The project took ten months to complete. While the timeline is not incredibly long, the constant and consistent engagement was obvious as recorded throughout the 10-month process. Member check was practiced throughout the study. As a section was complete, I sent it to people who had experienced that part with me and asked for feedback. Many gave specific feedback that resulted in some modifications of those sections. I found the member check particularly helpful in this process. I also included an extensive autobiographical disclosure which traced my personal history that led up to my interest in literacy, at-risk learners, and designing schools. Autobiographical disclosure adds to credibility.

In terms of creating transferability, I provided thick descriptions of several aspects of the study. The portraits of charter writers and how they came to this task were part of the thick description. Where we held our meetings and how the meetings were conducted also involved thick description. I want readers to feel they knew the writers as well as I did, knew our setting and knew our schedule. I want readers to get to know us, our biases, our sense of humor, and feel as though they could participate if we knocked on their door tomorrow. I also gave a thick

description of the types of schools I had designed in the past and what process I used for that design as compared to this more collaborative process. A thick description was given of the school academics, the curriculum, schedule, and educational philosophy.

Dependability is ascertained through an audit trail. I made dates, personal correspondences, professional conversations, and meeting notes apparent in the body of the document and could readily provide an auditor with these artifacts if asked. My reflective journal took many forms and those reflections are recorded throughout the study.

CHAPTER 4

Meet the Charter Writers

The Context of Charter Writing Meetings

Well, now the reader knows lots about me, how my career started, and how it has evolved. Now it is time to learn about the Charter Writers. The primary writers are a group that Sharon affectionately named the “Core Four” with at least four intermittent writers contributing to specific portions. When Patty S. started joining us regularly, we became the “Core Five”. The five of us met every other week on a Wednesday evening at my house. The intermittent writers came when their schedule allowed and/or when we requested their expertise to discuss certain charter aspects.

I am one of the “Core Five.” Since the reader already knows a lot about me, I will tell about how and where we met. We started each meeting with a bottle of red wine and a meal. A very wise priest and mentor, Fr. Tarantino, taught me to conduct important meetings over a meal. Our most esteemed and well-loved colleague, Patty Silva, prepared our meals, which always included at least one fresh vegetable, a main course, and dessert. We are hoping she will publish her recipes when we publish the charter. I provided the bottle of red wine. When the charter writers arrived they dropped their bags, computers, and writing resources at “Uncle Donald’s table” and came to the kitchen island for a glass of wine and a quick meal. During the meal, we visited and shared stories, but we also began to discuss our evening’s work. When the meal was over, we walked into the sunroom and met at a wide and long antique table that was passed down from my Uncle Donald. He was a Catholic priest who unfortunately passed away from cancer in his mid-forties. Uncle Donald was a gourmet cook way before that was a fashionable hobby. He

loved to host exquisite multi-course meals with fine china and crystal and lively, animated conversations. Eight people were a dinner party to him, but 18 suited him better. He bought this table to accommodate the 18. The table survived Katrina – somehow sat in two feet of water – and its elaborately carved legs are no worse for the wear. The table has always been very special to my immediate and extended family. Luckily, I also inherited my uncle's love of giving dinner parties. I sleep well at night when I can seat 30 people in my house for dinner, so Post-Katrina made me squirm with my one round kitchen table for four. These days I am back to the ability to seat 30 if need be, although the usual number hovers around 10-18. The Charter Writers met at this wide, long table in my sunroom. It is both wide enough and long enough to let us fit our laptop computers, our charter binder, any books we may have brought any given night, and our many copies of new writing, resources, etc. Its extra large size gave us space, its origin gave us faith that we could do this job, and its history encouraged spirited, lively conversations. It was the perfect table to begin each meeting. When we broke into splinter groups, we could move to the Mexican tile round kitchen table, the Duncan Fife oval dining room table, or everyone's favorite spot, the rectangular kitchen island. Charter writers could choose from texture, shape, and style as to where their chosen writing/conferencing area was on any given night. We set the meetings for 2 hours, but invariably they were closer to 3 hours. We chose to meet at my home since we have wireless Internet access, printing, faxing, and DVD/VCR capabilities. We viewed one video of an Achievement First charter school during a meeting. I organized each agenda, had pencils and pens ready, and placed important information on the Post-it Note chart paper although we used it sparingly due to Jan's concern for budget.

This process was so different than any other school design process I have been through to this point. We had time. We had a collaborative team of bright, dedicated educators. We had a

community backing us. We had access to a limited amount of funding although none of us got paid for our time and effort. All involved volunteered for the charter writing job and did it as a response to a community need. I knew I was the intended Head of School, but other charter writers were not guaranteed jobs nor did they ask for jobs before accepting the charter design duties. Of course, after spending many long collaborative hours working on this project, we have dreams of working together one day. That may or may not prove to be a reality. We have no guarantees of charter approval. We did not have an office so my house had to become the bi-weekly charter office. Each week the forces gathered.

Meet Jan

Jan is a doctoral student in Curriculum and Instruction. Her Master's degree is in Curriculum and Instruction, Reading Arts with Reading Specialist Certification. Jan has 14 years' teaching experience. She is an educator from the bottom of her toes. She understands and loves kids and their development, be it typical, quirky, or unpredictable. Jan believes in kids and honors their ability to explore learning that is chosen by them and important to them. Jan is a wife and mother. She often recalls instances of her daughters' education that are vital and important to our discussions. Her two daughters are an immense source of pride for her. They are working hard in academic, collegiate pursuits, are involved in important community projects, and care about the greater good. Jan is from Ohio and has lived many places throughout the United States. Although she loved her years in San Francisco, she has made New Orleans her home. She has a multi-faith background, a liberal lean on politics, and a sense of humor a mile long. Jan's laugh is loud, strong, and contagious. She is a legend at the local coffee shop averaging at least one visit per day. Jan loves to think, read, study, and act on literacy development in young children. After Katrina, before local libraries reopened, Jan and I did

doctoral projects from her house because of her extensive collection of professional literature. Her curriculum and instruction personal library challenges university libraries. Jan is very bright. She has a memory like a steel trap for authors' names, their particular view of literacy, and their tools to enact their ideas. She is easily able to synthesize important ideas across several fields of study. Jan is an excellent writer. She edits and revises writing even when not intentional. She has an eye for surface structure and a mind for integrated, complex writing. For those reasons, Jan is an invaluable member of the "Core Five."

Jan has taught first grade at an academically competitive private school in New Orleans for the last 14 years. She loves the workshop approach to teaching reading and writing and would rather have 18 students reading 18 different books of their choosing than all of them begrudgingly reading one assigned book. She has many bright students who practically teach themselves to read, but, her love is for those little ones that enter her class and have little innate knowledge of reading, writing, or our sometimes unpredictable English language phonemic system. These are the ones that keep Jan in graduate school, keep her studying, and keep her challenged. Reaching those reluctant readers has been her mission and teaching them to love reading and writing from the bottom of their toes has been her goal. Her passion is apparent when she talks about these little ones and their literacy reluctance, and their obvious ability. Jan is a lifelong learner by example and is determined to make lifelong learners of her young students. She wants them to be curious about life, to explore areas of interest, and to feel confident to read and write about topics of personal interest.

Jan and I met about 11 years ago when she came to observe at the private school program I was directing. We knew then that we shared much in educational philosophy and teaching practice, but our paths did not cross again until 2002 in the doctoral program. By chance, we

wound up in the same classes for a couple of semesters; later we intentionally planned our schedules together whenever possible. Jan and I collaborated on many doctoral projects and consulted with each other on our individual projects. We are in an unofficial educational philosophy sisterhood or to be more politically correct, personhood. Jan and I tend to love the same authors. However the following authors quintessentially remind me of Jan. She has introduced to me to most of them and helped me understand in a deeper manner: Ralph Fletcher, Sharon Taberski, Stephanie Harvey, Richard Allington, Donald Graves, Regie Routman, Patricia Cunningham, and Camille Allen. Jan and I share a love for Lucy Calkins and Shelley Harwayne.

Jan's primary area for charter development was early literacy, focusing on grades Pre-K through 4th. She also helped Sharon Preen with textbook selection for English, Reading, and Language Arts classes.

Meet Penny

Penny has a Master's degree plus 30 hours plus in Reading-Reading Specialist. Most of her post-masters coursework is in Anthropology and Social Studies. Penny is also an educator from the bottom of her toes. I have had the pleasure of working with Penny for the past 11 years. She is a master of knowing and understanding middle school students. During our first program fundraiser in 1999, I introduced Mrs. Speaker as "The Middle Learning Center Lead Teacher who luckily has no pulse and needs no break because the kids hang out in her room during their breaks." This is my ongoing description of Penny. The kids know they can't overexcite or infuriate Ms. Speaker and that her demeanor and response is calm, precise, and always in the best interest of kids.

Penny is a wife and mother. She and her family have traveled the world extensively, and she never met a culture or civilization that she didn't want to know more about. She plans our

annual school trips to correlate with the curriculum being taught. She prepares the kids ahead of time with special lunches and slide shows to give them a background for what they are about to see and experience. All of this is quite natural for her because she home schooled her son for many years, planning small and large expeditions for him. Our dream is to one day take a group of students to the Galápagos Islands. Who knows? Maybe it will happen.

Penny is strong in a quiet sort of manner. When the edges of her lips curl upward or her eyes dart to the side in a certain manner, we know she is amused. A small chuckle is the largest response Penny is likely to give to humorous situations. Penny is a storyteller. She records and remembers poignant anecdotes on student learning. She has the ability to blend these stories with examples of best practice and teaching philosophy for those many young teachers whom she mentors. Penny is exact and precise with her words and her writing. She also loves to write and is a gifted writer. She is able to synthesize her vast years of experience with recent research and accepted education philosophy.

There are three student stories about Penny that I just feel compelled to tell, stories that help define her as an educator. Three years after starting the first program, I was looking for a middle school teacher to establish our first multiage 6th-7th-8th middle school classroom. I needed someone who was a self-starter, creative, independent, able to make sound decisions, knew curriculum, and loved middle school kids. This is a tall order. The interviews that I had conducted had candidates who were too inexperienced, still getting certified or had not taught middle school kids. The students in the current 5th grade were the charter students, and they were very aware that I was interviewing for a teacher. One of the young ones asked if I had time to walk him to his math class. (He was taking math in the traditional grade level classroom.) I said sure, but was puzzled by the request. He had walked this route to this class many times on his

own. He liked the math teacher and had an “A” in the class. I didn’t think there was any reason for anxiety or needed support on his part, but I gladly accompanied him. Along the way he said, “Ms. Patty, I know you are looking for a teacher for us for next school year.” I confirmed that without divulging additional information. He said, “Have you considered that lady Mrs. Speaker who came in to substitute for us a few times?” I told him I had not and actually that I didn’t know Mrs. Speaker that well. He said, “She is really good; I think you ought to consider interviewing her.” I chuckled to myself and thanked him for his advice as we arrived at his classroom door. I proceeded immediately to my office and scheduled an interview with Penny. When Penny gave me her resume, I told her references would not be necessary since she had the greatest reference of all: a student in the program. Truly out of the mouths of babes and our babes who are supposed to have so many “disabilities.” So Penny was hired primarily due to a student recommendation. My second favorite story about Penny is when we took a group of kids to the 2004 Presidential Inauguration. As we were waiting for President George W. Bush to take the stage we were talking to the kids about the significance of what was about to happen and how lucky we all were to be there. One of the students spoke up and said, “But Mrs. Speaker I don’t understand why you came, we all know you didn’t vote for him.” Knowing Penny’s stance as a proud liberal, the faculty chaperones all chuckled while Penny gave her usual well thought out response and said that in the democratic process no matter who you vote for in the election, it is your obligation as a citizen to support the process and that witnessing a presidential inauguration was a special event and one in which she was proud to participate. My last favorite Penny story is when a group of middle school students came in to complain about an older middle school teacher. They said, “Ms. Patty, we just don’t like the way she teaches. She isn’t organized and doesn’t give us enough examples. Her class is disorganized and she is just old. She can’t relate to

us.” Knowing this teacher was about Ms. Speaker’s age, I responded with, “Well, Ms. Speaker isn’t young and you love her and are constantly in her room during your breaks.” Their response was, “But Ms. Speaker is cool!” Age never entered their minds when they came to evaluating Ms. Speaker, yet it was foremost in their mind for others. I think these student stories define Penny as well loved by her students and define her ability to be open and fair-minded with her students.

Oddly enough like Jan, Penny is from Ohio. She swears to us that there were years where she sat in the card section of the student section for Ohio State football games. In her own words, as unlikely as it seems now, Ms. Speaker says, “It was fun waving those different colored cards around on command to form different patterns and signs.” That just doesn’t seem like the Penny that we know and love today! Penny’s undergraduate degree is from Ohio State, which does seem like the Penny we know and love. She lived in Southern California in the late 60s and taught in the California public school system for 14 years. Luckily for us, her professor husband took a job at the University of New Orleans in 1986 and since then, they have called New Orleans home.

Penny has taught for 37 years, although I jokingly ask her if it has been 102 years because her teaching practices are so precisely developed and refined. Penny’s classroom is the model classroom: neat, orderly, and stimulating. Her bulletin boards are works in progress of student work or intriguing postings that make the students and classroom visitors think and ponder. She greets students, colleagues, visiting adults, media, and even celebrities in her same calm, welcoming manner. Everyone knows Penny is in that classroom to teach and people are welcome to watch her, join in with her, but just not stop her from doing what she does best. Penny best illustrates this quote from Maxine Greene (1995), “Once granted the ability to reflect

upon their practice within a complex context, teachers can be expected to make their own choices out of their own situations and to open themselves to descriptions of the whole.” (p.12)

Penny consistently reflects on her practice, now assists less experienced teachers to reflect on theirs, and makes her own decisions about teaching that are consistent with the child’s needs and the school’s good as a whole.

The kids think Mrs. Speaker is cool, and they are right. Ms. Speaker is cool; there is no better way to describe her. As an administrator, I must say there are not many teachers that both middle school students and administrators agree are cool – Ms. Speaker is one of them.

Penny loves to read! She reads constantly as far as we can tell. When we go to conferences or read books together, so often Penny says, “I met that author in (any city).” “I’ve had dinner with that author.” “I heard that author speak.” So for this chapter, I asked Penny to share a list of her favorite authors and/or educators some of whom I expected, others surprised me. Those who influenced her during their lifetime include Charlotte Huck. She was Penny’s professor at Ohio State for Language Arts Methods. She introduced Penny to individualized reading and the wealth of children’s literature. Her books and articles provided support during Penny’s first years of teaching. A second influence was Ralph Tyler who is very important to Social Studies teachers. Penny was greatly influenced by his approach to curriculum and his ability to evaluate students beyond paper-and-pencil tests. Shirley Engle, a colleague’s late husband provided her with invaluable insight in preparing students for active citizenship in a democracy. One author/educator that I admire and that I knew Penny also admired is Nancie Atwell who wrote *In the Middle*. Nancie Atwell’s book on teaching in the workshop format is important to our middle school curriculums. A second author that we both love is Jonathan Kozol who as Penny says, “rattles cages.” His research involves cultures, communities,

education, and empowering the powerless. He confronts those in power who are oblivious to the needs of children. John Taylor Gatto, a New York City Teacher of the Year three times and New York State Teacher of the Year once has written about what is wrong with compulsory education in this country.

For the charter, Penny focused on Social Studies curriculum in terms of scope and sequence for K-12th grade. We use Social Study themes as annual themes to build literacy opportunities around. Penny helped identify annual themes and choose textbooks, videos, music, and other supplemental materials we need to support our Social Studies curriculum. Penny was also the primary writer for the section dealing with social studies curriculum, annual assessments and reporting effectiveness to the state.

Meet Sharon

Sharon is the youngest of our “Core Five.” She is in the process of completing her Master’s degree in Curriculum and Instruction with an emphasis in literacy. Sharon loves literacy, teaching kids, and rock music from the bottom of her toes. Needless to say, the kids think Ms. Preen is cool simply because she is! Sharon began teaching in the first program I created in 1997. During the 1999 program fundraiser, I introduced Sharon “as the Lower Learning Center lead teacher who is convinced that she teaches gifted children and challenges them to that level.” She worked as our colleague until 2003 when she took a leave to pursue her rock star passion, as drummer for an all female hard rock band. They toured the country, played small venues, were featured in local weekly newspapers, and sometimes in daily papers. They played college venues, small concert halls, and live music lounges. Sharon tutored kids between tours and helped home school some challenging middle and upper school students, often helping them transition through difficult times. She stayed in touch with her two-Patty friends

anpromised to come back and work with us when her rock star days were over. Luckily for us, she met and married a local man, bought a house, and was ready to return to teaching. By that time, I was moving toward creating this charter school, and I knew we needed Sharon's energy on the writing team. Sharon is a native New Yorker. She attended undergraduate school in New Orleans, fell in love with the city's music and funky soulful roots and decided to make it home for her and her dad. Sharon is outgoing, outspoken, and sure of her ideas and goals. She goes after them with a vigor not to be challenged. She speaks with certainty and is highly energetic. Sharon is a problem solver always seeking creative solutions to seemingly unsolvable dilemmas. She is an excellent writer who has a way with words that makes her writing accessible to a large audience yet technical and specific enough to be significant.

Sharon knows and understands literacy development in students. She easily identifies and works within their zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1985) and knows how to scaffold tasks and challenge kids. She has high expectations of her students, and they want to please her. Sharon thinks outside of the box so if a student needs a different manner of presentation, Sharon realizes it and will devise a new and innovative manner to present the material. She also allows students to take ownership of their work and take pride in their accomplishments. Her classrooms are neat and organized; just don't enter in the dark as she tends to rearrange the furniture often.

Sharon was responsible for two main areas of the charter. She worked with Jan with literacy formation, scope and sequence over the entire program. She helped select textbooks for spelling, English, Reading, and Writing. In Reading, she focused specifically on the middle school literacy program. In Writing, Sharon played a large role in designing the writing program over the 13 years of schooling. Another large charter writing responsibility is admissions. Patty

S. and Sharon worked closely on application format, in-house screening tools, timelines, and most importantly designing an objective admissions process. I consulted frequently with the admissions design since this is one of the trickiest parts of the charter. She also assisted Jan with the selection of textbooks for English, Reading, and Language Arts classes. Sharon consulted with Penny and me about the design of the literacy program in middle school including optimal scheduling, transitions, and types of academic support.

Meet Patty S.

Patty S. is kind, loyal, and compassionate. She and I have worked together for more than 20 years, and she manages to be somewhat of a Jack-of-all-trades and morph into whatever is most needed. A state worker often referred to us as Patty ² (Patty squared). We tend to go by Patty S. and Patty G. to keep things straight. After having two children, Patty S. restarted her career with me as a part-time typist for diagnostic evaluations. She later became the office receptionist and eventually office manager for my private practice. Patty S. has great people skills. She deals uniformly with parents from a small town who both work two jobs in order to afford therapy as she does with rock star fathers and their secretaries. In days gone by, a true rock star legend was trying to get entrance for his child into one of our programs. I was out of town. When the call came from the London secretary that he would expect to see me on a specific date, Patty S. said, "I am sorry, Patty G is not available then." The London secretary replied, "Do you know who my boss is? He is quite busy." Patty S. apologized again and said I was equally busy and the date would have to be changed. I would have changed my schedule to come back to town, but she decided that was not necessary. Later when my career evolved to school administration, Patty S. ran a school office.

I think her best suited position came next when she was named Admissions Director of the school. She loves children no matter their size, shape, age, or level of ability. She empathizes with their families and always has a ready ear. If the school President, Principal, Social Worker, or Learning Specialist couldn't get the whole story, we knew who could. People trust her and confide in her, as they should. When we were uncertain about admitting a child because we weren't sure if we could make a positive difference in a child's life, Patty S. always encouraged us to give the child a chance because it might be his/her last chance at a stimulating and rewarding environment. She was right on most of these calls.

As my career moved onward and I became involved in the charter process, Patty S. moved on also. She became the Executive Assistant for the Father T Foundation and a member of the Charter Writing Team. She formatted, collated, proofed, edited, and revised innumerable versions of the charter. She made copies, organized binders, and accompanied me to many Baton Rouge excursions. Patty S. collected all mail and kept our Father T events running smoothly. She took minutes at meetings and distributed copies of laws, accounting details, and e-mails as needed. With Sharon and me, she helped design a Selective Admissions policy that was fair and able to target those students with which we do best. When the policy needed revision, due to federal charter grant regulations, she worked with me to redesign the policy to a weighted lottery system. Patty S. is patient. She listens to every up and down I have experienced in my career and just as patiently awaits the outcome. She is a cheerleader on the worst of days and a ready celebrant on the best.

The charter writers' favorite thing about Patty S. is that she can cook. She was raised in a small town to the west of New Orleans and comes from a strong tradition of Creole, Cajun cooking. Luckily for us, she provided meals for each of our charter meetings. This was a treat.

We often told her the writing was better because the meals were so delectable. She swears she will publish a mini-cookbook for us once the charter is submitted.

Patty S. is a treasure to be fought over, but if the charter is approved I am going to win the battle and have Patty S. as my administrative assistant. She knows how to channel the important calls straight to me, knows how to delay or reroute the less important calls, and knows how to comfort or placate an irate parent, donor, or community partner until issues are resolved. She has become a good problem solver and brain stormer over the years and knows how to walk in with potential solutions to go with potential problems. She keeps her wits about her in difficult circumstances and is ready and able to work post-crisis as she so readily demonstrated after Katrina. Patty S. is a gem who is loved by all. Every charter writing team and charter school needs a Patty S. on board.

