



VAYLA-NO
PRESENTS:



Raise Your Hand **CAMPAIGN**

SIX PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOLS, SIX YEARS AFTER THE STORM

450 Student Voices from Inside New Orleans' Educational Experiment

*Executive
Summary*

AUGUST 2011

Vietnamese American Young Leaders Association of New Orleans (VAYLA-NO)

4646 Michoud Blvd., Suite D2

New Orleans, LA 70129-1816

Office: 504-253-6000

Fax: 504-754-7762

www.vayla-no.org



Introduction

After Hurricane Katrina, education officials and lawmakers promised to build a New Orleans public school system capable of delivering a “world-class” education to all students. For six years, students in New Orleans public schools have waited patiently for the delivery of this promise. While changes have been made to the way that schools are governed and managed, declarations of the reform movement’s success do not always align with the experiences of students who spend forty hours each week inside our city’s public schools. As students, we may not know the name of our school’s CEO, or even which school district we fall under, but we do know whether or not our teachers are effective, our counselors are available, or our busses are running on time. Standing on the inside of New Orleans’ educational experiment, we know for certain that it is too early to declare “mission accomplished.” Considerable work must be done to ensure that every student has access to a quality education in our city.

Unfortunately, young people, particularly students of color, have had little opportunity to share feedback or influence the direction of New Orleans public schools. In this era of great educational change, we have been acted upon rather than treated as invaluable partners. Grounded in our belief that student voices must be at the forefront of New Orleans’ educational transformation, youth at the Vietnamese American Young Leaders Association (VAYLA) embarked upon an **18-month bottom-up research initiative** to assess conditions in public high schools from the student perspective.

Using both qualitative and quantitative research methods, we recorded over **50 hours of testimony** from students and parents, and administered a survey project that engaged **450 students** from **six public high schools**, yielding over **25,000 student observations**. This research initiative represents the most extensive youth-led, student-centered evaluation of New Orleans public high schools since Hurricane Katrina. Our study encompasses Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB) and Recovery School District (RSD) schools, both direct-run and charter. In total, **450 students have “raised their hands”** through either a survey or interview to express their concerns.

On the heels of Superintendent John White’s 100th-day in office, as well as the six-year anniversary of Hurricane Katrina, we present our research findings and recommendations as a gift to the city of New Orleans, and to the officials who exercise power over what happens in our schools. At this historical moment, it is critical for the young people who rely on our city’s public schools to raise their voices. In the spirit of Superintendent John White’s 100-day initiative, we hope that this report can contribute to the formation of a system that embodies excellence, equity and community. Until then, we remain highly critical, yet always eager to contribute our ideas and knowledge in the struggle forward.

—*Raise Your Hand Campaign, August 2011*

Six of the RYHC Founders (Left to Right)
Lynn Hoang, James Do, Linda Tran,
Cassandra Tran, Paul Sampson,
Danyea Pierre



Executive Summary

This youth-led, student-centered research initiative examines twelve dimensions of schooling that local students identified as integral to a quality education—**teaching, student support services, physical environment, textbooks, school food, family inclusion, rigor and college readiness, English as a second language, school fees, access to school options, transportation, and safety**. Through interviews, focus groups and peer-to-peer surveying, 450 students at six public high schools reported on their school’s delivery of these dimensions, which we use as the basis for evaluating educational quality and equity in the post-Katrina system.

Based on a thorough analysis of the student responses, there is much to celebrate when considering the state of public education in New Orleans. Specific schools have emerged as beacons of hope on particular issues, and we want to highlight these successes.

- Student reporting on **counselors** reveals two standout schools, an OPSB charter and an RSD direct-run school, in which over 75% of students believe their counselors are “helpful” or “very helpful” when it comes to supporting student progress and post-secondary planning.
- When asked about **teaching**, over 60% of students across the six schools report that their teachers are “prepared” or “very prepared” for class; 60% of students also believe their teachers put a high degree of effort into helping students learn.