Before the charter writing journey began, I read an article on the Edutopia website which is part of the George Lucas Educational Foundation. They aim to provide information and inspiration for innovative teaching in K-12 schools. The website is: www.edutopia.org . I specifically found this article at www.edutopia.org/big-ideas , on February 2, 2008. The Edutopia staff listed some guiding principles and major topics related to school improvement and innovation. In regard to students, they discuss project-based learning, integrated and connected studies, shared and cooperative learning, and comprehensive assessment. In regard to teachers, they compare teaching to intellectual and emotional coaching and teacher growth through planned apprentice programs using the expertise and experience of Master's teachers. In regard to schools, they recommend adopting technology for teaching, record keeping, and connecting to parents. They also suggest reorganizing resources for longer class periods, shorter vacation periods, and looping teachers in elementary schools. In regard to community, schools should

build strong alliances with parents and involve community partners to help with resources and school-career movement. The reason I mention all of these areas is because each of the charter writers believe in innovative education. That is part of why they were chosen for the team. They believe in researching and enacting best practices. They think creatively and brainstorm new and unique solutions and strategies to help at-risk learners succeed. We are aware of all of these potential principles of innovative education, and we are innovative enough to put together a plan that utilizes many of these concepts.

CHAPTER 5

The Charter Writing Journey: Following our Itinerary

The Fleur de Lis Journal

My youngest son, Jeffrey, worked on an important play in our city in fall, 2007. Creative Time and the Classical Theater of Harlem produced and directed *Waiting for Godot*. Its significance in our mostly destroyed city was incredible since we were all “Waiting for Godot” for FEMA, for Road Home, for a rebuilt school system, and for our native citizens to return home. It was important to our community, to our family, and to our son. Jeffrey was the stage manager. He had many details to organize and keep straight, which he did in a spiral bound notebook. All of the notables in this production kept their notes in leather bound journals. So he decided that for my birthday both he and I needed a leather-bound journal since we are always organizing something. He wanted me to keep notes about the charter school development. He knew I would have lots of important meetings and details to keep straight. So I started recording my notes, feelings, and decisions, in this beautiful fleur-de-lis embossed leather bound notebook for this journey. Truthfully, in my typical eclectic style, I also recorded notes and thoughts on random pieces of paper located near my favorite chair, or my bedside table, or in the console of my car. I recorded some in my computer and others on pages of printed out versions of the dissertation. But recording in the fleur-de-lis embossed journal brings the biggest smile to my face. So this is the synthesis of the journey I embarked on.

To Replicate or Not

With a group of community supporters and the charter writers, I started the process thinking we may replicate or partially replicate the model of the Lab School of Washington D.C. (LSW). The charter team discussed the arts infusion, hands-on learning as well as the academic

clubs, which were Sally Smith's trademarks. We certainly believe what she so eloquently stated in *The Power of the Arts*, "Every child can learn; it is up to us, as adults, to seek out and discover routes by which a particular child learns" (2001, p. 4). We were determined to focus on kids' abilities rather than their disabilities and structure our school and classrooms around varied abilities. We were equally determined not to recreate the current limited focus on deficit teaching emphasizing isolated skills-based learning, often in pull-out resource classrooms (Harwayne, 1999). Elliot Eisner stated that "Educational programs... should not be modeled after the standardized procedures of the factory; the studio is a better image" (1991, p. 19). It is safe to say that the Lab School is modeled more after the studio. Eisner went on to say that sustained experiences with art forms would benefit students. The charter writers believe this. I know it to be true from my previous teaching experiences with language-literacy delayed students. Arts infusion at the lab School works and has worked for over 40 years now.

However the replication process was complex. First and most tragically, Sally Smith passed away unexpectedly, shortly after our board's visit there in November, 2007. This left the Lab School in an unlikely position to proceed immediately with support for new replications. Secondly, our state curriculum, the Louisiana Comprehensive Curriculum (LCC), had a sequence and structure that was designed to parallel state testing requirements, and this structure did not correlate with the Academic Club structure or even with previous annual themes I had used for earlier programs. Multiage classrooms and Academic Clubs also seemed like a scheduling nightmare, but that could have possibly been solved by the LSW consultants, who were currently not available. So to this end, we decided reluctantly against replication or even partial replication because we had a state imposed timeline and impending deadline. We also decided to use the LCC and create new annual themes that would align with the LCC sequence.

Laying the Foundation

The first three meetings were lively and animated. Our primary team consisted of one school administrator, two literacy experts, one social studies expert, and one admissions/executive administrator. Our science expert and math expert attended intermittently due to their busy schedules, but readily participated by e-mail, answering crucial questions, providing expert opinions and offered concrete curricula suggestions when needed. Since we came from very different backgrounds, we spent much of the first three meetings having “complicated conversations” (Pinar, 2004) about educational philosophy, teaching practice, student goals, impact of high stakes testing, and organizing principles. We all readily agreed with Maxine Greene (1995):

Similarly, it may only be when we think of humane and liberating classrooms in which every learner is recognized and sustained in her or his struggle to learn how to learn that we can perceive the insufficiency of bureaucratized, uncaring schools. And it may be only then that we are moved to choose to repair and renew. (p. 5)

We knew we wanted a school that recognized each student and his or her learning style rather than focusing on a label. We wanted the school to provide the necessary layers of support for students to meet their academic challenges with vigor. Heath encourages schools to capitalize on unique populations by fostering appreciation of their customs and language socialization patterns, offering a variety of activities including sculpting, boxing, pool, library, working in teams and learning from mistakes. (Flood, Heath, & Lapp, 2005) We knew we wanted to integrate student cultures within the school and provide unique opportunities for parents. Harwayne (1999) recognized the culture of each student by maintaining a growing list of all languages that students speak on a language board. Another wall displayed a perpetual birthday

calendar where each student and even school alumnus are honored with an entry. In this manner Harwayne showcased the unique populations of her students as Heath (Flood, Heath, & Lapp, 2005) suggested. We also knew we wanted clubs to be a part of the regular school day so all children could participate. Heath cited the success of “at-risk” students when they have one-to-one mentors and participate in clubs and after-school programs. She believes clubs are successful because they target students’ interests. Clubs also give time for sustained conversation and mutual exploration, increasing interpersonal relationships. The dialogue or conversation that occurs during club helps to increase the ability to communicate, make shared decisions, negotiate, and problem solve (Noddings, 1992). Our clubs will be decided by student interests and teacher talents. But what form would the school take? What curriculum would we use? How can we make the scheduling student friendly? What activities would we offer to help our unique populations capitalize on their natural talents?

By the third meeting, I listed eight overarching curriculum theories or organizing principles on a large Post-It Presentation Board. I garnered the principles from our first two discussions as a team and from our previous years of work and schooling with each other. The principles listed were:

1. Whole to part teaching as well as the prescribed part to whole teaching
2. Integration of subjects based on current research on neuroprocessing pathways
3. Concurrent focus on social skills development (character development according to the state) and academic success
4. Incorporation of values of curriculum for caring by Noddings (1992)
5. Emphasis on instruction in the Zone of Proximal Development by Vygotsky (1985)

6. Combined inductive reasoning and deductive reasoning to reach multiple learning styles
7. Consistent, mandatory school-wide organizational skills imposed at each level
8. Emphasis on metacognitive skills, learning how one learns, at every level so the students can become independent learners and their own advocates for learning beyond our school walls

We reviewed these unifying principles and all agreed that the various sections of the education portion of the charter would be written with these principles in mind. Finally we were ready to choose our areas of writing. The writing actually was attended to this early in the process, but at least we knew which areas to focus on. Once our topics were chosen, we each had to do additional research for the next several weeks into state mandates, typical charter school practices, realistic goals, and best practice. Again we met, discussed these issues, sometimes argued over them, and reached conclusions about where to head next. We divided into teams for various tasks. Those teams often met between Wednesday night meetings to collaborate, debate, and decide. We would then present our decisions to the whole team, revise, and move on to new areas.

Mission, Vision, and Philosophy

The school's mission was agreed upon by the community board members and slightly tweaked by the charter team. It was then reapproved by the sponsoring school board members. The mission of our charter school is to serve special needs, at risk learners and typical learners through developing their diverse assets to achieve academic success, intellectual curiosity, social competence, community and environmental responsibility, and their personal best lifelong learning plan. Our vision is to increase services to special needs

students in the state of Louisiana (LA) establishing three small learning communities, elementary (Pre-K-4th), middle (5th-8th) and upper school (9th-13th) within one charter school.

The philosophy was written by the charter writing team. We incorporated ideas from other successful charter proposals, ideas that seem important to the state, and our own ideas as curriculum and instruction experts. Our job was to blend these three components so ultimately the state would approve our proposal, and the design would be one creative enough to give us latitude in planning, and of course, most importantly that students would be academically successful and happy at our school. At the core of our academic philosophy are data-driven planning, high quality instruction, arts-infusion, hands-on learning, inquiry pedagogy, character and social skills training, and academic/career counseling.

As stated previously, our vision is to increase services to special needs students by establishing three small learning communities, elementary (Pre-K-4th), middle (5th-8th) and upper school (9th-13th) within one charter school. Janet Quint (2008) supported school reform models that create small learning communities. Owings and Kaplan (2001) described schools with approximately 200 students and class sizes of 15-18 for at-risk learners. They continue describing small learning communities as small school buildings or schools-within-schools, interdisciplinary teams of educators and students getting to know each other very well. We proposed to open the school for the 2009-2010 school year, serving 300-400 students in grades K-11th with approximately 100-150 students per learning community. Classes will have 1-2 teachers and 16-18 students. With a mission, vision, and philosophy in place as well as a timeline for opening, it was time to decide on the structure of the school.

Structure of School Leadership

The only way I know to lead and the only way I believe in leading is through a shared leadership model. School leaders can cultivate learning communities in their school when they lead with intentionality and heart. (Uchiyama & Wolf 2002) Schools are complex communities with many components to worry about including student welfare, faculty welfare, family welfare, facility, safety, accountability, academic stimulation, governance and policymaking, marketing, community involvement, professional development, government opportunity, and fiscal responsibility. How can one person be an expert in all of these areas? I chuckled when Harwayne (1999) described her experience of securing the school building because there was a sniper a block away and FBI agents had cordoned off the street. After taking all needed precautions, she thought to herself, “But I know children’s literature. I’m sort of a *maven* in the writing process. What am I doing here?” Similar thoughts went through my mind over the years of leading schools as I locked down the school due to a sniper loose in the neighborhood, and dealt with abatement issues related to facility issues. I thought, “But I know child development, literacy, and diagnostics. What do I know about lockdowns and abatement?” I had personally experienced her story. While the day-to-day incidents at a school can alter your schedule unexpectedly, there is a bigger focus for the Head of School. I believe the school leader drives the vision and mission while sharing the responsibility with talented others for the many, many tasks involved in running a school. Kriegbaum (1998) describe leaders as living on the edge, squinting forward, inventing, convincing, and always building confidence among those they lead, but without being absolutely certain because for leaders, every time is a first time. This is what I see as my job, taking the school to the next level, developing the next program, and gaining support of the next donor. Governance must be decentralized and involve all

stakeholders. (Wolf et al., 2000) A charter school already has a decentralized form of governance, and it is our plan to give all stakeholders a voice. Uchiyama and Wolf (2005) reminded us that school leadership requires balancing pressure and support. The pressure keeps the school moving forward while the support assists faculty in making the step forward with confidence. Specifically this requires creating new programs, evaluating and improving existing programs, and providing the leadership and professional development needed for these two things to thrive. It also requires a school leader to build capacity in teacher retention and expertise, funding opportunities, and program development. Max DePree's (2003) view of shared leadership involves the ability to lead from within, to facilitate personal growth, and to grow from the inside out rather than from the top down. With a shared leadership model that develops school-wide ownership, the administrative team and stakeholders will establish ownership in the school and its community. They will feel empowered because they are given a voice and their natural talents are appreciated and showcased. It takes a concerted community effort over time for continual involvement of the curriculum design (Heath, 1983). I believe that every good school is a school in progress, constantly evolving. Giving multiple stakeholders a voice encourages ownership, commitment, and buy-in. It takes a community to build a school and a community to run a school.

To this end, the organizational structure of the school and the organizational chart was designed by drawing on my previous experience and on research about school leadership. While the nature of the flow chart is hierarchal so responsibilities can be clearly defined when needed, in day-to-day practice, all stakeholders will have a voice.

Organizational Flow Chart

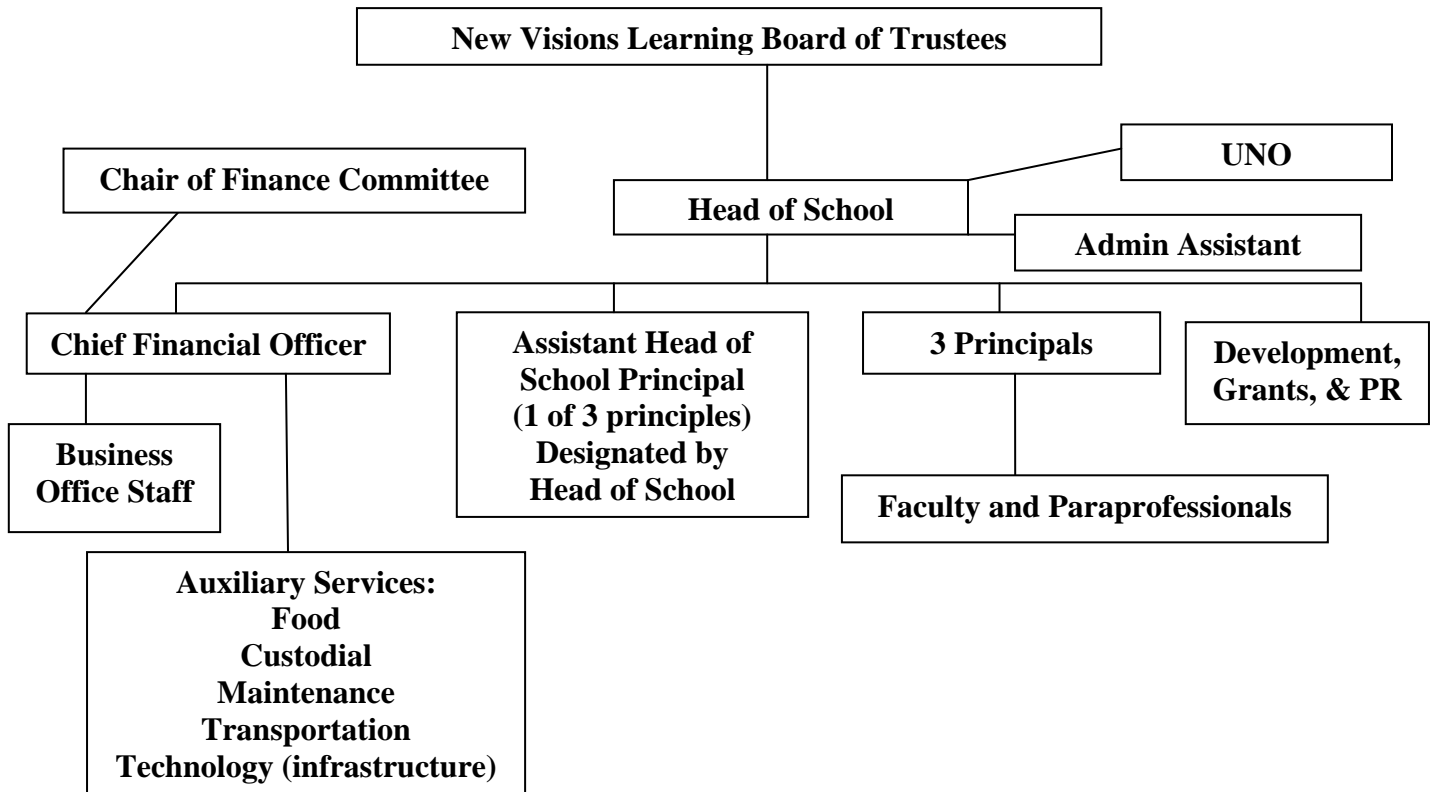


Figure 1. Flow chart of the charter school.

The flow chart is a graphic organizer that is required by the state charter application and will be utilized as a tool in decision-making. This is one of the state requirements that I see the need for, but a simplistic flow chart just cannot stipulate the specifics of school leadership. The actual school design will involve teams of administrators. Specifically, school decision-making will occur in a collaborative manner with an Executive Administrative Team, an Extended Administrative Team, and Division Leadership Teams. Teachers and parents will be encouraged and given the opportunity to suggest organizational, academic, and creative additions. As the Head of School (HOS), I expect teachers to act as informed decision makers (Tompkins, 2001) based on our chosen and stated

philosophies of education and their own competency and creativity. Harwayne (1999) believed that teachers will step up as leaders when their opinions are valued, their plans carried out, and their contributions acknowledged.

As the Head of School (Chief Executive Officer), I will be the only employee of the nonprofit organization that sponsors the school. The Board of Directors of that nonprofit organization has assigned the Head of School with supervision of all operational matters and the responsibility to meet strategic and operational goals set by the foundation's board of trustees. The Board of Directors will evaluate the Head of School and decide on appropriate compensation, bonuses, contract terms and extensions for subsequent years. All other employees are employed by the school. Those that report directly to the Head of School will be evaluated by the Head of School in regard to compensation, bonuses, and re-employment. As a fiduciary safeguard, the Chief Financial Officer (CFO) also reports financial data to the Chair of the Finance Committee since financial stability is at the core of running a successful school that offers extensive student services. Wolf, Barko, Elliot, and McIver (2000) stated that finance in school reform must be adequate, uniform, and given equal opportunity to all parties.

The CFO/Business Manager is responsible for all aspects of financial operations, including the supervision of all auxiliary services. S/he manages the business office staff. S/he is also the school's liaison to governmental entities for financial matters. Harwayne (1999) reminded school leaders that financial responsibilities could overtake a principal's life. I know they consumed my time Post-Katrina. Harwayne did not allow finance issues to enter her office and worked on them instead at home. I think this is unrealistic and not making the most of available expertise so I chose to delegate the financial and business aspects of running a school to the Chief Financial Officer/Business Manager (CFO/BM). "Due to the emergence of charter

schools and increasing school autonomy, some suggested that increased ‘MBA-like’ training is needed to handle issues like student recruitment, public relations, fundraising, strategic planning, and school operations.” (The State of Public Education in New Orleans, 2008) Student recruitment, public relations, and fundraising fall within my expertise and will be handled by a Development/ PR person and me. Strategic planning can be handled by the board, HOS, and CFO/BM, while the business office handles most of the financial, Human Resources, and day-to-day operations of the school.

The CFO/BM reports to the HOS and to the Finance Committee of the Board with the HOS’ input. The CFO/BM works with the HOS to assess program viability in terms of funding. In regard to finances, the Louisiana Request for Application for Charter Schools (RFA) states:

Schools must demonstrate the proper use of public funds and future financial viability, as evidenced by annual balanced budgets, sound audit findings, and timely financial reports conforming to generally accepted accounting standards for fiscal management.

S/he is responsible for all aspects of financial operations, including the supervision of all auxiliary services. S/he oversees the business office staff, food services, IT personnel, transportation, human resource issues, maintenance, and facility manager. The Business office will oversee payroll, human resources, purchasing, and reimbursements. Harwayne (1999) did not allow anything to do with purchasing enter her office. The CFO/BM is also the school’s liaison to governmental entities for financial matters. As required by the state, the CFO/ Business Manager will ensure the financial solvency of the School by using sound business and budgetary practices that promotes good fiscal management. The school will also contract a Certified Public Accountant to conduct an annual independent audit of the school’s finances, another state requirement that is wise and necessary. The division of duties and the HOS is one of my favorite

design features in the charter because it takes the business of running a school and puts it with a business person freeing the Head of School to build community, lead instruction, recruit and retain faculty and students and create a public awareness and image of the school. I observed this division of duties last year while working in a charter school, and I consider it a crucial part of new school design.

The Development, Grants, and Public Relations person(s) will report directly to the Head of school and work cooperatively with the CFO/BM and each principal in completing governmental reports in a timely manner, writing grants for each division, planning and coordinating community events, updating the school website, and preparing written media communications and advertising for school as needed.

The school will have an Executive Leadership Team and an Extended Leadership Team. Their functions will be purposeful and coordinated. The Executive Leadership Team will meet weekly and review the overall school administration, governance issues which impact the whole school, school schedule and events, school policy, data analysis, school accountability, school wide culture, and community outreach. This team will handle bigger picture administration issues that impact the school as a whole. It is important for all school leaders to exemplify the embedded philosophy that all students can be successful. With that belief, comes the public acceptance of school accountability as it exists today. It is essential for leaders to be exemplars for appropriate uses of accountability policy – leaders that convey that accountability for the achievement of all students is an integral, nonnegotiable part of the overall organization (Rorrer & Skrla, 2005). Improvement is based on sound data about student learning and achievement. Collaborative leadership and continuous professional development are emphasized throughout (Lachat, 2001).

The Executive Leadership Team will consist of the HOS, CFO/Business Manager, and three Principals. The Lower School Principal (Pre-K-4th) will have expertise in early literacy, child development, and curriculum. The Middle School Principal (5th-8th) will have expertise in preadolescent and adolescent development and social skills development. The Upper School Principal (9th-12th) will have expertise in high school structure and organization as well as adolescent and young adult development. Principals at the three levels, to whom certificated teachers and paraprofessionals report, are the frontline of administration. Each principal will have at least one weekly meeting with the Head of School, and the entire team will meet once a week as well. The Head will be accessible to them on an as-needed basis beyond that so that the school's strategic and operational goals can be met. One of the three principals will be designated to act as the lead administrator in the absence of the Head of School. The second in charge should have a rapport with the school board, make sound decisions in unison with the school's mission and philosophy and align themselves to work cooperatively with the Head of School and other principals on an ongoing basis.

The three principals will also collaborate with each other when they need additional expertise or the presence of another administrator. The principals will guide instruction in their learning community, attend staffing meetings with various grade levels or departments, and maintain a consistent and positive school culture. The principals will help create a sense of belonging for faculty and students (Quint, 2008). They will develop relationships and interactions to communicate clear expectations, while focusing on a shared sense of responsibility for increased achievement for all students (Rorrer & Skrla, 2005). Rather than fighting or resenting state requirements for increased performance, school leaders will embrace these expectations and problem solve and add services as

needed until performance goals within the curriculum are met. I believe as does Harwayne (1999) that “principals need to stay close to teaching” and not be locked in their offices and inaccessible (p. 35). Subject matter is “integrated” around “real-world” tasks requiring reasoning, problem solving, and communication. Diverse abilities, developmental levels, readiness, and learning styles will be acknowledged and addressed so all can succeed (Lachat, 2001). The principals will foster continuity of teacher-learner relationships (Owings & Kaplan, 2001). Each principal will have a Curriculum Coordinator within their division and the middle and high school will have a shared Dean of Students. The Curriculum Coordinators and Dean of Students will help their principal division leaders guide instruction and problem solve student academic and/or social issues. They will also act for the principal in his/her absence. Each principal may choose to create their own Division Leadership Team within their division. Teachers with four or more years of experience will be encouraged to join these Leadership Teams. A collaborative group of division administrators will evaluate teacher performance and have input about teacher placement and re-employment.

The Extended Leadership Team will include the Curriculum Coordinators, Learning Specialists, Social Workers, Special Education Coordinators, Development/Public Relations person, and the Dean of Students. The Extended Leadership Team will play active roles within their school division in regard to data analysis, ongoing assessment, curriculum choices, professional development, weekly grade-level staffings, social skills development and academic achievement of students. If student learning is at the center of the school’s mission, then school leaders must monitor student performance and evaluate the extent to which new structures and approaches to

curriculum, instruction, and assessment will result in higher achievement. This staff will have the charge of using data and student performance for purposes of equity and instructional improvement (Lachat, 2001). Lachat discussed a student database that includes student demographics (gender, ethnicity, language proficiency, disability), education data (grade level, sending school, prior education, Special Education, Title 1), performance data (state assessment results, standardized test results, diagnostic measures, grades, attendance, discipline) and multiple student characteristics. Although the model was created for high school reform, it is an important model to consider for all grade levels. From previous experience with school administrative software systems, much of this information can be gathered with an excellent student software data system.

Hiring and Collaborative Focus of Colleagues

Employees will be hired according to their belief in the mission and philosophy of the school and their ability to work within and support those expectations. Designing, putting in place, and monitoring change requires a whole cadre of staff who share a vision and who have the skill and time to realize the vision (Quint, 2008). This same cadre of staff is needed to start and sustain a school. In keeping with a vision of shared leadership, it also takes an interview team to hire teachers. Harwayne (1999) asked three interesting questions about teacher candidates. First do they consider it a privilege to be around children? Next, do they read? Last, would she like to have dinner with this person? Certainly hiring goes beyond a good resume and high-qualified state status. In schools, the ability to relate to children, share with colleagues, and extend yourself as part of a larger community is of utmost importance. One of my favorite interview questions was always asked by an esteemed Scrabble playing colleague of mine. If you could invite anyone over

to dinner, who would that person be? Harwayne (1999) also suggested asking about launching a writing workshop, planning a social studies inquiry, organizing a classroom library, and discussing the candidate's professional growth plan. Luckily with a team of interviewers all of these questions are usually asked, those direct questions that give us insight into one's pedagogy and the indirect questions that give us a peek into one's soul. High school students want teachers who are caring and concerned and use interactive and non-traditional teaching methods (Whitney et al, 2005). We hope to have teachers with these qualities across all three school divisions.

Faculty will be trained with extensive professional development workshops before the school year begins and several additional days dispersed throughout the school year. As instructors, they are expected to act as informed decision makers who will be supported with on-going data, expert curriculum consultants, special educators, and problem solvers who assist them in creatively meeting the diverse needs of their students. We hope to employ a teaching staff whose diverse methodologies help us reach and develop the many minds of our students (Saban, 2002). Several layers of mentoring will be provided for teachers new to the school and additional layers for those new to the profession. Returning faculty will be used in their areas of talent and expertise to present workshops and/or mentor incoming colleagues. Communication in regard to student achievement and curriculum design between teachers and the extended leadership team will help serve students with various needs through data analysis, research driven best practice and reflective practice.

In *The First Days of School*, Wong and Wong (2001) reminded us that many teachers are comfortable working in isolation and do not take advantage of professional colleagues and

resources. We aim to discourage isolation and encourage collaborative sharing and problem solving through weekly teacher staffings held during grade-wide planning periods. Alternating members of the Extended Leadership Team will be there to help facilitate the staffing. Staffings will focus on analyzing assessment data, plan teaching/reteaching, problem solving student issues, small topic professional conversations, and new curriculum ideas. Depending on grade-level concerns facilitators rotate throughout the school year and could include the division level principal, the curriculum coordinator, dean of students, learning specialist, the social worker, occupational therapist, speech therapist, or the Head of School if warranted. Through on-going performance, formative, summative, and interim assessments, teachers will identify specific student weaknesses and collectively problem-solve to find alternative means of instruction, compensatory strategies, or accommodations that may increase achievement. Based on grade-wide concerns, the Extended Leadership Team and/or teachers will pick various small-topic professional development topics to present. Teachers can also use this time to present additional creative learning opportunities to propose for grade wide curriculum inclusion. Our school structure is a unified design to support rigorous academic achievement from students, closely supported teaching from school educators, and strong instructional leadership from administration. We expect our students to achieve and will design, problem solve as a community, and redesign until that goal is realized.

A recent issue of *Educational Leadership* (2008) published an article called “Overcoming the Obstacles to Leadership.” In the introduction to the article Johnson and Donaldson told the story of Lacey:

As a social studies teacher, Lacey had developed considerable skill in teaching with a project-based format during her four years in the classroom, and her students were

making steady progress as a result. But the reach of her expertise was limited by her classroom walls. Teachers in her school were dedicated to their students, but not to one another's growth. Whatever they had learned over time—how to do project-based learning, how to facilitate classroom discussions, how to effectively use technology—remained largely private. No one asked; no one told. As a result, the school's instructional capacity remained static, no more than the sum of individual teachers' strengths and deficits. (Johnson & Donaldson, 2008)

This is a fairly common problem found in schools. School instruction needs to grow and develop, not remain static, and this is accomplished by ongoing, professional sharing and working together within the school's mission for the good of its students. The same article tells us how “becoming a teacher leader offers an opportunity to vary one's responsibilities and expand one's influence. Many second-stage teachers want to have a hand in making decisions about how their school operates” (Johnson & Donaldson, 2008). I support the findings of this article that “second-stage” (those with 4 or more years) teacher leader “roles must be introduced deliberately and supported fully . . . with well-defined qualifications, responsibilities, and selection processes” (Johnson & Donaldson). One of my methods for supporting new teacher leaders is to ask them to pair with teachers new to the grade level as their first line of mentoring for school routines and traditions. Additional and deeper levels of mentoring are provided with Master's level teachers. Second-stage teachers are also asked to share some of their “best practice” during weekly staffing, to visibly demonstrate their professional development efforts, and to share an individual interest or talent with the school (i.e., photography, yoga, dance).

Teachers new to the school will have a second day of assigned weekly planning to allow time for mentoring. Additional professional development will occur with voluntary memberships

of activities such as a faculty book club, submissions of professional writings, implementing research within classrooms, and presentation at professional conferences. It is essential to the organizing partners that faculty be a model of lifelong learning for our students.

Community Partnerships

In February we were invited to talk with charter network leaders from the University of New Orleans (UNO) in regard to our plans. With a new charter network leader in place, the university was interested in working out a partnership. It currently operated four schools within its charter network and had at least three partner schools. After many meetings where we shared vision, governance, and structure, we decided on a strong partnership. In *Big Ideas for Better Schools* (Edutopia, 2008) partnerships are encouraged with a wide range of community organizations, businesses, higher education, museums, and government agencies.

Ravid and Handler (2001) list the following characteristics for successful partnerships:

shared educational philosophy, strong commitment to the project, mutual respect for the knowledge base each partner brought to the project, a commitment to following through on the implementation of the project, regular and ongoing communication, investment of time on an ongoing basis, for the practitioner: being respected and considered an equal by the university partner, mutual ownership and commitment to all phases of the project. (p. 245)

We already have a partnership with a nonprofit foundation that will help host fundraising events. A university partnership can create sustainability, increase professional development opportunity, provide pre-service teachers, and assist with fundraising and marketing. We felt comfortable that we had a shared educational philosophy and a strong commitment to the project. We knew the rest of the components could grow over time. The partnership with the

University of New Orleans will be coordinated through the Head of School office. The university will be intricately involved in the realization of this school from the time of inception and charter writing through the identification of a campus, to the implementation of best practice delivered to students. The university has agreed to provide the charter school board, administration, and school with the following services: assistance with fundraising, grant writing, board training, and charter writing. Identification, development, and maintenance of the school facility will be a shared responsibility.

University pre-service teachers will complete field experiences and student teaching in the three divisions each answering to the appropriate Curriculum Coordinator and Principal of that division. UNO faculty will assist in mentoring and training new teachers, designing and working with the Head of school and three principals for faculty professional development workshops. UNO faculty will also play a large role in continuing to implement “best practice” through the school.

The university will provide consultation for some of the day-to-day operational issues by providing assistance with administrative data management, record keeping, state reporting, and student data information systems. Consultation services will also be available in the areas of financial, legal, and human resource consultation, student and faculty handbook development, information technology services and e-rate support. These are all time consuming tasks that an independent charter would have limited resources for, but the ability to work within a charter network allows autonomy with some of the advantages that a centralized system and economy of scale can offer.

The university will also place Special Education and Regular Education student teachers in the school. Since we are an arts immersed school, we hope to house some artists-in-residents

for music, visual arts, and/or drama. Both parties expect that the active and dynamic partnership will create an innovative, student-centered, achievement oriented school.

We do not have a business partnership yet, but hope to attain one after school approval. Many high schools in California partner with businesses to help bring industry to the classroom. These models integrate academic and technical study in real-world learning. There are 296 Partnership Academies, which are organized around industry sectors. Another 300 career academies are in operation. According to Hoachlander (2008), these programs combine college-preparatory curriculums and career and technical education. This is what we envision for our five-year high school students. Students can proceed at a slower pace through their academic coursework and intersperse some career, technical, and/or talent training. Students would have the opportunity to develop and demonstrate their own strengths and talents, explore a suitable occupation, and realize that success comes in many forms (Noddings, 1992). We expect this facet of the school to evolve over the first five years.

Meeting State Guidelines While Supporting Teacher Perogative

One of the ongoing challenges of public/charter school design is that of meeting state guidelines and requirements during this systematized, accountable age of education in which we are living and include “best practice” in regard to more holistic and constructivists approaches to learning. The high stakes testing environment has taken the country’s educational system by storm, in part because of No Child Left Behind (NCLB). Under NCLB public school students throughout the country must participate in annual testing in specific academic area and grades outlined in the law, including students with disabilities (NCLB, *Parent Advocacy Brief*). A school must reach a predetermined AYP (Annual Yearly Progress) or risk the chance of being classified as a school in need of improvement or as a failing school. In answering the call to high

stakes testing, the tendency is to drill basic skills to assure passage. P. David Pearson (2005) stated that there are two factors that determine the consequences of assessment. First, the stakes that are attached to it, and secondly, the level of challenge. He feared we are currently in an environment of high stakes and low challenge. If the challenge is low, the poorest achieving students will be “sentenced” to a curriculum of basic skills and keep them from inquiry, independence, and self-generative learning. However examination of old samples of our state’s high stakes testing, LEAP, show items that require higher level thinking skills also. For example, in reading students are asked four multiple-choice questions and one short answer for each passage read. They can score Advanced, Mastery, Basic, Approaching Basic, or Unsatisfactory.

The Advanced level reading criteria involved using context clues and colloquial meaning to choose the answer. The Mastery level involved interpreting a character’s feelings. The Basic level asked for identification of the characteristics of the passage or inferences about a character’s actions. The short answer question required students to identify a setting and discuss character traits. None of these questions involve simple recall. They all involve interpretation, inference, and higher level thinking skills. Baumann and Ivey (1997) successfully taught a 2nd-grade class with a balanced approach to literacy, using both literature and strategy based methods. Schofield and Rogers (2004) reminded us that modes of literacy should be designed to mesh with students’ experiences and include oral, written, photography, art, and video.

In describing the history of literacy, Turbill (2002) called our present time, the age of multiliteracies; a plurality of literacies that incorporates technology. I therefore think that we can teach the skills of reading and writing in a holistic fashion utilizing multiple literacies, including as much direct and systematic instruction as individual students require and get better test results. Test results that show students can analyze, synthesize, infer, and draw conclusions. With this

dichotomy in mind, we wrote the education portion of the charter to include the terminology the state wants to hear and the curriculum philosophy that supports the way we want to teach. The two are not truly divergent they primarily have semantic differences. As a design team, we have decided to accept the challenges posed by NCLB and accountability policy and learn to use it for the benefit of our students and school (Rorrer & Skrla, 2005). By this time, most of the charter writers determined that they would like to be employed at the school. It is not surprising since they feel such an ownership in its design. We agreed that school staffing and professional developments would not focus on bemoaning high stakes testing, but determining the best way for the majority students to succeed. An accountability system – with all its faults – does at least force schools (with long histories of poor performance) out of their complacency and encourages the schools to try a little harder and experiment with new approaches (Wren, 2005).

In our quest to move every child ahead, P. David Pearson (2007) was afraid that as a profession we may have fallen behind. He stated

I see a system in which (at least) three of these fundamental values and practices—insistence on *transfer* of learning, faith in *teacher prerogative*, and regard for *individual differences* as the hallmark of learning and assessment—have all but disappeared from the educational landscape; we seldom hear them in our public pedagogical conversations or see them in our curricular practices. And when we do see them, they often appear as perversions of their original constructs. (p.145)

Again I often think the differences are primarily semantics and the opposing parties all want the same thing: student achievement. Pearson's three fundamental practices are going to be evident in this school design. We are going to work until there is a transfer of learning for the students where they demonstrate their knowledge in multiple forms. Transfer of knowledge can

be shown through transdisciplinary study and through multiple forms of assessment. We are going to support new teachers adequately, but have faith in teacher prerogative. We are going to regard individual differences in both the way we teach and assessment. That will mean teaching and re-teaching, using multisensory materials, providing hands-on learning experiences, and designing multiple performance assessments. Teachers can use curriculum lessons as a theoretically grounded flexible blueprint on which to imprint his/her particular perspective, repertoire, and close knowledge of her students (Morocco & Hinden, 2002). Eisner (1991) defined teaching as an art, one that gives attention to qualitative voice, responds to flexibility in aims, exploits unforeseen opportunities, and guides students toward constructive activities. The school administration teams will facilitate complicated conversations about schools and curriculums and provide opportunity for our teachers to be vocal public intellectuals (Pinar, 2002).

Here are the essential and underlying building blocks that we included in the charter proposal to make our school and students successful. Part of the building blocks are state related terms, whereas others appeal more to curriculum theorists. These building blocks form the foundation for designing a curriculum that results in student achievement and teacher prerogative. Student achievement is our most important and first unifying theme. Considering our student population, a high concentration of special needs and at risk learners, data-driven instruction, multiple types of assessments, high quality instruction, creative solutions, student focused organizational strategies, time on task, a strong school culture, and unique accommodations will be key to creating positive growth in student achievement. These are characteristic of other successful urban charter schools such as KIPP, Achievement First, and Uncommon Schools. In the *New York Times* magazine, Tough (2006) described KIPP's mission

to educate low-income and minority students, emphasize measurable results, and promise to do whatever it took to help students succeed. The KIPP charters set clear and strict rules of conduct with two principles of behavior: "Work Hard" and "Be Nice." KIPP founders were opening schools in Houston and New York City and their test scores were rising. Donors and media took notice. Uncommon Schools and Achievement First charter schools have an informal relationship with KIPP schools and are primarily based on similar models.

Our school administrators will use independent and school-based diagnostic data and interim assessments to help inform instruction, which is essential to student success. Interim assessments are successfully used in the Achievement First and Uncommon Schools charter networks. Instruction that starts in the student's "zone of proximal development" (Lev Vygotsky, 1985) and is scaffolded from that point increases levels of independent learning and student achievement. The following four parameters were included in most successful charters written for our state. Our team believes in them and included them in the charter proposal in bullet format for emphasis.

1. A school structure that supports a school-wide discipline program which increases time on task
2. High-quality instruction that is delivered by certified teachers who pursue planned ongoing personal professional development
3. Assessment that is rigorous and focuses on the upper levels of Bloom's taxonomy: analysis, synthesis, and evaluation
4. Character development that includes developmentally appropriate social skills development, long-term educational and vocational goal setting, as well as responsible contribution to the community and environment.

Arts-infused academics allow students with diverse learning styles to be successful. Gardner (1999) supported arts integration to allow various types of learners the ability to express their knowledge. Heath and Wolf (2005) believed that completion of arts projects combines manual and linguistic work, thus facilitating vocabulary and understanding. They also noted that visual focus enhances the ability to hold attention. Thus we plan to integrate arts into academics. Art teachers will “push-in” to classrooms, especially at the middle and high school levels to co-plan art projects that support academic work. An example of a middle school project with arts and social studies integration is the building of a sarcophagus and wrapping of a mummy to place inside as the students study Egypt. Egyptian jewelry is made and added during the year and hieroglyphics will be used to write messages about the honored mummy.

With arts projects, students work their way through problem solving using underlying math and science concepts. Berghoff (2000) believed literacy develops via multiple sign systems, which include dramatic play, drawing, dancing, singing, and writing. I would like to include sign language as a foreign language in the school because sign language facilitates verbal language. In drama, adults and students speak and interact knowing that they have an urgent responsibility to find out, make decisions, and/or interpret data (Wolf, Edminston, & Enciso, 2005). This supports Reader’s Theatre and an active drama program. Wolf and Heath (1992) linked movement to metaphors to assist in comprehension (for example, run, run as fast as you can).

I have witnessed a school put a LOVE and HATE sign at the end of a football field. The students and teacher discussed the concept of hate in relation to a book they were reading. The teacher asked the students who they loved the most and who they hated. When running the distance between the two, students realized the great distance between these concepts. It made them realize how harsh saying “hate” was to someone. The entire activity reinforced a

character's motives in reading and social skills in a very physical manner. By linking the activity with discussion, the teacher helped facilitate a greater understanding and expression of words so packed with emotion.

Vygotsky (1985) supported active learning with academic and social interactions between students and teachers. Small student-teacher ratios help create time for sociolinguistic learning. Our philosophy includes components of Noddings's (1992) *Challenge to Care* by incorporating social skills and character development program into the daily academic curriculum to develop student reception, recognition, and response. The purposeful use of a social skills development program such as Second Step Violence Prevention will be incorporated through all grade levels. Small student-teacher ratios and multiple years with the same teachers will help our younger students develop a personal student-teacher relationship. Noddings encouraged keeping students and teachers together for multiple years. She also encouraged part of every day to be devoted to caring by helping students treat each other ethically, letting them care for a pet and/or plants, and providing opportunity to care for their surroundings and environment. Advisory groups in middle school and high school give opportunity for those students to develop personal student-teacher relationships and to learn how to face some of the challenges that come with adolescence and young adulthood. Counselors advising students can help design a personalized learning plan considering data about the student's learning style, family situation, and academic strengths and weaknesses (Owings & Kaplan, 2001). Clubs at all levels help students develop their personal interests or talents and again give the students a chance to relate to a club facilitator with similar interests. Heath (Flood, Heath, & Lapp, 2005) attributed the success of clubs to offering a variety of activities that fall within student interests. This

setting invites an atmosphere of diversity and imagination. It is also our intent to help students develop the ability to cope with and compensate for the challenges and opportunities they will face as adults. We plan to do this through frequent field trips from early ages where students go into the community to further study a concept and to interact with a larger community. Field trips are most academically rewarding and satisfying to students and teachers when teachers gave pre-trip instruction and preparation, students were actively involved during the trip, and teachers followed up in the classroom with field experiences (Morrell, 2003). Field trips will coordinate with academic topics being studied, tying them into state benchmarks, background content, and using them to integrate content areas with other academic subjects (Morrell). We also plan for high school students to do some social, career, and technical apprenticeships during summer months and during the school year if they choose to spend 5 years with us. Plans include hosting typical social activities for middle and high school students such as school dances, film nights, and book clubs. Traveling with students from 7th – 12th will expose them to other cities, topographies, and increased personal responsibilities. Travel plans will coordinate with academic themes being studied in school.

According to recent research on neural networking, interdisciplinary study and collaborative projects between arts and academics support language development, neural networking and processing (Posner, 2003). Neural networks overlap and communicate with each other rather than performing in isolation. Therefore, teaching to multiple intelligences or learning styles may enhance processing ability in students. This research supports arts immersion and multisensory teaching because both would stimulate multiple neural networks.