- With regards to **physical environment**, there are two schools in our sample, an RSD direct-run and an OPSB charter, in which the majority of students report overall school cleanliness ratings of “good” or “excellent,” and a willingness to regularly use the restrooms.
- Student responses on access to **textbooks** spotlight two exemplary schools, both in the OPSB, in which over 80% of students report being permitted to take textbooks home to study, and the majority of students report receiving textbooks in at least four of their classes.

Notwithstanding these highlights, our study also reveals educational conditions that are cause for concern and immediate action. Considering the data set as a whole, we can conclude unequivocally that the majority of students attending these six high schools believe major improvements are needed. Five of the six schools, including all four RSD schools and the OPSB direct-run school in the sample, were consistently reported as underperforming when measured against standards that constitute a holistic, quality education. There were very few indicators of educational quality for which respondents, on average, rated their schools a four or a five on the survey’s five-point scale. With the exception of the OPSB charter school, the mean student response ratings for most of the indicators fell between 2.5 and 3.5, which can be converted to a “D” or “C” grade point average.



We also found significant disparities in the quality of education between the schools in our sample. Students from the OPSB charter school—the only school in our sample with a significant white population, as well as a significant medium to high-income population—reported a markedly higher quality of education across nearly every dimension of schooling in our study. There were also considerable disparities between the five remaining schools, with one RSD direct-run school performing well below the others in the majority of categories. Overall, these disparities are systemic and troubling, suggesting that access to quality education is a privilege enjoyed only by those who are able to gain entry into specific schools.

The report's findings highlight 12 issue-areas, each of which points to significant concerns:



Teaching

- Less than 30% of students believe their teachers make class lessons interesting.
- 70% of students feel their teachers do not manage the classroom well.
- At three of the six schools, 70% of students report having at least one substitute teacher each week.



Student Support Services

- Only 1 in 4 students feel comfortable turning to school staff with an emotional or social problem.
- 20% of students report never visiting a guidance counselor each year.



Physical Environment

- 60% of students do not feel comfortable using the restrooms at their schools
- 40% of students report that their schools are “unclean” or “very unclean.”



Textbooks

- At two of the high schools, 80% of students report “never” or “rarely” being able to take textbooks home to study.
- Over 70% of students report classes that do not have enough textbooks for all students.



School Food

- Only 1 in 100 students believe that schools are serving “excellent” lunches.
- Only 1 in 10 students believe that schools are serving “good lunches.”
- 50% of students do not eat lunches that are provided by their school each day.



Family Inclusion

- 30% of English-speaking parents and 50% of limited-English proficient (LEP) parents have never visited their child's schools to talk with a teacher.
- 71% of Asian students and 82% of Latino students report that their parents "rarely" or "never" receive forms in their native languages.



English as a Second Language (ESL)

- 70% of Asian and Latino students report having been misplaced in an ESL class that they believe did not challenge them, or fit their needs.



Academic Rigor and College Readiness

- 1/5th of students do not complete any homework each night.
- 3/5th of students complete one hour of homework or less each night.
- Sixty percent of high school juniors and seniors report feeling that their school is not preparing them for college
- Over half of the students not taking Advanced Placement classes report that institutional barriers prevented them from enrolling, rather than personal preference.



School Fees

- 42% of students report struggling with school fees, including 67% of students at one RSD direct-run school.
- 28 % of all fee complaints are about uniform costs.



Access to School Options

- Low-income students, compared to others, are twice as likely to report attending a school that is not their choice.
- 75% of students from LEP families reported parents with insufficient knowledge of school options for their children.



Transportation

- 25% of students who are not attending the school of their choice cite a lack of viable transportation as the primary cause.



Safety and Bullying

- 28% of students feel "unsafe" or "very unsafe" at school, including 56% of students at one RSD direct-run school.
- 19% of students from LEP families report being harassed due to their ethnicity.