When I speak of state requirements and educational philosophy, here are common ground and common semantics. The classroom model will be immersion of special needs and typical

students in classrooms with low student-teacher ratios and ongoing support from special education teachers, curriculum, and learning specialists as they push-in to classrooms. One of the many changing faces of Title 1 reading programs is that they are moving toward a push-in method rather than a pull-out method. The push-in method supports work with small groups of needy children, individual students, and serves as a manner in which to broaden the classroom teacher's techniques through demonstrating and modeling methods for literature, writing, shared and guided reading, literature circles, and phonics instruction. With a good rapport and shared educational philosophy, the classroom teacher and reading specialists can work to impact reading across curriculum--not just during reading period (Bean, Cassidy, Grumet, Shelton & Wallis, 2002). A team approach to teaching literacy concurrently with specialists and classroom teachers allows the students not to miss important classroom time and not to feel the stigma of pull-out programs. Reading rooms can serve that purpose (Ravid & Handler, 2001). Push-in programs can also serve that purpose. The entire framework-pedagogy, curriculum, informed high-quality instruction, rigorous assessment, careful and caring character development, arts integration, and the home-school partnership-are built to provide students with knowledge and inventive, flexible minds that they will need to continue their education or training in order to become active citizens of an increasingly diverse nation and interconnected world. According to Max DePree (2003) in *Leading without Power*, "one of the wonderful facets of a movement is the existence of disciplined routine in the midst of freedom" (p. #). This is what I hope to accomplish from right outside my office door through the hallways of the school to all teachers, staff, and students.

Admissions Policy

Mission, vision, and philosophy are now well defined. What we don't know is how to

design an admissions policy that is fair and yet admit students who we do well with. We intend to educate a variety of diverse learners with a focus on students with academic disabilities. We know how many students we want at each grade level and know the overall structure of the school. The school's target population will consist of 50-60% special education students and 40-50% regular education students. The percentages were designed to create a mainstream, inclusive learning environment in which all students' needs are met with push-in specialists in a classroom environment. The enrollment progression for the first 5 years can be found in the chart that follows. While starting with 423 seems like a large initial population, each of the small learning communities has only 135-150 students. With the administrative structure and the vast amount of support personnel we have in each division, I think this is a reasonable first year enrollment and progression of growth over time. We need enough students for each grade level and division to feel a sense of community and emulate a mainstream environment. Considering economy of scale, we also need enough enrollment school wide to afford the level and depth of services we have planned.

Table 1. Enrollment projections.					
YEAR	1	2	3	4	5
Enrollment					
Projections	'09-10	'10-11	'11-12	'12-13	'13-14
PK/K	12	18	24	24	36
1/2	56	56	56	66	70
3/4	68	68	68	84	97
LS TOTAL	136	142	148	174	203
5/6	76	80	84	96	102
7/8	76	80	84	96	102
MS Total	152	160	168	192	204
9	54	54	54	72	72
10	54	54	54	54	72
11	27	54	54	54	54
12	0	27	54	54	54
13	0	0	18	20	28
HS TOTAL	135	189	234	254	280
TOTAL	423	491	550	620	687

Our challenge is how do we identify and select students for whom we can make the biggest difference in the 50-60% of special needs students. Part IV. Charter Contents, Renewal, And Revocation and Charter School Authorities And Limitations of the state charter law states that:

Admission requirements, if any, that are consistent with the school's role, scope, and mission may be established. Such admission requirements shall be specific and shall include a system for admission decisions which precludes exclusion of pupils based on race, religion, gender, ethnicity, national origin, intelligence level as ascertained by an intelligence quotient examination, or identification as a child with an exceptionality as defined in R.S. 17:1943(4). Such admission requirements may include, however, specific requirements related to a school's mission such as auditions for schools with a performing arts mission or achievement of a certain academic record for schools with a college preparatory mission. No local board shall assign any pupil to attend a charter school. (p. 94)

The special education diagnoses that we make the biggest difference with include: ADHD, ADD, Dyslexia, Reading Disabilities, Dysgraphia, developmental speech and language delays, primary and secondary language disorders, non-verbal learning disabilities, hearing and vision impairments, Pervasive Developmental Disorder-Not Otherwise Specified (PDD-NOS), and Asperger syndrome. While we can work with low incidence, severe and profound students, it is not the population we are designed to educate. Students with a primary diagnosis of behavior disorder may find we provide too many choices and not enough definitive boundaries in our academic work and in our school culture and climate. We don't want to be preferential or exclusive, but we want to target the population that we can make the biggest difference with; those whose lives we can have a lasting, positive impact on. This is a matter of being true to our mission and vision and not being exclusive. Our aim is to be fair and equitable and still give some sort of extra consideration to admit those students whom we know we do well with.

Specific reasons we do well with these types of disorders are described below: a) Clear

and explicit programs in regard to self-awareness, autonomy, and organization are important for ADHD students (Voeller, 2004); b) capitalizing on unique populations by showcasing them (Flood, Heath, & Lapp, 2005); c) infusing arts and multiple literacies for students with learning disabilities and diverse learning styles (Wolf, 2005); d) personalize learning environments with multiple years with one teacher and low student-teacher ratios (Owings & Kaplan, 2001); e) accommodations built into all classrooms; and f) verbal classrooms (Morrocco & Hinden, 2002).

Our nonprofit sponsoring agency, school board, and school are non-sectarian organizations committed to increasing learning opportunities and access to quality education for students with and without learning differences throughout the greater metropolitan area and beyond. Since our mission is specific toward a certain population we are applying for a Type 2 charter in the state of Louisiana. A Type 2 charter allows students from anywhere in the state to apply and attend as opposed to having to live in the school's district or parish (county). This is the most difficult type of charter to gain approval on, but I will expound more on those details in the bureaucracy section of this study. Designing an application process that would be open, inclusive and fair and yet still allow those students with exceptionalities to be admitted with some kind of preference would be a challenge. We had to ensure that no student is discriminated against on the basis of race, color, national origin, creed, gender, and ethnicity. Charter schools are public schools run independently of the traditional public school system. (*New Orleans Parents Guide*, 2008) The school is a tuition-free Prekindergarten – 13th institution public charter dedicated to serving special needs, at-risk, and typical students. The admissions process evolved and went through several redesigns over time, which included animated “core five” discussions, research, outside consultations, and conference calls before the final design was decided.

Let me begin by describing the easiest part of the admissions process first. Admissions preference will be given to family members of enrolled students and faculty, UNO faculty children, and families in the 70122 zip code. This portion of selectivity is acceptable in New Orleans, post-Katrina. I do not know if it would be acceptable in other cities and towns. Part of rebuilding neighborhoods involves bringing schools back. One can't separate the rebuilding of a city from the rebuilding of the school system (Waldman, 2007). The thought behind this is if a school opens; families will move into the neighborhood. The former Director of Emergency Operations in Jefferson Parish told me a phone conversation just 2 weeks post-Katrina to come back and open my school and encourage other school leaders to do the same. He said when schools return, families return. The University of New Orleans is in the New Orleans neighborhood called Gentilly, the 70122 zip code. That area of town had five to eight feet of flood waters after Katrina. It took months before the area was reopened to the citizens, and the majority of houses and businesses suffered great losses if not total destruction. UNO is committed to helping their neighborhood rebuild and is making great efforts toward that end. The university is also committed to partnering with us as a nonprofit agency and school. Therefore it makes sense for us to be located in the 70122 zip code and to give preferential admissions to children in the area code. It will actively help rebuild the area. If the school is highly successful, in future years it is even possible that families will move to the 70122 zip code to get preferential placement. If that is so then we will have accomplished our goal of an achievement oriented successful school and our longer-term goal of helping to rebuild our city.

Giving preference to siblings of current students is common policy among the charter schools in the city. As a team, we decided to extend preferential admissions to family members of current students and faculty. We feel strongly that having many members of a family helps

build and solidify community. Until Katrina, New Orleans was not a transient city where people transferred in and out of often. Most of us grew up with large extended families and multiple generations and same generations of cousins going to school together. We feel giving preferential placement for family members will help with faculty retention and with building community in the traditional sense of New Orleans schools before the storm.

Our first thought was to create a selective admissions policy. All students would go through the process, those with and without a diagnosis because it seemed to be the most equitable. Sharon and Patty S. examined selective admissions policies at schools around the city. Typical charter schools do not have selective admissions policy, but once again New Orleans is different because of the aftermath of Katrina. The differences in the public school system will be thoroughly explained in the next chapter. The one that we liked best used a matrix to admit students according to their test scores and interest and talent in art. We designed a matrix that allowed us to admit students with the types of diagnoses that we designed the school for. This was a complex test that took several charter meetings, meetings between meetings, constant revisions, and outside consultation. When we achieved a matrix design that satisfied us, I called some parents of children with educational evaluations and asked if they would share their son or daughter's evaluation with the team so we could pilot the selective admissions piece. We chose students who we thought may lie on the perimeter of successful admissions, but whom we thought would be positively impacted by admissions to the school.

Luckily, after living and working in one city your entire life, having contact with families that entrust this information to you is not difficult. The matrix included credit for a diagnosis that fell within our criteria, credit for previous testing, credit for a learning style screening completed by charter school employees, and credit for a student interview. We completed a mock

admissions team meeting at one of our charter meetings and to our great surprise the matrix worked. While we were satisfied with its components, scoring, and results, we still had three main concerns. The first was explaining this complicated process to the BESE board interview team, the public, parents, families, and possibly even the media. Understanding the details took a deep understanding of Special Education and the school design. This was not going to be an easy task. Secondly, the screening process was time consuming and would need funding. In the start-up year, this would be difficult as the school facility would not be physically open, employees would be limited to the Head of School, a Business Manager, and an administrative assistant. The charter writers and other colleagues were willing to participate in the process, but it would be week-end scheduling since we all had job commitments, and interested students had school commitments. Running the number of potential candidates through the process for the first year could be difficult. Third, although it was called a selective admissions policy due to lack of a more precise name; it was not typical of selective admissions policies. Typical selective admissions policies screen students for intelligence, previous successful academic achievement, and/or personal talents in the arts.

Our admission policy was quite the opposite; we were screening students to accept a large majority of students that had not succeeded elsewhere. Charter schools with selective admissions policies are often frowned upon by other charter schools. They are often not eligible for certain grants or funding due to their selective status. We did not want to be caught in this misnomer of selective admissions while running a school for at-risk students that would need every bit of funding it could get to deliver the needed students services. This was a dilemma for us, and it brought about some of the most serious discussions of the collaboration.

Our dilemma was further amplified when we consulted with the State of Louisiana

charter officials and the UNO Charter Network officials. A federal charter school start-up grant of \$200,000/3 years is available for new charter schools when certain conditions are met. One of those conditions is open admissions with no selective admission policies allowed. Giving up that amount of money as start-up money is not realistic. The capital costs for opening year are approximately \$615,000. The federal start-up money allows us to provide students with a well-equipped school that can provide multiple layers of service for these needy students. After my conversations with the state and charter officials, Patty S. and I sat down to brainstorm alternate admissions policies. I held several late evening conference calls with charter writers since we were no longer regularly meeting. We strongly considered straight forward open admissions, rather than risk not being able to open the school. Upon reading the law carefully, I found a reference to a weighted lottery. With that in mind, the charter writers designed an admissions policy that is two-part and should fall within the parameters of the federal grant start-up regulations. If one thinks of it as a two bucket system, it is organized as follows: Non-special education students who are typical learners will be placed in Bucket one and admissions will be open equally to all. Special education students who apply will be placed in Bucket two and student admission will be weighted according to diagnosis and school mission. Those with a professional diagnosis of ADHD, ADD, dyslexia, reading disabilities, dysgraphia, developmental speech and language delays, primary and secondary language disorders, non-verbal learning disabilities, hearing and vision impairments, PDD-NOS, and Asperger syndrome will be given additional chances in the weighted lottery since the school was designed to meet their specific learning needs.

Application periods will run for one-month periods starting in February, 2009, and continue until enrollment is full. Students completing the application during the month will be

accepted at the end of that application period as long as there is space remaining in that grade level. Typical learners will fill 40-50% of each grade level. If the grade level is full, the names of remaining students will be placed in the non-weighted lottery. Lottery details are explained in the following section.

In the case in which the number of applicants is greater than the capacity for the school, grade or class, the school will hold a manual, public lottery to choose which applicants will be granted enrollment. Typical learners will qualify for the non-weighted lottery filling 40-50% of slots at each grade level. Special education students will qualify for the weighted lottery filling 50-60% of slots at each grade level. To assure fairness and consistency in the application of the rules, a disinterested party will draw names for the lottery. After all spaces in the school are filled through the lottery, remaining students who applied will be drawn and placed on the waiting list in the order in which they were drawn. In subsequent years (year two and thereafter), OPBC will provide all previously enrolled students the opportunity to continue to attend the school, and will give admissions preference to family of current student and faculty children, UNO faculty children, and families of the 70122 area. Once the lottery is complete, the school will send notification to each student of the status of their application. Students chosen in the lottery will receive explicit instructions regarding enrollment and pertinent start of the school information.

Monitoring Effectiveness of State Requirements and Our Own Requirements

Pearson (2007) writes about transfer of learning and various types of assessment:

So what is to be done about this conundrum? Are we to abandon curriculum-embedded assessments? Are we to limit our assessments only to applications that represent far transfer? Neither, I think. Instead we should maintain and regularly use both kinds of

assessments because each tells us something the other cannot. The curriculum-embedded assessment that looks just like the instruction (in an ideal world the match is from the instruction to the assessment and not the other way around) tells us whether students learned what we taught them in pretty much the same context and format in which we taught it. (By the way, these assessments can just as easily be turned on their ear to evaluate the effectiveness of our teaching and give us some feedback about how to revamp our instruction—but we seldom use them for this purpose.) The far transfer assessments (ideally a *set of increasingly* distant transfer tasks) tells us how far the learning will travel—into what new domains, contexts, texts, or tasks. That information is useful, too, because it provides an index of the robustness of student learning. As such, it is much closer to the gold standard to which our students and we should aspire. Equally as important, we should not be regarded as failures if we do not always achieve the far transfer standard. Instead, we should celebrate our partial successes while redoubling our efforts to build more robust learning. (p. 3-4)

At the end of each school year, the school will analyze data from a variety of assessment tools, both qualitative and quantitative and align with the Louisiana Comprehensive Curriculum, to monitor trends in key performance areas and to plan educational programming for the following year. Participants in the annual data analysis will be the Executive and Extended Leadership Team, Board members, UNO Charter Network administrators, and teachers. The final product of this annual analysis will be a published plan including goals and strategies to adjust and improve the educational program to better meet the needs of our students. The same assessment tools will be used during the year by teachers, the Executive and Extended Leadership Team, and UNO administrators to monitor student performance and make minor

adjustments in the curriculum and instruction as needed. At the end of the first, third and fifth school years, the school will conduct an educational audit to produce a detailed report on the progress the school has made toward its internal and external goals. This report will be shared with all stakeholders to demonstrate the school's progress and planning for subsequent years.

The testing schedule is a compromise of state required tests such as the DIBELS & iLEAP, & LEAP tests and those that we want to include: the Benchmark Assessment System for Reading, and the TOWL (Test of Written Language). This data along with formative and interim assessments from teachers will form the basis of our annual academic report. We feel the tests we chose will give us more specific information about our student's current level of performance and the processes and strategies that student is using and those that s/he needs to develop.

Education: Curriculum, Textbooks, & Instruction

We now have vision, mission, philosophy, school structure, admissions, and state monitoring for accountability settled. Now what? Here is the part that the charter writers loved. Here are the parts that we sometimes had heated debates over. What will we do in the classrooms? What curriculum and textbooks will we use? How will our many specialists help support students at many levels? The charter application says, "The Education Program is one of the most important and complex components of your application... It is important to provide a detailed education program that provides more than just curricular topics but also the specific details regarding strategies, pedagogy, and professional standards that will be implemented." (Request For Applications (RFA) Type 2, Type 4, And Type 5 Charter Schools Authorized By The Board Of Elementary And Secondary Education (SBESE) To Open In Fall 2009 RFA Released May 28, 2008)

The LCC is the Louisiana Comprehensive Curriculum. To be or not to be was not our problem; to use the LCC or not to use the LCC was our problem! It was a long and hotly debated topic. The curriculum was designed to align with Louisiana standards and GLE's particularly in regard to pacing and sequence. The state website describes as the LCC as follows:

The purpose of the Comprehensive Curriculum is to align content, instruction, and assessment. Research has shown that when these are aligned, students' academic achievement increases. Additionally, the use of the Comprehensive Curriculum provides uniformity in content taught across the State in English language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies. (<http://www.doe.state.la.us/lde/uploads/4179.pdf>)

The concept behind the LCC is that if it is used in sequence, it will correlate with the most likely testing concepts at each grade level. The state website also defines what aligned content, instruction, and assessment means:

The Grade-Level Expectations (GLEs) identify the essential content for each grade, while the activities within the Comprehensive Curriculum indicate various instructional strategies based on best practices for teaching. The units in the curriculum have been arranged so that the content to be assessed will be taught before the iLEAP testing dates. Samples of performance-based classroom assessments are provided to assist teachers in determining if students are making progress towards mastery of the GLEs. (<http://www.doe.state.la.us/lde/uploads/4179.pdf>)

As a team, we all tended to be biased toward themes and eclectic approaches, responding to students and classes and their needs. At the same time, several experiences in the past made me stop and consider the LCC. First, I appreciate the need for a school wide scope and sequence in regard to curriculum. While I want teachers to use prerogative in the manner in which they

teach, we have to provide some sort of linear development of skills and topics over time to ensure that students are learning the various aspects of each academic area. Secondly, I helped two groups of middle grade teachers plan curriculum using the LCC and it was specific enough to be used as a curriculum guide and yet general enough to not mandate the manner in which one taught or assessed. Actually, many of their suggested strategies were instructional techniques that were interdisciplinary and developmentally age appropriate. Their instructional strategies were also not mandated as the only way to approach this unit, but only suggestions for teaching. Third, I interviewed several 4th grade teachers last year who had great success in student achievement on the LEAP test (Louisiana's high stakes testing) and have attested to the success of following the LCC. They used it as their guide and adhered for the most part to the sequence and pacing guides and felt it contributed to their students' high level of success. We, of course, had to consider this information. One of my problems with the LCC is also something I like very much about it. The LCC is a general guideline – specifying what standards to cover (by topic) and approximately how long to stay on that topic and group of standards. It doesn't give specific lesson plans or even promote a certain textbook series. I like this part of it. Part of my problem with it is the topics included for certain grade levels do not appear in the state approved textbooks for the same level. This is not a huge issue since charters can vary from the state approved textbook list and since we advocate teaching “with textbooks and not from textbooks.” However if we use the LCC we need to be sure that teachers at all levels have textbooks and/or supplementary materials for all topics and standards covered.

In the end, since our kids have so much difficulty with standardized tests, we decided to use the LCC. We examined it at many different grade levels across all subjects and feel it is well organized and comprehensive while still giving the teachers enough flexibility and creative

license. To appease our theme-driven charter writers (me being one of them), we were led by Penny Speaker in a collaborative effort to create year-long themes for our students that correlate with the social studies topics and with an authentic literature trade book. We often use social studies topics and/or social studies artifacts as a springboard for literacy projects. Middle and high schools are often asked to revisit children's literature books as a springboard to their academic work (Noddings, 1992). Much of our reading is thematic as well as our writing projects. This transdisciplinary instruction helps with neural processing, memory, and recall (Posner, 2003).

The specific themes we chose and their alignment with the LCC are listed below. We have started to compile a list of authentic, literature to correlate with the overarching division level themes. The division level themes are meant to target developmental milestones and social skills issues that impact children and young adults at these various stages of development. In combination with the annual social studies themes, we hope to incorporate these threads into reading, writing, and social skills development. We also envision many connected projects and arts immersed learning stemming from these themes. At times, math and science concepts will also be part of the theme learning. Themes make our students more able to integrate and connect facts from one subject to the next. The connection and repetition among subjects helps our students with memory and recall and transfer of learning. Since we plan and teach best with themes and our population learns best with them; we incorporated our themes into the LCC structure and format (see Appendix A).

Charter schools are free to choose books other than those on the state adopted textbook list. However varying from the list must be a well-founded decision since the charter readers and interviewers are likely to support using the LCC and state textbooks, due to alignment of content,

instruction, and assessment. With that in mind we examined all choices on the approved state textbook list and tried to select approved textbooks when it met our criteria for our school population. The curricular programs chosen were those that specifically reflected the school's mission of serving the needs of a variety of diverse learners with academic challenges (see Appendix B). A major component of the school's curriculum includes data-driven analysis and performance assessments to ensure that all learners receive the instruction necessary to meet or exceed national standards. Other criteria included promoting inquiry-based learning activities designed to develop problem-solving and critical thinking skills that can be applied to real life experiences. Additionally, the focus on global awareness encourages students to understand the world as a diverse, dynamic, evolving place and propels each student into taking an active role in society. Chosen programs chosen include options for differentiating instruction, connections to real life, material that can be adapted to varying levels of performance, multi-sensory options, hands-on activities, suggestions for integration across the curriculum, and a focus on critical thinking and problem solving skills.

The publishers and curriculum titles were chosen to implement and enhance the LCC. The subject, grade level, curriculum name, source, and rationale for choosing can be found in the Appendix C. We acknowledge that these programs are not the only ones that will be effective with our at-risk student population, but these programs in varying combinations for students will give us the flexibility to reach multiple learning styles and design programs specifically for individual students based on their academic growth and development.

Grade Level Structure

One of our first complicated conversations was about multiage classes in grades Pre-K – 8th. In the programs I have designed in the past, multiage classes are the standard. I initially

observed this arrangement through observing Churchill School in New York City during the 1990s. According to Owings and Kaplan (2001),

looping or multiyear teaching, one teacher works with a common group of students for two or three years. With fewer transitions to make each September, more teaching and learning occur... Instructionally, both looping and multi-age grouping help teachers better understand and meet their students' individual learning needs. The time together increases opportunities for students to receive individual teacher feedback to enhance learning. (p. 26)

The charter team agreed that multiage classes were valuable for our at-risk learners. This framework allows the school's faculty to develop a deep connectedness with the students that provides stability and builds a sense of community. The advantages of spending multiple years with students allows teachers to gain a deeper understanding of the students' abilities and needs, allows students to adapt to teacher's teaching styles, and fosters the development of a strong teacher-student paradigm and student leadership skills. Students will do things for people they like and trust. Kids learn in communion. They listen to people who matter to them and to whom they matter (Noddings, 1992). We feel it gives them flexibility in grouping for math and reading, provides younger students with older classmates to help guide them and in turn gives older students some leadership opportunities. Harwayne (1999) encouraged students of different ages to work together and not just be grouped by birth date, allowing them to mix with a wide range of students with varied interests and needs, much like we do in the adult world. Multiple years with one teacher also allows students and teachers to get to know each other better over the course of two school years and prevents summer anxiety about new teachers and class routines. Multi-age classrooms and looping allow teachers to accumulate more in-depth knowledge of

students' personalities, learning styles, strengths, and weaknesses. In multiage classes from a teacher's perspective s/he only has half the number of new students each year which gives her a better opportunity to spend some time with them since returning students know the class routines. In looping, the teacher gets new students only every other year. This longer contact time with students reduces the time spent on diagnosis and facilitates more effective instruction (Owings & Kaplan, 2001).

Now the problem – state mandated high stakes testing at 4th grade and 8th grades – pacing charts to keep the students on track with covering information included on high stakes testing. It is important that our students are able to pass the high-stakes test. It is important for the students and for the life of the charter. Standardized testing is already a challenge for our students. They need every possible advantage. What we decided to do is have teachers loop for 3rd and 4th grade. With looping, the teacher moves to the next grade with the students. This will continue into 5th and 6th grade. Although we prefer multiage grouping, we feel that going back to it while the 3rd & 4th are looping would feel like digression to earlier days from the students point of view. If our test scores are good for the first three years, and we are meeting accountability goals; we will probably field test a 3/4 class with multiage and compare test results. As literacy experts, we feel this could work, but don't want to bet the future of the charter or the standardized testing success of the kids on this model.

Teachers in 7th/8th will be on a modified departmentalization schedule so the 7th/8th teachers will see most of the students in those grade levels depending on their area(s) of expertise. Ideally, we would like each teacher to teach the same group of students for two consecutive periods a day. This should help with organizational skills for students, continuity of routines and instructions style, and ability to extend class over two periods for more involved

presentations. The students would go to their lockers at the beginning of the day, after snack time, and after lunch or co-curricular period. Limited transition times help because these times tend to be difficult for our student population. Since lockers and storage will be introduced at this level, all notebooks and book covers will be color coordinated to ease the transition of organizational skills.

Students in grades Pre-K – 8th will be encouraged to participate in some cross-curricular projects or learning when appropriate. Harwayne (1999) emphasized it is important for students to feel part of a school and not just a class. They should have time to work and play together with children of varying ages. Like adults of varying ages, they should be able to gather at times according to common interests and needs. We accomplish some of this through multiage clubs. Other plans include a mentoring “buddy system” for middle and high school years and joint projects between grade levels when studying the same topics. Additional opportunities will come in performance groups (band, drama, chorus), peer tutoring, yard play, community service, and school rituals and celebrations. Harwayne reminded us when students of different ages come together they are learning and practicing important life skills and nurturing social skills.

Class schedules and calendar are designed to provide the student population with the maximum support necessary to achieve academic success. The school day is longer than mandated by the state, and the daily schedule includes more than the required minutes allotted for ELA and Math. The School’s low student-teacher ratio at every level promotes an optimum learning environment for students with diverse social, emotional, and academic needs. With large blocks of time available, the daily schedule provides the flexibility necessary to engage in inquiry-based, hands-on transdisciplinary projects.

Grade level schedules were discussed at length: “Schedules are instruments to accomplish curricular, pedagogical, and assessment goals to derive improvement in student accomplishment” (Wasley, 1997, p. 46). He continues with it is more common to look for a schedule to adopt than to design one that fits the needs of that school community. It is also more common to find a schedule that better suits the needs of the adults than the students. I have a scheduling mind. I think in spreadsheets; I like to see a visual sense of organization in projects that I do. So I usually end up being the schedule master – much to my own dismay.

I tried to illustrate various examples on the chart size post-it notes, but Jan consistently reminded us of their expense, suggesting that perhaps we should call ourselves the Green Team rather than the Core Five. I include this detail only to reflect the laughter and spirit of unity that we shared during the process. Each session we knew that Jan was going to ask us to conserve large post-it chart paper. Each session we knew that Penny would recycle 8.5 x 11 paper and have us wisely use the back sides. We also knew Patty S. would cringe at the thought of too many inkjet copies run when Xerox copies were cheaper. Most importantly, we knew that Sharon preferred white wine while the rest of us preferred red, and she preferred seconds on her meal rather than just one serving. Sharon and Jan knew that I would give them a hard time about the length of their writing pieces and the time they took to write them. They equally knew that I would praise their perfection of product in the same breath. They knew that every meeting I would present my latest version of the schedule that I had revised in my mind during the middle of the night. Somehow I obsess over schedules. My point to this diversion is there is a story beyond what was written in the final version of the charter. The story is one of forging a sense of community which included solving tough challenges, completing time consuming tasks, sharing our own sense of pedagogy, and bonding over the larger sense of purpose and mission. I think

this story is equally important to tell because I want to reinforce the sense of collaboration and community that it took to get the charter written as well as the many months it took. Our official state charter application was released in May, 2008 for submission in September, 2008. We used an older version until the revised version was released. It seems it would be better to have the application available sooner so longer periods of collaboration can occur before the due date.

In the end, we were going to design a schedule and not adopt one. We worked on schedules verbally and with electronic versions, which I printed and e-mailed. Intermittent breaks in the schedule were important to us all because of our somewhat fidgety population. The breaks from purely academic classes can include nutrition breaks, recess, and/or co-curricular time. These times allow our kids with excessive energy to move, stretch, run, or play. Vigorous exercise increases arousal and enhances brain factors that increase memory and learning (Voeller, 2004). Too much quiet time in a desk can work against their ability to maintain attention and complete tasks. We tried to have students attend only two core classes with some sort of break before the next two core classes began. Since we incorporate many arts infused and hands-on projects, we also grouped classes in the schedule that could more easily extend time allowing longer class periods when needed. Later in the week, these extended periods would trade off with those periods whose minutes were shortened. For example, in middle school, we have social studies and science in succession. This allows for some of the conveniences of modular scheduling without the confusion of modular scheduling.

Daily co-curricular schedules give classroom teachers important planning periods (Lachat, 2001). Co-curricular periods provide students with the opportunity to develop talent in non-academic areas, which increases student motivation and provides multiple forms of expression. Co-curricular subjects include music, physical education, art, and drama in the lower

and middle school years. It is extremely important that co-curricula are not called “specials” or “extracurricular.” They are not to be the first to be cancelled on short days. All classes will be shortened instead. Daily co-curriculars give two major advantages. They give our kids an alternate means of expressing themselves other than in verbal linguistic manners. While co-curricular teachers “push-in” to classrooms to coordinate with academic material; during their class time they get to teach the students the basics of their area. For art: color, the color wheel, texture, perspective and other important artistic concepts. For music: rhythm, instruments, composers, tempo, and other essential musical concepts. Maxine Greene (1995) talked about her experiences with different forms of art and how her connection to the arts helps her discover cultural diversity, make community, and become wide-awake to the world. Secondly, a daily co-curricular time for each grade level, gives our teachers an essential planning period when their entire group of colleagues are off together. Once weekly, this time is used for a grade level staffing. New teachers have a second period of the week scheduled for mentoring with a master’s level teacher or specialist.

A gradual departmentalization occurs throughout the middle school years—at least two periods with one teacher—builds the independence needed for success in high school. As part of the push-in model, the School’s specialists and arts teachers will collaborate with content-area teachers to develop and implement inquiry-based transdisciplinary projects at the middle and high-school level. The school schedule provides time for students to meet in their advisory groups. This time is dedicated to helping high school students continue to develop social skills as well as the ability to make good choices when faced with difficult decisions.

An example of our intended class schedules is given in the three charts that follow (see Appendices D, E, and F). I would assume by opening day that these will be revised and amended

depending on the size of the facility, the number of students enrolled, and the expertise of various teachers.

The daily schedule for Lower School and Middle School exceeds state requirements for instructional time. We will provide 70,200 minutes of instructional time per year, 12,450 minutes over state requirements. ELA time will greatly exceed state requirements due to our targeted population of students with language and learning disabilities and differences. Lower and middle school students will receive 825 minutes of ELA each week. All 1st -8th grade students will receive a reading period, writing workshop period, and word study/spelling period. Students will receive a minimum of 300 minutes of Math per week. In Lower School, students will receive a minimum of 225 minutes of science and social studies per week and more during center and writing activities. In middle school, students will receive a minimum of 250 minutes of science and social studies per week and more during writing and research activities. In middle school, science & social studies will occur sequentially to provide flexibility for double periods to complete long labs, projects, or topic related films. Lower School and Middle School students will receive at least 225 minutes of co-curricula subjects each week. The students will alternate in some form between music, art, drama, and physical education. All students will be scheduled for library on a weekly basis during a word study period.

Upper school periods are 65 minutes in length and meet five times a week. Four periods a week are devoted to typical teaching/learning tasks in a core subject. Typical instruction will be planned with a format that includes a 5 minute intro/review, 20 minutes teacher-directed, 20 minutes practicing the skill/task, 20 minutes student directed with the focus on synthesizing for higher level thinking, and a 5-minute conclusion. This routine and the use of a school-wide

behavior program will give all upper school students routines which should assist them in meeting classroom academic and behavioral expectations.

One period a week is devoted to integrating knowledge in two designated core areas. Project based learning will be emphasized during this bi-weekly period. For example, the art teacher may join the math teacher to create tessellations illustrating a mathematical concept. The Social Studies teacher may join the English teacher to complete a reader's theatre of a historical fiction novel. The Learning Specialists and the co-curricular teachers will play lead roles in helping the core subject teachers in planning and carrying out the fifth period collaborative learning session. The fifth period can also be used to divide students into groups who need re-teaching and those who would benefit from further inquiry. The Learning Specialist along with the core subject teacher will co-teach during all fifth period subject slots. This will also help reduce S:T ratios during these important periods. These collaborative periods will be preplanned for the entire quarter by the appropriate teaching teams.

We will offer multiple layers of support for all of our students. Two teachers will be provided in all K-4 classrooms, which will have a maximum of 18 students to ensure low student: teacher ratios. University preservice teachers will be completing field experience classes and student teaching in grades K-4, which will help reduce student teacher ratios. In our 5-8 classrooms, two teachers will be provided in all ELA and math classes. There will also be a Learning Specialist and art teacher who will intermittently participate in classrooms as needed. All middle school classrooms will have a student teacher from the university to help reduce student-teacher ratio also. The 9-12 classrooms will have 18 students and one teacher in each class. A learning specialist assigned to each grade level will intermittently assist in core subject area class instruction and activities. There will also be a fine arts teacher pushing into the middle

and upper school classes to reinforce an arts-infused curriculum. All of the intermittent educators will help classroom teachers achieve low student: teacher ratios and specialize learning as needed for various students. Speech therapists, social workers, and an occupational therapist will also “push-in” to the classroom as needed. They will pull students out only if needs necessitate intervention skills beyond the classroom walls.

The goal is to hire a minimum of two Special Education teachers at each grade level throughout grades K-8. Grades K-4 and grades 5-8 will each have one Learning Specialist and one Curriculum Coordinator. These specialists will “push-in” to classrooms to teach model lessons, provide extra support or accommodations, and help problem solve critical issues with classroom teachers. A Dean of Students will work with behavioral issues in the middle and upper schools to maintain a strong and positive culture and climate. In the first year, the school will hire two counselors to provide academic and career counseling to middle and upper school students. These counselors will work closely with our students and their families to make appropriate higher academic education and career preparation choices as well as informed choices in regard to the core five curriculum sequence and requirements. Additional counselors will be added in later years as needed.

It is not educationally better to study literature, math, and history than to study woodworking, drafting, science fiction, and photography. Studying non-college topics does not doom anyone to an inferior occupation or underdeveloped mind (Noddings, 1992). Priority at all levels is to help the students realize how they learn (metacognition) and what they learn best. Metacognitive strategies help students monitor and evaluate their learning and comprehension (Tompkins, 2001). Students knowing themselves metacognitively and learning to be their own best advocate prepares them to continue academic learning beyond our walls. A high-quality

education includes meeting the talents and needs of the students and not excluding students from a form of schooling from which they may profit (Noddings). Our staff will also include several full time social workers, speech therapists, special education coordinators and an occupational therapist to help students, families and teachers as needed.

Premium in the typical classroom is on silence; premium in ours is verbal participation. According to the website of the American Speech and Language Association:

Speech and language skills are essential to academic success and learning. Language is the basis of communication. Reading, writing, gesturing, listening, and speaking are all forms of language. Learning takes place through the process of communication. The ability to communicate with peers and adults in the educational setting is essential for a student to succeed in school. (n.p.)

This is in agreement with Vygotsky's (1985) theory of sociolinguistic development. Language is accomplished by language flowing between individuals. We have to give these children a chance to act out and discuss their ideas to further develop their comprehension and written language skills. Dialogue extends our search for meaning, understanding, empathy, and appreciation (Noddings, 1992). These concepts are at the heart of reading comprehension. Dialogue can be playful or serious, logical or imaginative, goal or process oriented, but it takes us on a quest for an undetermined outcome (Noddings). The tone of various dialogues can naturally lead to novel writing pieces. Dialogue in classrooms is essential to creating and maintaining relationships. So much emphasis is placed on logical-mathematical reasoning, but very little on interpersonal reasoning (Nodding). Wolf and Heath (1992) thought kids should be allowed to act out stories with props. It helps master retelling, allows students to incorporate their own words, and calls on them to interpret and defend a character's actions. Mark Palmer

(1989) examined the pragmatic aspects of language development and concludes that conversational partners that have more talk time or control and choose topics have an advantage over others because they get to express opinions, gather information, solicit affective responses, persuade, define self-images, and solve problems. Students with disabilities can participate with typical learners in the challenging kinds of classroom talk and thinking required for good reading when teacher facilitate and mediate scaffolded discourse (Morrocco & Hinden, 2002). The authors recommend frequent opportunity to read compelling texts and participation in discourse practices that build interpretation.

Climate and Culture

The school's climate and culture will be specific and well defined. We will provide a safe and nurturing school environment that is clean, secure, and stimulating. We often think of providing specialists, computers, advanced coursework, and remedial coursework, but we seldom think of providing conversation, continuity, and building a sense of belonging (Noddings, 1992). Conversation, a trusting environment, continuity, and a sense of belonging and ownership are the bedrock upon which the climate and culture of the school will be built. A school-wide behavior program that grows at each level will be adhered to. Several of the charter writers have successfully used a school wide behavior program in the past. It was designed to meet the needs of the school population. I imagine our school wide behavior plan will also be a collaborative effort designed with our population and school structure in mind. Certainly confirmation will be a part of the school's climate and culture. When we confirm someone, we recognize a better self and encourage its development. Confirmation lifts us toward a better vision of ourselves (Noddings).

Positive and negative behaviors will have specific consequences at each level. We adhere to Wong and Wong's (2001) cardinal principles for penalizing a student's misbehavior including: a) do not stop instruction, b) give consequences immediately, and c) give out the consequence quietly and keep teaching. The new behavior system will adhere to those three principles. As often as possible, consequences of offensive behavior will be related to the misbehavior. As Harwayne (1999) said, "I don't know if my neighbors are good spellers, but I know if they are caring citizens." (p.106) She believes when children misbehave they take away from the community and therefore must give back to the community as repayment. Faculty and students will be knowledgeable of the entire discipline program and potential positive and negative consequences.

The students will practice school routines and transitions often in the first few weeks of every school year to ensure that they have a clear knowledge of school routines and rules (Wong, 2001). Parents and students will sign a handbook at each of the three levels to assure that they have read, reviewed, and agree to school policy and procedures in regard to behavior management, grades, attendance, and community involvement. An Achievement First video of Amistad Academy has parents sign a contract, although that is not allowed by state guidelines, parents and students will sign the school handbook indicating they have read and are aware of school policy and rules. The school will also utilize a school wide acronym to help students keep targeted behaviors in mind. Achievement First uses REACH. We are considering PATIENT. The letters stand for personal best, active listening, truthful and trustworthy, independent learning, everyone matters, no put downs, and triumph. We would use this acronym as an active way to help students understand what school value they betrayed through their misbehavior and what alternative behavior they could have chosen to triumph.

We will operate clubs at all levels which challenge students' thinking skills and motor skills and help develop social skills, individual gifts and talents, and community spirit. Clubs will include all aspects of the arts to develop arts further than our arts-immersed curriculum. Heath cites the success of "at-risk" students when they have one-to-one mentors and participate in clubs and after-school programs. She believes the success of clubs is because they target students' interests (Heath et al., 2005). Sports will begin as intramural sports at the lower school level and move into a school league for middle school. Eventually upper school athletics would participate in LHSAA sports programs. All students will participate in some sort of club or school organization beyond academics. Advisory groups at the middle school and upper school levels will help address issues related to growth into and beyond adolescence years. Advisory groups and clubs also give time for sustained conversation and mutual exploration, increasing interpersonal relationships. The dialogue or conversation that occurs during club helps to increase the ability to communicate, make shared decisions, negotiate, and problem solve (Noddings, 1992).

Students and teachers will be involved in service to our community and the larger community outside of the school in a visible and reportable manner. Curriculum planning will promote hands-on learning with manipulatives and project-based learning to help extend academic achievement beyond typical lecture test-taking skills. Field trips within the community and beyond that are related to academic curricula will help support active learning and social skills within the community-at-large. Students will be given an active voice in student government and community growth of rituals and traditions, such as naming a school mascot, fight song, and alma mater. Organizational skills will be specific at each of the three levels to help students in study skills and completion of long term projects. "Academic Organization" is

specified in the Achievement First video. The charter writers have also used an assortment of organizational tools for students in the past. These include a school wide agenda or plan book; color coded notebooks and text books, a specific homework folder, indicating papers to stay and home on one side and those to be returned to school on the opposite side. As with Achievement First, we would like all classes in middle school and high school to begin in a specific manner as well as all grade levels to begin their mornings with a specific routine. Except for extended project periods, planning for typical class periods will include a specified sequence of planning and lesson delivery. As with Achievement First and our own experience homework would be tasks the student can accomplish independently, will be limited in length, and will include 20-30 minutes of self-selected reading.

A specific social skills program, most likely Second Step Violence Prevention, will be implemented school wide to develop internal decision making in regard to problem solving, emotion management, impulse control, and empathy. This is a program many of the charter writers have successfully used in the past and one that Achievement First currently uses. In regard to parents, they will also have an active voice in developing school rituals, routines, and traditions.

Education as a Joint Effort: Teachers, Parents, and Students

Pinar (2004) stressed that education is a joint effort and commitment from teachers, students, and parents. Our school board, administrators, and faculty understand that this joint effort is crucial to our special needs population in regard to developing independent adults who are continuing their education and contributing positively to their community. We will emphasize and create multiple opportunities within the school for student-parent relationships to grow and flourish. Heath (Heath et al., 2005) reminded us to connect the

school culture and the child's culture to increase early literacy development. A Parent Association will be formed from year one to promote community, parenting skills, and development/fundraising. Professionals from the community will be sought by school administration to help develop parental knowledge in areas of psychosocial development, academic development and other pertinent child rearing concepts. At the lower grade levels parents will be invited to participate in regular school visits to learn facilitation techniques for language, motoric, and social development. We hope to incorporate bonding, language facilitation, motoric sort of floor time on a weekly basis for parents of Pre-K, K, and 1st grade students. Floor time helps facilitate the pragmatic features of length and topics of conversation may help facilitate metacognitive skills in students with language differences (Palmer, 1989).

Parents at middle and upper grades will be encouraged to attend student-driven parent conferences and other school events. They will also be invited to participate in programs aimed at adolescent developmental milestones. In the early morning and evening hours, yoga classes, a fitness room, and adult sports leagues will be offered for parent, teacher, and neighborhood participation. Our goal is to make the school a strong, united community of student, parent, and teacher learners that promotes talent discovery and development, academic achievement, community connectedness, and ultimately lifelong community service and learning.