Student Recommendations

Excellence in New Orleans' system of public schools is not being realized when service deficiencies are as broad and systemic as the students in this study reveal. **Equity** is not being realized when the quality of teaching, counseling, textbooks, physical environment and other dimensions is so drastically different between schools and student populations. **Community** is not being realized whenever families are excluded, students are treated unequally, or the voices of those who rely on the public school system do not translate into meaningful policy changes.

These 43 recommendations are aligned to address the most pressing, recurrent issues vocalized by students. These recommendations target the Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE), the Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB), the Recovery School District (RSD), as well as school leaders and city officials who must take a stand to improve public education in our city.



Teaching

1. Require schools to administer student survey evaluations of their teachers each semester, and use student-generated data to shape professional development, provide teachers with meaningful feedback, and improve the accuracy of teacher performance evaluations.
2. Include professional development workshops each year that focus on creating engaging, relevant, participatory lesson plans.
3. Require teachers to hold office hours for two hours each week, either after school or during lunch and free periods, and compensate teachers for their additional time.
4. Increase the amount of classroom management training required before new teachers enter the classroom, and strengthen ongoing professional development to improve non-punitive classroom management techniques.
5. Partner with community-based organizations to create professional development programs that expose teachers to the communities and cultures of the students they serve.



Student Support Services

6. Make sure there is at least one full-time social worker at each school (apart from academic/guidance counseling) and maintain a social worker to student ratio of 1:400, as recommended by the School Social Workers Association of America
7. Work with students to pilot a Peer Counseling program in a direct-run RSD high school.
8. Require social workers and guidance counselors to have appointment slots after school hours, and during student lunch periods.
9. Collect confidential student survey evaluations of guidance counselors and social workers, and require school and district leaders to strongly consider student feedback when making staffing decisions in these departments.



Physical Environment

10. Require district staff to conduct surprise site visits to assess school sanitation (including bathrooms and cafeterias). Publish publicly displayed "sanitation report cards" at each school.
11. Create a public, online feedback site where students can post comments and pictures about parts of their school that need maintenance, checked regularly by district and school-level staff.



Textbooks

12. Ensure that classes requiring textbooks have enough textbooks for all students, in good condition and at no cost.
13. Ensure that schools permit students to take their textbooks home. If there are “class sets” that cannot leave the school site, then schools must also provide students with “home set.”



School Food

14. Collect bi-annual student evaluations of lunches, and make annual contracts with food providers contingent on student satisfaction ratings.
15. Provide a serving of fresh, locally grown food every day.
16. Offer a healthy afternoon snack to students in every classroom, every day.



Family Inclusion

17. Encourage teachers to call home or conduct home visits at least twice each semester to give parents more opportunities to hear how their child is doing.
18. Create an online information program for families to track how their child is performing academically, and submit questions to teachers on-line. Train parents in how to use this system, and partner with public libraries and school libraries to provide access for parents without Internet in their homes.
19. Translate all critical school forms and information into Spanish, Vietnamese, and any other language spoken by families at the school, and offer LEP parents interpreters for all important school-related meetings.
20. Require schools to make certain staff, such as parent liaisons, available on evenings and weekends so that working parents can get information and resolve issues.



School Fees

21. Uniforms should either be capped at \$75 for two pairs of all required clothing components, or students should be permitted to purchase generic uniform components that meet their families’ budgets.
22. Create a “uniform recycling program” with the goal of providing free second-hand uniforms to 200 incoming 9th graders each year.
23. Create and publicize a means-tested financial aid program for families to apply for uniform fee waivers, as well as other school fee waivers. Monitor schools to ensure they are disbursing funds that are allocated for this purpose.
24. Prohibit schools from charging class or book fees, including AP classes or elective classes. While schools may offer students the option of purchasing a textbook, schools must also offer students the option of borrowing a textbook at no charge.