“The founding board, Head of School, and school Executive Team consider involvement of parents critical in their child's education and their ultimate achievement in school and in life skills” (in the charter RFA). Parental involvement promotes a wider reaching community working toward common goals for the children. Student academic achievement is more attainable and sustainable when a collective community of adults within the student's life demonstrates a cooperative spirit, unity in goals, and rituals and

traditions that they celebrate. Heath (Flood, Heath, & Lapp, 2005). reminded us that connecting the child's culture and school life result in a more connected and successful academic community. We built in opportunities for whole families, which will empower parents with confidence and trust in the educational setting. We want parents involved in the academic parts of the school, the governance parts, and the social/community parts. We plan for parent involvement in multiple manners hoping to reach every parent at some level. Effective teacher-parent-school partnerships are essential to successful education for at-risk students (Owings & Kaplan, 2001). A sampling of our parent involvement and communication opportunities includes the following intentions: There will be two positions for parent representation on the school board. Openings will be widely posted and parents will receive information about the school's governance opportunities during early enrollment meetings, school informational brochures, and through ongoing newsletters throughout the school's operation. The Volunteer Coordinator will coordinate the numerous opportunities for parents to volunteer at the school through tutoring, office assistance, fundraising events, chaperoning, working on school projects, or as members of various school committees.

The school will establish an active parent organization, which assists with event planning, community building, and fundraising. School leaders will help plan professional community members as guest speakers for parent meetings. The guest speakers will inform parents of child development, home discipline and management, technology safety, positive mental health, and other relevant child development topics. The school will offer training in areas of school curriculum, school discipline policy and technology for parents to be able to work with their children and reinforce academic work.

The school will feature various parent nights, which will help familiarize the parents with standardized testing resources, and literacy and math development in and out of the home setting. Parents and family members will be rewarded with free dress passes and homework passes for their students to encourage their attendance. The school is incorporating a “push” phone call system, which will increase effectiveness and efficiency of parent contact. The system allows us to automatically send voicemails to parent groups for notification of school meetings, events, updates, school registration, and closures. Parents at each division will receive monthly school newsletters detailing information about upcoming subjects, events, and areas to focus on assisting their children. Correspondences will be translated into parents' native languages.

Parents will also be invited to the school for multiple functions. Parent-teacher conferences will be held three or four times a year, after each report card is issued. These conferences will be scheduled by the teacher and through the front office. Parents are allowed and even encouraged to schedule a conference with the teacher whenever they have concerns. This gives the parent opportunity to have an active voice in their child's education. Parents will also be invited to attend and help host several academic-based events at the school throughout the year. These include Back-to-School Night where the parents meet the School Leadership Team, spend time with the teacher in their child's classroom, sign up to volunteer for school activities, and meet co-curricular teachers and staff. Parents will also be invited to academic evenings such as literacy, math, and science nights. During these sessions, parents will be able to view their child's work, actively participate in academic games with their children, and learn more about typical academic growth and development.

With these multiple opportunities, we hope each parent can find their niche and be involved in their child's education. We hope to learn from parents about their culture, their families, and their special talents. We hope they learn from us about educating children and expected developmental milestones in growth. Heath (2005) advised us to connect families, cultures, and schools to each other for maximum success. The charter writers believe that parents involved in their child's academic life results in increased student achievement.

How will parents know of these opportunities? We will advertise these opportunities by sending flyers home, telling the students to tell their parents, offering incentives for participation, posting it on our website, and placing flyers on walls of school. We are also incorporating a "push" phone call system, which will automatically send voicemails to parent groups for notification of school meetings, events, updates, school registration, and emergency closures. As the school grows and develops, we hope that parents telling parents of these opportunities will help increase the number of parents choosing to become involved.

Professional Development

We are committed to providing intensive summer workshops as well as ongoing professional development throughout the year. Professional development topics will include, but are not limited to: data-driven instruction and assessment, learning style assessment, learning differences or disabilities diagnoses and teaching strategies, differentiated instruction, integrated technology that supports instruction and communication, classroom management, and social skill integration.

The primary goal of the school's professional development is to provide the teachers

with the tools necessary to maximize student achievement that is centered on data-driven instruction and assessment. Based on faculty surveys and the school leadership team's assessment of needs, additional professional development will be planned for each school year considering teacher's professional needs and student test score results. We want professional development to be evident everyday and be part of the core of school operations. A faculty book club, a professional library, daily postings of professional opportunities, sharing of new ideas learned, inviting consultants to work with us on pertinent topics are all signs of ongoing professional development (Harwayne, 1999).

For the opening year, considering we are trying to train and unite a new faculty, the following rigorous professional development calendar will be followed. One week of professional development will be completed in June, 2009, followed with two weeks in August, 2009. One professional development day will be held in the fall semester and one in the spring semester. Throughout the first year, the school will provide over 100 hours of in-house professional development. The Head of School is planning to allocate additional funds for The Executive and Extended Leadership Teams and lead teachers to participate in additional professional development beyond the school walls. After our opening year, the anticipated professional development calendar includes five days before school starts with at least three additional days during the school year. The Head of School plans to establish a PD fund, for which individual teachers can apply to complete additional professional development days specific to their approved annual Professional Development Plan. School support will come in the form of providing substitutes and/or funding opportunities.

Planned professional development will focus on the following topics: a) data-driven instruction and assessment, b) learning style assessment, c) learning differences or

disabilities diagnoses and teaching strategies, d) differentiated instruction, e) integrated technology that supports instruction and communication, f) classroom management, and g) social skills integration.

Professional Development is aligned with the school's pedagogy in the following manner. Our primary goal, to increase student achievement, involves school pedagogy that centers around data driven instruction and assessment, shared leadership and frequent communication, research-based literacy instruction, differentiated teaching for diverse learners, technology infusion, multimedia instruction, arts integration, and social skills development. Professional development includes allocating time for teacher collaboration, curriculum design, and sharing instructional strategies (Darling-Hammond & Friedlander, 2008). Based on faculty surveys and these pedagogical stances, professional development will be planned for each school year considering teacher's professional needs, student test score results, school leadership team's assessment of needs, and current student performances. Successive years will be planned in the late spring based on similar criteria.

Professional development will be evaluated by faculty in written formats following each PD session. In an on-going manner, it will be evaluated through grade level meetings with Division Heads noting new techniques used. Professional development will also be evaluated through improved student achievement each year. Faculty surveys regarding Professional development needs will be taken twice a year, once in the opening days of school and once late in the spring before school closes for the year.

CHAPTER 6

Navigating the Bureaucracy: Steering Through Rough Waters

Bewildering, Bewitching Rebuilding

If the education portion was our favorite part of the charter writing process, then navigating the bureaucracy was my least favorite part. The landscape of schools in New Orleans post-Katrina is quite complex and ever changing. As Amy Waldman said, the rebuilding of the New Orleans school system encompasses “bewildering complexity and bewitching promise” (NPR, 2007). I have felt both of those elements throughout this process. As a noted local educator wrote in a letter of support for the school:

New Orleans public education has a long and difficult road toward excellence. In the wake of Hurricane Katrina, the city is contending with a scarcity of schools, education professionals and resources. However, the true recovery required in the long term stems from the long and deplorable history of a public system that offered no more than a sub-par education to the children of New Orleans. Schools in New Orleans before the storm were identified as some of the worst in the country; likewise, the city’s students consistently performed at below grade-level expectations. *Recovery*, thus, is a word that can scarcely be applied to this situation for it implies a *return* to an ideal state of public education that never was. What is presently required is a new beginning, a rebirth – a complete re-envisioning of what schools can and should be. And for no population could this need be more urgent than for students who are identified with special needs in the Greater New Orleans area. (K. McClure, October 1, 2008)

This one paragraph truly characterizes the complexity and unprecedented nature of rebuilding the school system and starting new schools within the current system.

To keep parents informed about the ever-changing system, a coalition of community organizations now publishes an annual booklet called *A Parents' Guide to New Orleans Public Schools*. Our nonprofit organization's finance consultant attended a community information session held by this coalition to help further understand the system of public schools post-Katrina. After attending, he told me that he was glad I was getting my Ph.D. because I would need it just to comprehend the various components of the current school system. Paul Tough (2008), in a recent *New York Times* magazine, described the system as a "bewildering tangle of interlocking organizational structures administering 86 public schools" (p. 6). Even the parents' guide starts out by saying this information is subject to change. The first complete paragraph in the introduction says,

Whether you've been back in New Orleans for a few weeks, several months or are still trying to get home, you have probably realized that public schools in New Orleans are very different than they were before Hurricane Katrina. Many schools are not open. School attendance is no longer based on where you live and students have some choice about what public schools they wish to attend. (*A Parents' Guide to New Orleans Public Schools*, 2008)

Before August 29, 2005

Before Hurricane Katrina, Orleans had dual public school systems operating. The first was Orleans Parish Public Schools operated by the Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB). According to the guide, the OPSB is composed of a seven-member board elected every 4 years. The second was the Recovery School District (RSD) established by BESE in 2003, to assist schools that failed to meet state academic requirements for four consecutive years. In November, 2005, after Katrina, the state legislator passed a law requiring RSD to take over any Orleans

parish public school that had below average scores in regard to academic performance. RSD is run by a superintendent appointed by the state Superintendent of Education. Pre-storm, there were three charter schools open in the city. Educators in New Orleans, as in many other cities were dabbling in the charter school movement.

After August 29, 2005

After the storm, all Orleans parish public schools were closed and all teachers were fired. Several public schools run by the Orleans Parish School Board reorganized and opened as charter schools. They had to have a majority vote from their parent and faculty constituency to reopen as a charter. These schools quickly wrote a charter, had it approved by the BESE Board, and mobilized their school communities to reorganize and relocate. Many of these schools opened with selective admissions policies, which are typically not allowed in charter schools (Waldman, 2007). According to the state of LA RFA for charter schools, “Charter schools are public schools operated independently and are required to serve all children; with the best interest of at-risk pupils being the overriding consideration when creating a charter school” (p. 4). Due to the emergency circumstances, this policy was overlooked and the newly opened charters maintained their pre-Katrina selective admissions policies. Most of these schools had previously operated as magnet schools and were high achieving, recognized in their communities, and had well networked school administrators leading the way.

Post-storm the charter school dabbling turned into a full force movement of charter school applications, quick approvals, and subsequent openings. For high achieving, closely connected existing schools, it was the quickest way to reopen. For national charter organizations wishing to open new schools, New Orleans was fertile ground.

According to a *New York Times* (2008) magazine article:

For the first couple of years after the storm, the schools of New Orleans, like most things in the city, were a mess . . . By September, 2006, there were 22,000 public-school students in New Orleans, one-third of the pre-Katrina population. Though it was more than year after the storm, the school system wasn't ready for them: there were not enough buses, not enough textbooks, no hot lunches, and no doors on the bathroom stalls. There also weren't enough teachers – 106 positions were still unfilled on the first day of classes; at some schools there were as many private security guards . . . as there were teachers. (p. 4)

As of August, 2007, OPSB operated 5 public schools and 11 charter schools. BESE operated three Type 2 charter schools run in the city. The Algiers Charter School Association (ACSA) was established post-storm. In 2007, ACSA ran two Orleans Parish Public Schools and seven RSD schools. The RSD directly operated 32 public schools, of which 13 were newly opened in the '07-08 school year. RSD also oversaw 20 charter schools. (*A Parents' Guide to New Orleans Public Schools, 2008*) OPSB also maintained ownership of all public school buildings and worked with state authorities for management and repair of the buildings. RSD charter schools are required to have open enrollment while the OPPS charter schools have varying admissions policies depending on their previous status pre-Katrina. Luckily, the guide also contains specific school criteria for parents' use when selecting a school as well as interview questions to ask. It has a template overview of each school, which contains the school's location, mission, grades served, size, registration process, extracurricular activities offered and other pertinent school information. Since the public school landscape is so fluid and so complex, this guide has helped parents and educators plow their way through the complexities of school choice and enrollment.

According to *The State of Public Education in New Orleans*, 2008 Report, produced by the Scott S. Cowen Institute for Public Education Initiatives, OPSB operates 6 public schools and 12 charter schools; as opposed to the more than 100 schools they operated pre-Katrina. ACSA operates 9 schools. RSD operates 18 public schools and 13 charter schools run by various organizations. BESE runs 2 Type 2 charter schools that are open to students across the state.

The Moving Target of State Requirements

Another bureaucratic barrier to writing a new charter is the ever-changing requirements and deadlines from the state. Due to the unprecedented rebuilding process, what the state wants, on what date, and in what format is ever changing. Dealing with the state bureaucracy is not necessarily difficult, but takes persistence. The state offers charter application information sessions in July. Due to schedule conflicts we were unfortunately unable to attend. The Executive Summary and Education portions of our charter were complete by July, and the financial and governance portions were in process. I believe the state timeline needs serious reconsideration. The new state Request for Applications for Charter Schools (referred to as RFA) was released in late May, 2008. The Letter of Intent was due by August 1st, the Eligibility Review was due September 5th, and the completed application due September 26th.

Our letter of intent was submitted by e-mail on July 30th and by fax on July 31st, 2008. The following excerpt from the letter most succinctly describes our final submission:

Our vision for Oak Park Bienville Charter is to increase services to special needs students in the metropolitan area by establishing three small learning communities, elementary (Pre-K-4th), middle (5th-8th) and upper school (9th-13th) within one charter school. We aim to help these children achieve academically, be immersed in their community and its needs, and discover their own best place to contribute to our metropolitan area in a

meaningful manner. Our mission is to serve the needs of special needs learners, at-risk learners, and typical learners through developing their diverse assets in order to achieve: 1) academic success through data-driven planning and high quality instruction; 2) intellectual curiosity through arts-infusion, hands-on learning, and inquiry pedagogy; 3) social competence through character development and specific social skills training; 4) community and environmental responsibility through service projects and proactive ecological planning; and 5) students' personal best lifelong learning plans through academic and career counseling.

The Eligibility Review was due September 5th, but here is the wording in the RFA regarding the stated deadline. It was written in red, bold-faced, and underlined:

Although the deadline for submitting Eligibility Review Documentation is not until September 5, 2008, applicants are encouraged to submit their Eligibility Review Documentation to the Department beginning on August 1. This will allow Department staff an opportunity to review the documentation and to provide feedback to applicants as to any missing items, so that they can resubmit their Eligibility Review Documentation prior to the final deadline of September 5th.

Needless to say we submitted our Eligibility Review early, actually by August 13th. We hand delivered a copy to the state charter office and received a signed receipt of delivery. My goal was to submit the completed charter application by September 16, ten days before the final deadline. Then came the threat of Hurricane Gustav, the first major threat to the city since Katrina. Gustav set its sights on the Louisiana coastline early on and our state occupied most of the cone on uncertainty. Over 2,000,000 people were evacuated; schools closed for 5 days; and survival of the fittest reappeared upon the first few days of returning. As we returned to normal

routines by resupplying our empty refrigerators, moving our patio furniture outside, and cleaning the broken branches in the yard; we watched Hurricane Ike decide its path. Although it ultimately headed to Galveston, TX, we had another Friday with closed schools due to the tropical force winds felt from the massive storm. The fall of 2008 had lots of starts and restarts in regard to schools. By September 12th, 2008, most schools in the greater New Orleans area had already used 5 emergency days.

When I returned from the Gustav evacuation mid-week, I was lucky to have the big 6: electricity, water, sewerage, phone, cable, and Internet. Many people had some combination of those six 21st-century commodities. Baton Rouge, our state capital, was hit hard by Gustav. The State Department of Education's website was down and their offices were closed. I waited until the following Tuesday morning to call the state charter office. Sure enough the deadline for Eligibility Review was delayed from September 5th to September 19th and Charter Application submission from September 26th to October 10th. Interviews that were scheduled for November 17-19 were unchanged as was the approval date of December 4th at the BESE board meeting.

Since our Eligibility Review was already submitted, the extended timeline just meant waiting longer to see if we are deemed eligible by the state charter office to submit a charter proposal. What is puzzling about this timeline, the new or revised one, is that one is given eligibility status only three weeks before the final charter application is due. The application is long and complex. It would seem the Letter of Intent and Eligibility Review should be due much earlier so organizations not granted eligibility will not spend time completing the lengthy charter application.

In the end, the Eligibility Review was submitted on Wednesday, August 13th, and on Friday, September 26th, we received confirmation by e-mail and by letter via postal

mail that we were eligible to submit a charter proposal. Thank goodness for the favorable eligibility ruling because the proposal was completed the day before and a copy given to the Executive Board for review.

The Charter Review Process

The State of Louisiana charter school office uses a team of evaluators to read and rate the charter. The evaluators include state education employees and a team of objective evaluators who read charter applications nationally. An evaluation rubric is used on each section of the charter. The rubric ratings are: excellent, good, fair, and poor. Written summary comments are made. Summary comments include positive attributes of each section as well as unclear areas, and those that are unacceptable. The ratings will form the basis for approval or denial, but are subject to change after the interview process. Each team member completes evaluation rubrics, and then a recommendation of accept, deny, or accept with revisions is made to the BESE board. Type 2 applicants go directly to BESE, whereas Type 5 applicants go to State Superintendent of Education and then to BESE on his recommendation. All applicants will be notified of the recommendation of approval or denial before BESE consideration. Any denied applicant can request a copy of their evaluation. With a denied application, the applicant can make significant revisions and resubmit during the same cycle (RFA).

Interviews with the nonprofit board members and charter leaders are scheduled for November 17-19th. The interviews, conducted by the BESE board, can help clarify unclear areas, add to summary comments and even change initial recommendations. Public approval comes in December, with school opening 9 months later. In a city where many public school facilities are either in poor repair or destroyed from Katrina, this does not give a charter operator a lot of time. In New Jersey and Washington D. C., the timeline for charter approval to school openings is

longer. According to the New Jersey Education website, financial data is due in January, completed application in March, and approval in May to open 15 months later. According to the D.C. Public Charter School webpage, in Washington D.C., the application cycle is from January to June with the charter school to open 14 months later. I think opening the school 12-15 months after approval is more realistic since the tasks until opening are monumental. Adding to the complexity is the current condition of our city in terms of the lack of available facilities and the complexity of the current school system.

See Appendix G for an abbreviated list of tasks to be accomplished upon approval. A more extensive list is included in the charter proposal.

Who to Tell, When?

Additional bureaucracy included who to tell, when, and how much. I was uncertain about how public I should be with the charter concept and application process. Keeping the project quiet is not recommended although it would have been my first inclination. One needs public awareness because of the need to raise money to sustain the initial effort and then the school. Unless there is a single, generous donor or a well-funded national charter network, it will be necessary to plan and hold a few fundraising events. These events will give the organization and the project publicity while raising needed funds for the incubation process. We had a fundraising event in fall 2007, and another in winter 2008. The details of these events were handled by two nonprofit foundations that help support our efforts. Two large mail-outs, a website, e-mail lists, and word of mouth helped spread information about our future plans which also piqued interest.

Public agencies for the most part don't like surprises. They want to know what applications are coming and what their overall purpose and structure are. They want to meet the applicants and hear directly about future plans. If it had not been for our university partnership, I

would not have spoken to officials in the state charter office. I thought that meeting with charter officials might be frowned upon because it may interfere with their objectivity. I can see now that their role is more to guide, encourage, and/or discourage applicants before they enter this lengthy process. They have a broader picture of the state, the city, the educational needs, and the ability of charter applicants to meet those needs. To evaluate submitted applications, the state hires a group of independent educators who evaluate each charter and make specific recommendations to the BESE board. I mistakenly thought the state charter office's first view of the project would come from these objective evaluators. But in fact, by the time an application is submitted, the state knows about the applicant's organization and its mission from the Letter of Intent. They know more specifically about the project from the Eligibility Review, which qualifies one to be able to submit, or not. The following information is included in the Eligibility Review: intended facility, nonprofit organization articles of incorporation, officers and their bios, charter school key contacts, certified teachers involved in the application process, and a one page overview of need, innovation, and plan for student achievement in the proposed school.

Although a certain amount of networking and publicity is needed, there is also an Applicant Code of Conduct in the charter application that reads as follows:

Members of SBESE are obligated to make decisions in the best interests of children, free from personal or political influences. Similarly, charter school applicants have the responsibility of respecting and upholding the integrity of the charter school application process. Specifically, charter school applicants shall not: Initiate, or attempt to initiate, any activity with a SBESE member that is prohibited by the Code of Governmental Ethics; Direct any communications, including application documents, to a SBESE member unless submitted through the Board's Office. Charter school applicants found to

be in violation of these requirements may be deemed ineligible for consideration of charter school approval. (RFA Charter Schools)

It therefore seems appropriate and important to make the public aware of the project and to raise funds for its continuation. It also seems appropriate to speak with the personnel in the state charter office about the charter's goals and the needs that they perceive in the community. However because this project is about a school, a community, and filling a need, it is not appropriate to politicize the project just for the sake of approval. It is important to distinguish these lines and abide by the code of conduct set. A well-designed school that fulfills a true community need should gain approval because that is the goal of the sponsoring nonprofit organization, the state charter office, and the BESE board.

How Many Charters are Enough?

Complicating the issue of how much publicity to give the impending project, is the number of charters that already exist and the limit the state has placed on the total number of charter schools allowed. No more than 42 approved charter schools are allowed by the state of Louisiana. Due to fewer students returning to the city than had been estimated, the state decided to limit the number of Type 5 new charters to two elementary and two high schools in Orleans Parish (personal correspondence from Eligibility Review Response). This information came as a surprise to most charter applicants and operators. Luckily, it doesn't impact us because we are applying for Type 2.

There are five types of charter schools in the state of Louisiana. We have opted to open a Type 2 school, which is the most difficult type to gain approval for. According to state charter law,

(ii) Type 2, which means a new school or a preexisting public school converted and operated as the result of and pursuant to a charter between the nonprofit corporation created to operate the school and the State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education... Within such type 2 charter schools, pupils who reside within the state will be eligible to attend as provided in the charter. Creation of a type 2 charter school shall comply with the provisions of R.S. 17:3983(A)(2)(a)(i). (LA State charter law)

The appeal of Type 2 for our organization is that students from across the state can attend. With our highly specialized mission and the lack of services for special education students post-storm, we feel it is important to accept students from surrounding parishes. Doing so also can encourage families to move to the greater New Orleans area if they need a school such as ours for their child. This has the potential to help repopulate our city and even attract new families here.