Transportation

25. All schools must be required to offer realistic transportation options to every student.
26. No student should have to spend more than a total of 120 minutes on a bus each day to attend the school of their preference; ensure efficient transportation options for students from New Orleans East and the Lower 9th Ward.
27. Schools must record and publish how often school buses arrive late to school, and hold transportation providers accountable for the quality and reliability of their service.



Access to School Options

28. Translate the Parent’s Guide to NOLA Schools into Spanish and Vietnamese, and require all schools receiving public funding to publish critical information about their programs in multiple languages.
29. Compile accurate data on which schools have ESL-certified teachers, bilingual staff and other relevant resources or programs so LEP families can make informed school choice decisions.
30. Ensure that there is at least one Spanish-speaking staff person and one Vietnamese-speaking staff person in the RSD’s Family Information Centers.
31. Make sure that all schools receiving public funding, including charter schools and OPSB schools, submit accurate, up-to-the-minute information to Family Centers so that families can research and apply to schools at one convenient location.



English as a Second Language

32. Create a committee of expert ESL teachers to monitor the quality of ESL instruction across the city, and to provide teachers with timely feedback.
33. Provide appropriate, differentiated ESL instruction tailored to each student’s level of language proficiency.
34. Ensure that ESL classrooms have certified ESL teachers.



Safety and Bullying

35. Require teachers and school personnel to report incidents of identity-based (e.g. race, ethnicity, sexuality, disability, religion, etc.) harassment and bullying to the Louisiana State Department of Education.
36. Require schools with high incident rates of identity-based harassment to implement school-wide interventions that teach students about tolerance, difference, and diversity.
37. Create safety commissions at each school composed of students, teachers, security personnel and administrators charged with improving school safety and devising non-punitive interventions and strategies.



Rigor and College Readiness

38. Ensure that every student with at least a “B” average has the opportunity to take a full range of AP classes with qualified teachers; AP classes on the computer are not a sufficient alternative.
39. Give all freshman students the opportunity to be on a rigorous, college-preparatory track, culminating with AP coursework; provide students who enter high school behind with tutoring and additional academic support to help them bridge the gap.
40. Offer daily study halls and homework support at every school, particularly in schools where students are struggling to complete homework in their home environments.
41. Make ACT Prep classes available to all students, free of charge.



Oversight and Equity

42. Provide schools labeled as “academically failing” with technical assistance and additional resources to improve educational quality and ensure equity for students.
43. Monitor and evaluate charter schools and direct-run schools through randomized site visits, student survey evaluations, and other oversight mechanisms that are not solely based on academic performance indicators

School Report Cards

Dimension	Indicators/Survey Questions	RSC C2	OPSB C	RSD D2	OPSB D	RSD D1	RSD C1
Teaching	1) Preparedness / organization for class	4	4.4	4	3.4	3.5	3.66
	2) Effort to help students learn during class	3.8	4.2	4	3.4	3.4	3.48
	3) Make class lessons interesting	3.1	3.4	2.7	2.7	2.7	2.51
	4) Control classroom environment	2.7	4.1	2.8	3	2.7	2.53
	5) Ave. # substitute teachers per week	1.72	0.54	1.29	1.26	1.84	1.32
		B-	A-	B-	C+	C+	C+
Student Support Services	1) Guidance counselor helpfulness	3.5	4.4	4.1	3.2	3.1	3.46
	2) # of Counselor visits/ year	2	2.9	1.6	2.9	3	1.32
	3) Counselor availability when you need them	3.2	4.2	3.7	3.2	2.8	3.04
	4) Comfort level turning to counselor with emotional or social problem?	2.1	3.1	2.9	2.1	2.5	2.4
			C+	A-	B	C+	C+
Physical Environ.	1) Overall cleanliness of high school	3.7	3.8	3.6	2.1	2.4	2.57
	2) Use of bathrooms at school (% responding "yes")	50%	56%	43%	32%	30%	30%
		B	B	B-	D	D+	D+
Textbooks	1) # of Classes currently providing textbooks	3.6	5.5	3	4	2.4	3.68
	2) Do classes have enough for all students? (% always)	2%	69%	40%	10%	7%	31%
	3) Condition of textbooks	2.6	3.49	3.8	2.9	3	3.48
	4) Ability to take home (% always, sometimes, rarely/never)	02,98	91,9,0	3,1,78	21,62,17	12,47,41	15,42,43
			D+	B+	C-	C	D+
Food	1) Quality of school-provided lunches	2.1	2.4	2	2.3	2.4	2.62
	2) % of students who eat lunch 3, 4, or 5 days per week	32%	34%	35%	50%	39%	40%
			D	D+	D	C-	D+
School Fees	1) % of students struggling to afford school expenses	55	18	19	43	67	15
			D-	B	B	D+	F
Rigor and College Readiness	1) Hours spent on homework each night	1.3	2.8	1.4	1.6	0.74	1.15
	2) How well is your high school preparing you for college?	3	4.7	3.6	3.1	2.9	2.6
			C+	A	B	B	C-
Safety and Bullying	1) How safe do you feel at your high school?	3.1	4.7	3.4	3	2.5	3.26
	2) % of students harassed because of their race or ethnicity	3%	5%	2%	10%	14%	7.70%
			B-	A	B	C	D+
OVERALL GRADE:		C	A-	B-	C	D+	D+

A+ (4.7-5.0)	B+ (3.7-4.0)	C+ (2.7-3.0)	D+ (1.7-2.0)	F (0-1.0)	Most indicators are on a 1-5 scale, 1=poor and 5=excellent. Grades were determined through a consideration of mean response ratings.
A (4.3-4.7)	B (3.4-3.7)	C (2.4-2.7)	D (1.4-1.7)		
A- (4.0-4.3)	B- (3.0-3.4)	C- (2.0-2.4)	D- (1.0-1.4)		

Methodology

We believe that the young people who rely on New Orleans public schools are equipped to articulate standards of excellence and equity that constitute “progress” in education, and to measure the extent to which schools are meeting these standards. Since April 2010, our group of student researchers and adult allies has utilized a Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) methodology to evaluate six New Orleans high schools. YPAR is a methodological approach that fills an “intellectual void that occurs when people’s voices are left out of the research and thus policy decisions that affect their lives and opportunities” (Cannella, 2008, 205). YPAR empowers politically marginalized communities to appropriate the tools of research and become producers of public knowledge. YPAR is characterized by the following three principles:

1. The collective investigation of a problem.
2. The reliance on indigenous knowledge to better understand that problem.
3. The desire to take individual and/or collective action to deal with the stated problem (Morrell, 2008, 157).

Our YPAR project was envisioned and carried out by youth researchers ranging in age from 14 to 20. Our group is made up of twelve youth leaders and fifteen additional youth volunteers, the majority of whom are residents of New Orleans East and members of the Vietnamese American Young Leaders Association of New Orleans (VAYLA), a community-based non-profit organization in Village de L'est.

The RYHC leadership team conducted over forty open-ended peer interviews, four youth forums, and two bilingual English-Vietnamese parent forums to identify key factors that contribute to a quality education from community perspectives and to generate a list of recurrent community experiences. Based on this qualitative research, the team constructed an 80-question survey to evaluate and compare six local high schools along the recurrent dimensions that students identified in interviews and forums. After being trained in how to administer surveys, RYHC team leaders collected 415 surveys from local youth enrolled in six high schools, which serve 2,660 students. The high schools were selected because they service many students from New Orleans East, and they are diverse in multiple respects: student demographics, geographic locations, governing authorities (RSD, OPSB), and management structures (direct-run, charters). Youth researchers used their free periods, lunches, and afterschool time to gather the surveys from fellow students.