Of course, our Type 2 also created more bureaucratic red tape. My first word of caution from the state charter office was that BESE and the Department of Education officials wanted to limit the number of Type 2 charters throughout the state and that one would need “a compelling reason to open anything but a Type 5 in Orleans parish.” I was also told the number of new approvals would be limited because fewer children had returned than predicted. Next I was told that the initial admissions policy may not pass the legal department because charter schools are supposed to be open to all students. When I explained that we were accepting more than our fair share of at-risk students, they suggested I talk to someone higher up. Finally, I was told to make a compelling case in the interview and to collect some letters of support for the Type 2 charter. I voluntarily changed the admissions policy due to the Federal Start-up Grant that I spoke of earlier.

After being advised that I needed a compelling case, I started contacting a diverse number of community members to write letters of support since the Type 2 charter is difficult to get. I sent these people an overview of the charter and the reason we were being asked to provide letters of support. I tried to collect a mixture of letters from parents of students with learning issues, from state and local politicians, from parents and families outside of the city limits, and from various school leaders. I plan to present them in a binder to charter state office employees and to the BESE Board members.

Finding a Facility in a Shattered City

One of the most ongoing complicated bureaucratic issues is finding a facility for a charter school. Facilities are an extremely complex issue post-Katrina. We have a board member who is devoting all of his efforts toward facility identification and acquisition. Many public school facilities in Orleans parish weren't well-maintained pre-Katrina. Hurricanes Katrina and Rita devastated a school system that was already in severe distress. In a letter to the OPSB concerning a needed reduction in personnel posted on the OPSB website and dated August 18, 2008, the Superintendent and CFO of OPSB, stated,

While we are approaching the three-year anniversary, we continue to face challenges resulting from Hurricane Katrina. Katrina devastated our already aging and long neglected facilities. Renovating, rebuilding and maintaining these facilities to provide a safe, secure environment for students has and will continue to drain on our cash resources. While some of these costs will eventually be reimbursed by Federal Emergency Management Agency funds and Community Block Development Grants, the reimbursement process is extremely time consuming, and there is no assurance that we will be able to recover all these costs.

On a website for Multimedia Educational Resources for Learning and Online Teaching, the leaders call for a community service day during their August, 2007 national conference held in New Orleans. They give estimates of facility replacement and/or repair. “The current estimates of the cost of physical damages to the school facilities and infrastructure is \$800 million. The FEMA match requirements will cost the Orleans Parrish School Board \$55 million (assuming that 100% of the facilities are rebuilt).”

There are provisions for providing school facilities to approved charter operators. There just are not enough repaired buildings to satisfy requests. According to charter law, the following guidelines must be followed in regard to building assignments.

Local school boards shall make available to chartering groups any vacant school facilities or any facility slated to be vacant for lease or purchase at fair market value. In the case of a type 2 charter school created as a result of a conversion, all property within the existing school shall also be made available to that chartering group under similar terms. If such facilities were constructed at no cost to the local school board, then such facilities including all equipment, books, instructional materials, and furniture within such facilities shall be provided to the charter school at no cost (RFA Appendix).

Adding to the conundrum is the fact that current applicants don’t know who else is applying or what buildings they are requesting. So one building could have five or six requests for use. We are not a conversion, but a new start-up trying to secure a renovated building, which is going to be difficult. Again our university partnership has been invaluable. University leaders arranged a meeting with a leading facility consultant in the city. He particularly knows schools, but in actuality knows the current state of most public buildings in the city, who manages or

owns the buildings, the state of their repair, and their best intended future use. School board members and I met with the consultant in May and reviewed most buildings in the Gentilly area.

With the help of this university consultant, we identified a site. It was selected because of its proximity to the University of New Orleans, its central location that is accessible to many areas of the city as well as other parishes, and its ability to accommodate the size school that we propose. Historically, the school was also one which educated many special education children whose families drove them to the school for its specific programs. Under the Recovery School District (RSD)/New Orleans Public Schools Master Plan, the school is located in Planning District 6 and is scheduled to be rebuilt in Phase 1. The campus is 4.9 acres with an attached New Orleans Recreational Department (NORD) playground taking up the remainder of the city block. According to the Master Plan all schools will have a cafeteria, art space, music space, library/media center, and a gym. The school capacity will be rebuilt to house 600 students. Our 5-year planned enrollment is 687. If granted this site, we can scale back the school's projected enrollment to accommodate the new facility. However the site is listed for a rebuild, which means if we are granted this site, we will still have to secure a temporary facility for 1-2 years.

Since we are proposing a Pre-kindergarten – 13th school, with approximately one third of the students being part of a specialized high school; we are expecting to contract some additional parking or green space by the 4th-5th year if at full capacity. Nearby grounds which are the result of a recent tear down are supposed to include green space for community use in their long term plan. There is also a strip mall and/or nearby church that may contract parking spaces in the future if needed.

In reaching out to the community, we were hoping to work with the neighborhood community organization and New Orleans Recreation Department (NORD) about the possibility

of sharing the use of the gym. Plans for adult classes and a fitness facility may appeal to the adult population in Oak Park subdivision, while child oriented classes or leagues could be organized for night time and week-end use. Public networking continues and will become more intense as we near the approval date. All previous personal contacts were contacted again to let them know we were eligible and now “sprinting” toward the submission date and final approval.

Partnerships and Power Brokers

The final bureaucratic hurdle involves partnerships and power plays in a city that is rebuilding. Great sums of money have poured into our city since Katrina through the generosity of our government, foreign governments, foundations, entrepreneurs, and nonprofit agencies. Great sums of money have been placed with people and organizations that are not used to distributing these kinds of monies. Policies for their organizations are not yet written, and they are accepting applications for grants to design and rebuild infrastructure and services to children. How did they come to run such organizations? Do they have the wisdom and expertise to make such far reaching decisions? Great power comes with handling that much money, but with that power needs to come vision, judiciousness, and ability to move beyond continuity and one-model-fixes-all to true innovation, improvement and evolvement. This is a tall order, but when given great responsibility one needs to acquire these capabilities quickly. Heath (1983), an anthropologist, linguist, and social historian for educational reform, values community, culture, and language, and encouraged that culture to enter a school in order to reach the students within that community. Heath stated that it takes a concerted community effort over time with all stakeholders involved in the reform process. I have witnessed some of the new power brokers in our city with unending amounts of funding not connect to the culture of the city and not consider multiple types of innovation. Many of these new power brokers are young and are familiar with

one style of education that worked for them in the past. Now in their new positions of authority; they say yes when that one style is proposed and no to everything else. This is a danger in a community that is rebuilding. We are trying to rebuild a school system not create a chain of franchised schools that all look alike inside and out. The outcome of this rebuilding is supposed to give families real choices for student achievement.

That being said, submitting an application for a charter school is supposed to include unique designs with special mission and vision. This is well and good, but in reality many of the power brokers and bureaucrats want and expect a KIPP-like model or some derivation of it. I like KIPP. I think the model has proven successful and holds great promise for the future, but I don't think it is the one and only model. Propose something different and be ready for the furor. The desire to reduce all teaching and learning to one well-defined method is part of a larger pattern in science, epistemology, and ethics. It has been criticized by many contemporary theorists (Noddings, 1992). I stand by that criticism and hope to encourage the powers that be to open their wings, stretch a little, take in a large dose of the local culture and see how innovation can blend with the old and the new.

Partnerships are needed and helpful. University partnerships are extraordinary because they have sustainability and so much to offer on an ongoing basis. University partnerships because of their academic nature tend to allow innovative school design as long as it results in student achievement. Business partnerships are very desirable especially if with a company that has access to school equipment or technology. Community partnerships are valuable in that they give a cultural connection to neighborhoods and potential volunteers to work and care for the school over time. Partnerships with other nonprofit agencies are helpful in terms of connecting to other sources of funding and helping with start-up and growth over years. Some partnerships

form and grow with ease and time while others hit many road bumps and have to be constantly renegotiated.

Once again, I would like to propose the list of characteristics that Ravid and Handler (2001) outlined for successful partnerships:

Shared educational philosophy, Strong commitment to the project, Mutual respect for the knowledge base each partner brought to the project, A commitment to following through on the implementation of the project, Regular and ongoing communication, Investment of time on an ongoing basis, For the practitioner: being respected and considered an equal by the university partner, Mutual ownership and commitment to all phases of the project.
(p. 245)

I would like to add to that list an open mind that thoroughly considers new and innovative ideas, and a concrete manner of communicating large monetary commitments on paper and not just in verbal conversation.

Sudden Smooth Sailing

When you least expect it, as you steer the ship through the roughest of the bureaucratic waters and you have all but given up, the tides of bureaucracy unexpectedly change – for no apparent reason or explanation. Organizations that previously gave mixed messages now believe that you and your ideas will figure largely into the future of education in the city of New Orleans. How does this happen? What is the reason? Will the tides reverse themselves again? These are all of the uncertainties of charter school design without a major charter company's support. Persistence pays off, as does patience. Being an Olympic hurdler would also help so you can leap over obstacles thrown in your path rather than be deterred or slowed down by them. Connecting to everyone and anyone in your community and beyond helps. Letters of support

from a diverse group of community members also help. Consider asking for support from neighborhood associations where the charter will be located, from local politicians, from parents who are likely to benefit from the charter, from officers in the armed services located in your area, from community activist, and from other school leaders. Tell the story of your proposed school to anyone who will listen. Tell it over and over again. Let it saturate the city. Don't keep it a big secret until the end. The state officials don't encourage this and the community certainly doesn't like to be surprised with these types of long-term plans.

Survival of the fittest is one of my personal ongoing themes that I have seen in the work environment since Katrina. Those of us who returned and are committed to rebuilding continually have to negotiate, implore, wrestle, and jockey to position their organizations for continued support and success. This is certainly true in handling the bureaucratic side of starting a school in New Orleans post-Katrina.

CHAPTER 7

Conclusions: The Lessons Learned

Let me reiterate, opening a school, especially a charter school, in a storm-ravaged city is not for the faint of heart. In the LA RFA it states:

This Request for Applications (RFA) and the resulting evaluation process are rigorous and demanding. The process is meant to ensure that charter school operators possess the capacity to implement sound strategies, practices and methodologies. Successful applicants will clearly demonstrate high levels of expertise in the areas of education, school administration and management; experience in implementing various research-based pedagogy and differentiated instruction; and high expectations for excellence in professional standards and student achievement.

Luckily, with a committed group of community supporters we launched the project with limited amounts of funding and serious goals. Then with a bright group of women charter writers we completed the vast majority of the Education portion by June, 2008. This was the longest part of the charter and the essence of the school. Making these decisions took months of meetings, lots of dinners, some lunches, several bottles of wine, and countless cups of coffee. Pinar himself would be impressed at the length and complexity of our complicated conversations. In the end, deciding on the “right” pedagogy, school schedule, climate, culture, staffing, and assessment were the delightful moments.

It is important to know that we voted to open a charter school in September, 2007. I immediately began to research state timelines and requirements. I also began to read charters that were accepted in the past as well as denials that were rejected. By November, I invited the charter writers to join me in this task. December was fairly quiet. In January, the charter writers

met for the first time and continued to meet every two weeks until May. In February, I began to tell some trusted colleagues and friends of our plans. I also told a few fellow educators in the city. By March, I mailed out hundreds of letters to community supporters to let them know of our plans. This included letters to friends and family, social workers, speech therapists, psychologists, and physicians. By April, I was receiving e-mails and phone calls from a large group of colleagues and supporters encouraging me to move forward with this project and asking how they could help. I told community leaders about it whenever I had the chance to meet them. Most people responded positively, confirmed what a community need this was, and told me to call them for any help that I needed. This was my personal networking before even submitting the charter. By June, the charter writers met twice weekly in order to complete the Education portion by end of June.

Anderson (1996) concluded that curriculum reform (or in this case design) takes a commitment of money, materials, and time in order to affect a lasting change. Change that becomes part of the daily routine and expectations are an essential part of reform. I am here to attest to the fact that school design takes a commitment of money, materials, and time. School reform takes a structured plan (Anderson). School design also takes a structured plan. Money is difficult to raise before an actual school is in existence. Community members must organize, have great faith in their leaders, and find resources that can be committed to an incubation period. Materials include computers, printers, paper, ink, post-it chart paper, and binders. The writers need access to professional journals, books, and professional conferences where academic materials can be viewed and assessed. Reviewing curriculums means ordering samples; some are free; others are not. Time, needless to say, is the most valuable asset. It takes lots of time for the design to emerge and to get it in proper written format that is clear and

accurate. Various expertise is needed for the education portion, the executive summary, the vision, governance, finance, and facility. One has to have lots of professional friends who will consult for no charge and/or have the assistance of a strong community partner who can collaborate on such issues. We had some of each.

The value of partnerships cannot be underestimated especially for an autonomous charter school starting from a nonprofit organization as opposed to a charter administrative business. Partnerships can extend your sphere of influence, your level of expertise in school operations, and your sustainability over years. Research is needed at all levels. Of course, research and knowledge of schools, school operations, school culture, and school achievement is necessary and ongoing. Research of federal and state guidelines for public schools and charter schools is also needed and ongoing. These are essential components to successful charter school design.

What did I learn about the process and myself? It takes a passionate fierce dedication and/or an established charter organization to get through the many road blocks and obstacles thrown in the way of charter writing. There needs to be an appointed leader who pushes, organizes, gathers, and hurdles over unforeseen obstacles. At times one has to have a persistent resolve to ensure that people and organizations follow through with their assistance or consultation. One has to be strongly networked in the community and in the state, ask many questions, and do consistent research on state policy, guidelines, and laws. Especially post disaster and in newly formed charter territories, rules, applications, state bulletins, and policy change quickly. Have all documents ready to submit ahead of deadlines in case the e-mail server is down or inaccessible. Hand deliver paper copies and electronic copies of all e-mailed documents whether requested or not before the deadline. Ask the receiving person to sign and date a document that lists what was received and file that receipt.

What were the recurring themes? At the top of the list is community in so many different forms: the community that is in need, the community of self-starters that takes on the mission, the community that does the day-to-day work to accomplish the tasks, the larger community that you go to for partnerships, funding, advice. The theme of collaboration was evident. While other programs involved less collaboration, the advantages of collaboration were evident from the start. Various types of expertise and various educators with differing educational philosophies helped add value and ownership to the final school design. The theme of compromise was evident from the beginning. Compromises involving the type of school to open, the location of the school, the partnerships to pursue, the number of students, the grades included, the interconnection of state requirements with innovation, and the admissions policy are some of the compromises made. The theme of culture and connecting a community's culture to a school design is so evident post-Katrina. So many people have moved here with the wonderful intentions of helping us rebuild our city. Sometimes remembering to include and respect the culture of the city in their plans is overlooked. Heath's (1985) work, which emphasizes the inclusion of culture in schools, is so much more alive for me now, even more so than when I read the book.

Still survival of the fittest rules – not everyone is going to survive – especially in this post-storm world. Will students and families repopulate at the rates predicted? Are there enough students to fill existing schools? Are there enough funds, architects, and construction workers to rebuild facilities in a timely manner? Will the project be recognized as needed, worthy, and cost-effective?

From a chapter that I wrote for an edited book, about reopening schools 6 weeks after Katrina:

Darwin's survival of the fittest is well illustrated in this pioneer-like setting. Roofers, contractors, debris removal workers, nonprofit agencies and even healing professionals are abundant with frequent contacts, large contracts, and intense competitiveness. It was obvious many people were not going to return: our community would be much smaller; revenues would be lost; some businesses would not succeed. Earning money for an individual, a business, a nonprofit entity, or even a school became essential to survival. Decision-making was often quick and done with less support than ever available before because everyone had such great needs and such great obstacles to overcome. Competition for money from foundations, government grants, and private donations was fierce. Those entities lucky enough to hold the purse strings had large amounts of power whether or not their decision-making was reasonable and sound Just as estranged family members were forced to live together, new professional colleagues were established out of need and availability. Some of these developed into positive, long-lasting relationships while others had to be dismissed as self-serving or unproductive. The business part of running a school required much more attention than ever given in the past. (Glaser, in press)

John Paul Jones knew what it took when we uttered, "We have just begun to fight." That attitude helps maintain the energy needed to design a charter school in a city that is rebuilding and recovering. The most important ingredient is community – a community that is connected in its mission and desire to accomplish this task. A group that has a unity about them and a cooperative spirit, shares common characteristics and perceives itself as distinct from the larger society within which it exists will succeed. It is with a combination of community, time, money, materials, expertise, and unstoppable desire that result in a completed and submitted charter

design and application. John Dewey described a community as one that involves collaborative activity whose consequences are appreciated as good by the individuals who participate. The good is realized and shared by many who desire to maintain it. A communal life constitutes a democracy. Democracy is always reaching toward some end that can never finally be achieved. Community and democracy have to be always in the making (Greene, p. 66). That is the type of community I envision, a school which as a connected community is always in the making.

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APPENDIX A

Grade Level	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14
PK/K	Diagnostic Skills Checklist (2/year)	Diagnostic Skills Checklist (2/year)	Diagnostic Skills Checklist (2/year)	Diagnostic Skills Checklist (2/year)	Diagnostic Skills Checklist (2/year)
1 st – 3 rd	DIBELS (3/year) Benchmark Assessment System 1 (3/year)	DIBELS (3/year) Benchmark Assessment System 1 (3/year)	DIBELS (3/year) Benchmark Assessment System 1 (3/year)	DIBELS (3/year) Benchmark Assessment System 1 (3/year)	DIBELS (3/year) Benchmark Assessment System 1 (3/year)
4 th	Benchmark Assessment System 2 (3/year) Interim Assessment (3/year) LEAP 21 LAA 1 or 2	Benchmark Assessment System 2 (3/year) Interim Assessment (3/year) LEAP 21 LAA 1 or 2	Benchmark Assessment System 2 (3/year) Interim Assessment (3/year) LEAP 21 LAA 1 or 2	Benchmark Assessment System 2 (3/year) Interim Assessment (3/year) LEAP 21 LAA 1 or 2	Benchmark Assessment System 2 (3/year) Interim Assessment (3/year) LEAP 21 LAA 1 or 2
5 th -7 th	Benchmark Assessment System 2 (3/year) TOWL-3 iLEAP LAA 1or2	Benchmark Assessment System 2 (3/year) TOWL-3 iLEAP LAA 1or2	Benchmark Assessment System 2 (3/year) TOWL-3 iLEAP LAA 1or2	Benchmark Assessment System 2 (3/year) TOWL-3 iLEAP LAA 1or2	Benchmark Assessment System 2 (3/year) TOWL-3 iLEAP LAA 1or2
8 th	Benchmark Assessment System 2 (3/year) Interim Assessment (3/year) TOWL-3 LEAP	Benchmark Assessment System 2 (3/year) Interim Assessment (3/year) TOWL-3 LEAP	Benchmark Assessment System 2 (3/year) Interim Assessment (3/year) TOWL-3 LEAP	Benchmark Assessment System 2 (3/year) Interim Assessment (3/year) TOWL-3 LEAP	Benchmark Assessment System 2 (3/year) Interim Assessment (3/year) TOWL-3 LEAP
9	Interim Assessment (3/year) TOWL-3 ACT Explore	Interim Assessment (3/year) TOWL-3 ACT Explore	Interim Assessment (3/year) TOWL-3 ACT Explore	Interim Assessment (3/year) TOWL-3 ACT Explore	Interim Assessment (3/year) TOWL-3 ACT Explore

10	Interim Assessment (3/year) TOWL-3 GEE ACT Plan	Interim Assessment (3/year) TOWL-3 GEE ACT Plan	Interim Assessment (3/year) TOWL-3 GEE ACT Plan	Interim Assessment (3/year) TOWL-3 GEE ACT Plan	Interim Assessment (3/year) TOWL-3 GEE ACT Plan
11	TOWL-3 GEE if needed ACT & or PSAT	TOWL-3 GEE if needed ACT & or PSAT	TOWL-3 GEE if needed ACT & or PSAT	TOWL-3 GEE if needed ACT & or PSAT	TOWL-3 GEE if needed ACT & or PSAT
12	TOWL-3 GEE if needed ACT & or SAT	TOWL-3 GEE if needed ACT & or SAT	TOWL-3 GEE if needed ACT & or SAT	TOWL-3 GEE if needed ACT & or SAT	TOWL-3 GEE if needed ACT & or SAT
13		GEE if needed ACT & or SAT	GEE if needed ACT & or SAT	GEE if needed ACT & or SAT	GEE if needed ACT & or SAT

APPENDIX B

SOCIAL STUDIES THEMES	Lower School: Pre-K – 4 th Grade		Middle School: 5 th – 8 th		Upper School: 9 th -13 th	
Overarching Annual Theme	We're All Alike: We're All Different		Celebrate Diversity		Making Choices	
	K	Spaces & Places	5 th	Seeds of Change	9 th	Mapping the World
	1	My World is Growing	6 th	Rivers of Life	10 th	Our World Across Time & Space
	2	The World in My Community	7 th	Growing Pains	11 th	I Hear America Singing
	3	Louisiana Life	8 th	My Louisiana Sky	12 th	Citizen Privilege & Choice & Bulls, Bears, & Bucks
	4	Maps, Movement, Money, & Me			13 th	A World of Opportunity