After reviewing and discussing the data, the Raise Your Hand Campaign youth researchers convened for five half-day meetings, spread throughout the spring of 2011, to determine a series of recommendations aligned to address the most pressing issues vocalized by students.

Student Population (2009-2010 data) and RYHC Sample at the Six Target High Schools:

School	Enrollment	%Black	%Asian	%Free/Reduced Lunch	Our Sample	% of School
RSD Charter (1)	180	91.0%	6.1%	80.0%	37	20.6%
OPSB Charter*	657	29.7%	22.5%	27.6%	71	10.8%
OPSB Direct*	430	82.0%	16.0%	87.0%	126	29.3%
RSD Direct- Run (1)	564	92.0%	6.0%	78.0%	85	15.1%
RSD Charter (2)	268	99.0%	0.0%	79.0%	38	14.2%
RSD Direct- Run (2)	561	98.0%	0.0%	75.0%	58	10.3%
Total	2,660	76.9%	9.8%	66.6%	415	15.6%*
Our Sample	415	56.7%	32.4%	76.3%	*Sample as a % of total enrollment	

Acknowledgements & Supporters

Acknowledgements

This participatory research initiative was conceptualized and carried out by the Raise Your Hand Campaign youth research team, which is part of the Vietnamese American Young Leaders Association. The youth organizers conducted all interviews and community forums, designed the survey instrument, and oversaw survey distribution and data gathering. Oiyen Poon, a PhD research fellow at the University of California Los Angeles, provided guidance on research design in order to eliminate bias and ensure methodological integrity. Jacob Cohen, assistant director at the Vietnamese American Young Leaders Association, compiled information for the report and led the writing and editing process with the help of the youth leaders and adult allies, including Minh Nguyen, executive director of VAYLA, Oiyen Poon, and Rashida Govan.

Youth Research Leaders

Cassandra Tran	Sarah T. Reed, Class of 2009
Paul Sampson	Chalmette High School, Class of 2009
Danyea Pierre	Sarah T. Reed, Class of 2010
Linda Tran	Abramson Science and Technology, Class of 2011
Victoria Tran	Sarah T. Reed, Class of 2012
Julie Cao	McMain Secondary School, Class of 2012
James Do	Sarah T. Reed, Class of 2009
Hoang Hoang	Cypress Hills High School (TX), Class of 2009
Lynn Hoang	Benjamin Franklin High School, Class of 2013
Luc Nguyen	Benjamin Franklin High School, Class of 2012
Shirley Tran	Lusher, Class of 2016
Nhi Tran	McMain Secondary, Class of 2008
Anna Nguyen	McMain Secondary, Class of 2011
Trang Bui	Sarah T. Reed High School, Class of 2008
Timmy Vo	Brother Martin, Class of 2008

Supporting Organizations

Vietnamese Initiatives in Economic Training
Juvenile Justice Project of Louisiana
Kids Rethink New Orleans Schools
Puentes New Orleans
MQVN Community Development Corporation
Urban League Young Professionals
Young Leadership Council
Institute for Women and Ethnic Studies

Partnership for Youth Development
Louisiana Language Access Coalition
Young Empowerment Project
Orleans Parish Education Network
API Young Professional Network
Students at the Center
YOUTHansia Foundation
Fountain of Youth Foundation

*The designation "supporting organization" signifies a firm belief in the importance of this youth-led research initiative, and an affirmation that young people must be at the forefront of our city's education reform movement.

Design

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Raise Your Hand CAMPAIGN

The **Raise Your Hand Campaign** promotes equal access to quality public education for geographically, economically, or linguistically marginalized students through youth participatory research, leadership development and policy-centered organizing.

The **Vietnamese American Young Leaders Association of New Orleans** is a youth-led community-based organization that empowers Vietnamese American and underrepresented youth through supportive services, cultural enrichment, organizing and positive social change.

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