APPENDIX C

Subject, Source & Curriculum Name	Reason for Choosing
<p>English Language Arts K-5</p> <p><u>Source:</u> Rigby</p> <p><u>Curriculum Name:</u> <i>Literacy by Design</i></p>	<p><i>Literacy by Design</i>, which is found on the state approved textbook list, is a research-based, complete reading and writing program. The program aligns to the five elements of reading identified by the National Reading Panel: phonemic awareness, phonics/word study, vocabulary, and fluency. Reading and writing components include explicit phonemic awareness and phonics instruction, direct reading instruction, guided reading strategies, systematic, intervention strategies, and integrated language arts components.</p> <p>Sequential, systematic reading instruction helps students activate or build background knowledge and emphasizes the three language cueing systems to construct meaning from English texts, which also benefits English Language Learners. Explicit instruction and daily practice in all facets of writing are critical components of <i>Literacy by Design</i>, including genre, process, traits, craft, and conventions. Valid and reliable assessment measures, Rigby READS, inform instruction, measure progress, and provide ongoing solid preparation for standardized tests. The program provides a built-in framework for teachers to use to differentiate instruction that meets the diverse needs of each learner. Through a variety of leveled fiction and nonfiction texts, literacy skills are linked to standards-based social studies and science content.</p>
<p>Supplemental Intervention materials ELA K-5</p> <p><u>Source:</u> PCI Education</p> <p><u>Curriculum Name:</u> Reading Milestones</p> <p>Supplemental Spelling & Phonics K-5</p> <p><u>Source:</u> McGraw Hill Children's Publishing</p>	<p>Reading Milestones is effective for students with hearing impairments and language delays and is also widely used with others who have special language and reading needs, including individuals with learning disabilities and students learning English as a second language (ESL). A systematic semantic approach to reading parallels to typical language acquisition; this makes reading more accessible and ultimately builds reading fluency.</p> <p>Making Words is a systematic, sequential phonics and spelling program designed to help children use their phonics knowledge to manipulate letters to spell words. The program is an innovative, word study program where students are guided through the process of using a limited number of letters to make a series of words. A critical component of each Making Words lesson is that the children learn to read and spell the transfer words. The ability to transfer spelling and phonics knowledge to authentic reading and writing is enhanced through hands-on, minds-on manipulative activities in which children discover how our spelling system works. Children learn that</p>

<p><u>Curriculum Name:</u> Making Words</p> <p><u>Source:</u> Wilson Language</p> <p><u>Curriculum Name:</u> Foundations</p> <p><u>Source:</u> Scientific Learning</p> <p><u>Curriculum Name:</u> Fast ForWord</p> <p><u>Source:</u> Educators Publishing Service (EPS)</p> <p><u>Curriculum Name:</u> Explode the Code</p>	<p>predictable things happen to a word when you change the beginning, middle, and ending sounds. Through the regular use of this type of constructivist and scaffold word-building activity, students learn about the spelling structure of words to the point where their word recognition and spelling skills improve significantly.</p> <p>Foundations by Wilson Language is a direct, multi-sensory, sequential, structured language program targeting grades Kindergarten through third. Using the visual, auditory, and kinesthetic modalities simultaneously, the Foundations curriculum systematically teaches the skills required for the successful acquisition of reading, writing, and spelling. Assessment is proficiency and sequentially based. It is also highly appropriate for the lowest thirty percent who may be at risk for reading and writing difficulties.</p> <p>Fast ForWord is an Internet and CD-ROM based training program for individuals with language and reading problems and is based on research in neuroscience and neuropsychology. An intensive series of adaptive, interactive exercises uses acoustically processed speech and speech sounds to promote gains in language and reading skills, including auditory processing speed, working memory, phonological awareness, listening and reading comprehension, syntax, and grammar. As a result of this training, neural pathways for processing and understanding language are strengthened.</p> <p>This program provides a sequential, systematic approach to phonics in which students blend sounds to build vocabulary and read words, phrases, sentences, and stories. The workbook series starts with initial consonants sounds and extends through syllabication, word study, and comprehension skills. This research-based program meets and exceeds “No Child Left Behind” requirements and National Reading Panel standards.</p>
<p>Handwriting Pre-K—cursive <u>Source:</u> Handwriting Without Tears (HWT)</p> <p><u>Curriculum Name:</u> HWT</p>	<p>HWT, which is found on the state approved textbook list, provides carefully designed instruction for each child. Designed by an occupational therapist, Handwriting Without Tears is a developmentally based handwriting program that uses multi-sensory strategies. The lessons are designed to keep the children engaged while meeting the developmental needs of each child. All components of this program are designed to meet the needs of each child, including those with fine motor difficulties and learning differences.</p>
<p>Writing K—5th <u>Source:</u></p>	<p>Units of Study is a carefully crafted, spiraling curriculum that is designed to assist teachers to lead strong efficient writing workshops. In each Unit of Study, lessons guide students through the process of</p>

<p>Heinemann</p> <p><u>Curriculum Name:</u> Units of Study: K-5</p>	<p>writing through a multi-genre approach. Daily mini-lessons provide direct instruction on both the writer's craft and conventions.</p> <p>Assessment rubrics are provided for each unit.</p> <p>(Both Primary Writing K-2 and Teaching Writing 3-5 will be used.)</p>
<p>ELA Supplemental Phonics 4-12</p> <p><u>Source:</u> Sterling Pub.Co. NYC</p> <p><u>Curriculum Name:</u> Phonics Blitz Science K-8</p> <p><u>Source:</u> Delta Education</p> <p><u>Curriculum Name:</u> FOSS (Full Option Science System)</p> <p><u>Source:</u> Delta Education</p> <p><u>Curriculum Name:</u> Seeds of Science/Roots of Reading</p>	<p>Phonics Blitz teaches phonics concepts in a fast- paced, multi-sensory, systematic and explicit manner. This program uses advanced language intended for use by students in 4-12 who still require phonics instruction. The lessons focus on phonological awareness, phonics, automaticity and fluency.</p> <p>FOSS is a research based science curriculum developed by the Lawrence Hall of Science at the University of California in Berkley. This hands-on, inquiry based program is founded upon the cognitive developmental milestones of students. FOSS kits and readers are developmentally appropriate, sequential in nature, focus on fewer concepts, and offer students multiple, in-depth exposures to concepts through a variety of modalities – hands-on investigations, stimulations, models, and readings. Students attain a deeper understanding of science and the science processes through such exposures and experiences to conceptual development stages.</p> <p>Seeds of Science/Roots of Reading is a research-based, field-tested curriculum that integrates inquiry science with content-rich literacy instruction. This curriculum helps students make sense of the physical world while addressing foundational dimensions of literacy.</p> <p>The program includes two series: a collection of integrated science and literacy units, and a parallel collection of literacy units. The integrated science literacy units allow students to learn about science through doing, talking, reading, and writing about science. The Seeds of Science/Roots of Reading approach capitalizes on the natural convergences between science and literacy to create a more effective, integrated approach to learning.</p> <p>Step-by-step, annotated teacher guides feature an innovative design. The left-hand pages detail steps to follow in presenting sessions, and right-hand pages provide teaching support.</p> <p>Many students may be at risk for academic success, and Seeds of Science/Roots of Reading is not only a substantive science program, but also provides content-rich literacy instruction with a special focus on reading and writing informational and nonfiction text genres.</p>

<p>Science 9-12 <u>Source:</u> Kendall/Hunt Pub.</p> <p><u>Curriculum Name:</u> Global Science</p>	<p>Global Science is a laboratory-based science program that provides activities for every main concept. This course teaches students how to use science to explore, understand, and manage our planet's resources. The hands-on instruction provides students with the ability to learn science by doing science. Comprehension of concepts is much greater after students have had first-hand experience. Every activity from the Student Text can be found on the Teacher Resource CD-ROM for easy accessibility to print and hand out.</p> <p>Global Science is funded by the NSF and is standards based. The program is correlated to the National Science Education Content Standards and to the Standards of the North American Association of Environmental Education.</p>
<p><u>Source:</u> Kendall/Hunt Pub.</p> <p><u>Curriculum Name:</u> BSCS Biology: A Human Approach BSCS Biology: An Ecological Approach</p> <p><u>Source:</u> Kendall/Hunt Pub.</p> <p><u>Curriculum Name:</u> S.P.I.C.E. Chemistry (Structured Pacing in Chemistry Education)</p>	<p>The BSCS biology programs are organized around an instructional model based on the constructivist philosophy of learning, which correlates with the school's pedagogy. The instructional model takes students through five phases of learning described by five words that begin with the letter "E": Engage, Explore, Explain, Elaborate, Evaluate. The Five E's model, coupled with the academic rigor of this program, provides a consistent format that deepens the students' understanding of scientific concepts.</p> <p>The texts use engaging activities and investigations that integrate major biology concepts. The Human Approach teaches biology from a human perspective, while the Ecological Approach incorporates key concepts into an ecological framework. The program includes NSTA SciLinks® and a CD-Rom that can be incorporated into the program. This program includes formal and informal assessments. Assessment strategies, including scoring rubrics, are varied and are embedded into the curriculum.</p> <p>S.P.I.C.E. is a high school chemistry program that emphasizes laboratory experiences as an integral part of the program and was designed to meet the needs of the individual learner. This program aligns with OBPC's mission and philosophy in that it supports a wide range of academic abilities while maintaining the academic rigor of a chemistry program. Major concepts are reinforced by laboratory work that requires students' active participation in the learning process. The hands-on experiences are critical for furthering the growth and development of important problem-solving skills. Mastery of basic materials in each chapter is expected. Optional extensions, including practice problems and additional experiments, are available in the Teacher's Guide for students requiring additional support or advanced materials. S.P.I.C.E. correlates with the State of Louisiana Science Framework.</p>

<p>Mathematics K-5 Supplemental <u>Source:</u> Pearson</p> <p><u>Curriculum Name:</u> Investigations in Number, Data, and Space</p>	<p>Investigations is a strong, research-based, coherent K-5 mathematical curriculum designed to help all children understand the fundamental ideas of number and operations, geometry, data, measurement, and early algebra. The program is organized by mathematical strand, as well as scope and sequence and pacing information.</p> <p>This program emphasizes the development and deep understanding of mathematical ideas and computational fluency. Interesting and engaging problem contexts help students make connections to the real world, which supports the School’s philosophy. Investigations gives students the opportunity to learn in an authentic environment that stresses making sense of math, using prior knowledge, reasoning and thinking skills, to move forward and tackle unfamiliar problems and new situations. Students benefit from the way mathematical ideas are introduced, developed, and revisited across the year. Investigations’ benchmarks are aligned with LA state content standards, as defined by grade-level expectations (GLEs).</p>
<p>Mathematics 6-8 <u>Source:</u> Prentice Hall</p> <p><u>Curriculum Name:</u> Connected Mathematics2</p>	<p>The Connected Mathematics2 curriculum for grades 6–8 teaches math concepts to students through engaging interactive problems connected to real-life situations. The program emphasizes deductive reasoning and teaches students how to verbalize math strategies and talk through math solutions. The program is research based and has been field tested, evaluated, and revised.</p> <p>The program uses visualization techniques and visual representations, which are critical strategies for the school’s target population. Online support is provided for teachers who need additional strategies and materials for servicing special needs students. Various types of accommodations are part of the online support. The units are organized by strands and are aligned with state frameworks and standards. The strands focus on number and operation, geometry and measurement, data analysis and probability, and algebra. An integral part of Connected Mathematics2 is the inclusion of a multi-dimensional assessment profile system. The profile includes three broad categories: checkpoints, surveys of knowledge, and observations. The CME Project is a comprehensive, four-year NSF-funded high school math program that provides a coherent curriculum with a focus on introducing mathematical ideas, skills, and themes early in the program. These ideas and themes are then deepened throughout the four years. The goal of the program is for all students to develop robust mathematical proficiency by emphasizing the interplay between mathematical thinking and essential technical skills.</p>

<p>High School Math 9 – 12 Algebra I & II Geometry and Precalculus</p> <p><u>Source:</u> Pearson Education, Inc.</p> <p><u>Curriculum Name:</u> CME (Center for Mathematics Education)</p>	<p>The CME Project’s cohesive curriculum develops mathematical themes that provide students with insight about what it means to think like a mathematician and to apply this thinking to real-world situations. The project’s unique approaches to content topics have been developed, tested, and refined over years of classroom experience and are designed to help students come to a deep understanding of difficult material. This curriculum is student-centered and standards based and allows for differentiated instruction that makes it accessible to all students. It provides students with ample practice with technical skills to that they can develop the fluency necessary to dig deep into mathematical concepts.</p> <p>Developing Mathematical Habits of Mind – CME Project workshops are available for teachers, curriculum coordinators, and administrators. These five-day workshops are designed to help educators deepen their own math literacy and address issues of implementations, differentiation, and assessment.</p>
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<p>Social Studies Pre-K – 3 <u>Source:</u> Multiple sources aligned with LCC pacing.</p> <p><u>Curriculum Name:</u> Louisiana Comprehensive Curriculum (LCC)</p>	<p>Social Studies for prekindergarten – 3 will follow themes developed in accordance with the LCC units. Trade books and reference materials, speakers, multi-media resources, fieldtrips, and available community resources will be used to augment the LCC’s transdisciplinary units and activities. The LCC’s unit approach is particularly appropriate for the school’s population as it enables the students to develop a deep understanding of the “big picture” through lived experiences. Assessment strategies will include portfolio assessment, activity-specific evaluations, and student-generated projects.</p>
<p>Social Studies Grade 4 & 5 <u>Source:</u> Harcourt School Pub.</p> <p><u>Curriculum Name:</u> Harcourt Horizons: Louisiana Student Edition Bundle</p>	<p>This series includes <i>Louisiana Student Edition People and Communities</i>, <i>Louisiana Lagniappe: A Little Something Extra</i>. It is on the state adopted list and meets 100% of the GLEs for grade 4 and 5. The structure of the texts and the reading level will allow for easy transition into the use of textbooks in Social Studies.</p>
<p>Social Studies Grade 6 <u>Source:</u> Pearson Prentice Hall</p> <p><u>Curriculum Name:</u> World Studies 8 Book Series</p>	<p>This series is on the state adopted textbook list. The 8 book series includes titles on Africa, Asia, and Pacific; Europe and Russia; Foundations of Geography; Latin America; Medieval Times to Today: The Ancient World; The United States and Canada. The series allows for flexibility in grouping and instruction and lends itself to transdisciplinary activities. The books can be used as texts and/or reference books and provide both depth and breadth of information on world geography and cultures.</p>
<p>Social Studies Grade 7 <u>Source:</u> Pearson Prentice Hall</p> <p><u>Curriculum Name:</u> America: History of Our Nations, Beginnings through 1877 – Louisiana Ed.</p>	<p>This book meets 100% of the GLEs for 7th grade Social Studies. The reading level and structure of the text make it easy for students with learning differences to use. Additionally the structure of the book will be helpful for students learning content area reading and research skills. The amount and variety of ancillary materials assist teachers in providing differentiated instruction.</p>
<p>Social Studies – Grade 8 <u>Source:</u> Clairmont Press</p>	<p>The text is on the state adopted list and meets 100% of the GLEs. The interactive student website will motivate students and aid in teaching the use of online resources such as Mapquest.</p>

<p><u>Curriculum Name:</u> Louisiana: History of an American State</p> <p>Social Studies - 9-12 World Geography <u>Source:</u> Pearson Prentice Hall</p> <p><u>Curriculum Name:</u> World Geography: Building a Global Perspective</p> <p>9-12 Civics <u>Source:</u> Pearson Prentice Hall</p> <p><u>Curriculum Name:</u> Government and Economics in Action</p> <p>9-12 Free Enterprise <u>Source:</u> Glencoe/McGraw Hill</p> <p><u>Curriculum Name:</u> Glencoe Economics: Principles and Practices</p> <p>9-12 U.S. History <u>Source:</u> Pearson Prentice Hall</p> <p><u>Curriculum Name:</u> America: Pathways to the Present, Modern American History</p> <p>9-12 World History <u>Source:</u> Pearson Prentice Hall</p> <p><u>Curriculum Name:</u> World History: Modern Edition</p>	<p>The geographic concepts introduced in the text are reinforced by a variety of ancillary materials using various media. The reading level and structure of the text make it easy for students to use. Additionally the structure of the book will be helpful for students learning content area reading and research skills.</p> <p>The use of interactive technology and activity-based resources will involve students in learning about the government, citizenship, economic and legal systems of the U.S. The content and activities are designed to encourage active citizenship. The reading level and structure of the text make it easy for students to use. Additionally the structure of the book will be helpful for students learning content area reading and research skills. The amount and variety of ancillary materials assist teachers in providing differentiated instruction.</p> <p>The text is correlated to state and national standards and uses current events and issues which spark student interest. It includes diagrams, charts, maps, photos, illustrations, and a variety of online resources for student and teacher use.</p> <p>The text is on the state adopted list and aligns fully with GLEs for this course. The focus on modern American history helps students understand how their lives have been affected by the recent past. The reading level and text structure make it easy for students to use. The structure of the book will be helpful for students learning content area reading and research skills. The amount and variety of ancillary materials assist teachers in providing differentiated instruction.</p> <p>The focus on modern world history provides greater depth of understanding of current global cultures, politics, and relationships. The reading level and structure of the text make it easy for students to use. Additionally the structure of the book will be helpful for students learning content area reading and research skills. The amount and variety of ancillary materials assist teachers in providing differentiated instruction.</p>
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APPENDIX D

MIDDLE SCHOOL SCHEDULE	5/6	7/8
8:15-8:30	Homeroom & Morning Journal	Homeroom & Morning Journal
8:30-9:30	Reading	Math
9:30-10:15	Word Study/Spelling	Science
10:15-10:30	Snacks	Snacks
10:30-11:30	Math	Reading
11:30-12:15	Science	Word Study
12:15-1:00	LUNCH & RECESS	LUNCH & RECESS
1:00-1:45	Co-curricula	Social Studies
1:45-2:45	Writing	Writing
2:45-3:30	Social Studies	Co-curricula
3:30-5:30	Homework Helpers & After Care Programs	Sports and/or Clubs

APPENDIX E

LOWER SCHOOL SCHEDULE	K		1/2	3/4
8-8:20	Morning Meeting	8-8:20	Morning Meeting	Morning Meeting
8:20-9:20	Reading	8:20-9:20	Reading	Reading
9:20-10:15	Centers	9:20-10:20	Writing	Writing
10:15-10:30	Snacks	10:20-10:30	Snacks	Snacks
10:30-11:15	Math & Music	10:30-11:30	Math	Math
11:15-11:50	LUNCH	11:30-12:15	LUNCH & RECESS	LUNCH & RECESS
11:50-1:00	Book & Nap	12:15-1:00	Co-curricula	Word Study/Spelling
1:00-1:45	Outdoor Play	1:00-1:45	Word Study/Spelling	Co-curricula
1:45-2:25	Art & Centers	1:45-2:30	Theme (Sc & SS)	Theme (Sc & SS)
2:25-2:45	Clean-up & Dismissal	2:30-3:15	Writing/Centers	Writing/Centers
3:15-5:30	After Care Programs	3:15-5:30	Homework Helpers & After Care Programs	Homework Helpers & After Care Programs

APPENDIX F

HIGH SCHOOL SCHEDULE	9	10	11	12
8:30-8:40	Homeroom	Homeroom	Homeroom	Homeroom
8:43-9:48	Core	Core	Core	Core
9:50-10:03	NUTRITION BREAK			
11:13-12:18	Core	Core	Core	Core
12:20-12:48	Core	Elective	Elective	Core
12:50-1:27	ADVISORY/CLUBS			
1:30-2:35	LUNCH			
2:38-3:45	Elective	Elective	Elective	Core
	Elective	Core	Core	Elective
2:20-3:45	Core	Core	Core	Elective
3:45-6:00	Clubs & Sports	Clubs & Sports	Clubs & Sports	Clubs & Sports

APPENDIX G

December	Charter Approval
January	Secure a Location & determine renovation needed Advertise for school job openings. Advertise & interview CFO Attend community meetings Advertise school's opening across several parishes
February	Hire a CFO/Business Manager Begin renovation process Write grants for various big ticket items Begin raising \$2500/classroom - donations Begin 1 st round application period Begin interviewing for administrative & key positions
March	Order classroom materials & curriculum books Begin 2 nd round application period Send out 1 st round acceptance letters on 3/25 Renovations continue Fundraiser for \$2,500/classroom Interview for teaching positions CFO sets up business office and operations procedures Complete first round acceptances
April	Begin 3 rd round application period Send out 2 nd round acceptance letters on 4/25 Renovations continue Write grants & approach foundations for additional programs Continue interviewing & hiring faculty Plan summer Professional Development
May	Begin 4 th round application period Send out 3 rd round acceptance letters on 5/25
June	Begin 5 th round application period Send out 4 th round acceptance letters on 6/25 Open building to receive goods. One week of PD 2 nd round of applicants accepted 6/15 Begin employment for new administrators, admin asst., and business office employees - 6/15
July	Begin 6 th round application period Send out 5 th round acceptance letters on 6/25 Complete in-house screenings on all enrolled students Set up classrooms
August	Two weeks Professional Development Classroom set-up Student/Family Orientation Begin teacher employment 8/1

Vita

Patty Glaser was born in New Orleans, LA and received her B.S. from St. Mary's Dominican College in 1976, her Masters of Communication Disorders from Louisiana State University Medical Center in 1981. She practiced as a speech-language therapist for many years and now designs school curriculums for at-risk students.