



# East Baton Rouge Parish Schools: A New Beginning?

## A Post-Desegregation Case Study

ANALYSIS No. 307 June 2005

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The East Baton Rouge (EBR) Parish Public School System is faced with the challenge of fixing what many consider to be a broken system. After nearly a half century of court-ordered desegregation, a continual decline in student enrollment and persistently low academic performance, restoring public confidence in the school system will be difficult. The final end to its 47-year-long desegregation case, however, provides a new opportunity to rebuild public support.

On August 12, 2003, federal Judge James Brady signed the Final Settlement Agreement (FSA) to *Davis, et al. v. East Baton Rouge Parish School Board et al.*, marking the end of the district's school desegregation case, the longest in U.S. history. The FSA requires that a plan, agreed upon both by the original plaintiffs and the EBR school system, be carried out "in good faith" until the end of the 2006-07 school year. It primarily calls for a plan that was similar to the 1996 Consent Decree, which largely focused on the district's magnet school program. No independent monitor, other than the court-appointed magnet program evaluator, has tracked the district's compliance with the FSA; and no one has issued a comprehensive evaluation.

The Public Affairs Research Council of Louisiana (PAR) regularly studies public education in Louisiana at both the state and local levels. It has undertaken this multi-year study of the EBR School System as part of a grant to monitor the district's compliance with the FSA and to provide a status report on the district's current condition. This project also serves as a case study in school desegregation that could be used by an estimated 50 other school districts throughout the state grappling with their own desegregation cases.

Specifically, this report examines each part of the FSA as well as the demographics, school and district performance scores, student achievement, teacher quality

and financial resources of EBR in comparison to the state; to its neighboring schools systems, Ascension and Livingston; and, to Caddo and Jefferson, two systems with similar student demographics. This study was not designed to be an exhaustive analysis of the EBR school system but, rather, intended to provide a snapshot of its current condition and a baseline for future study and recommendations.

A careful analysis by PAR has determined that the district has complied with the requirements of the FSA and has shown some measurable improvement. A recent slight increase in student enrollment, for example, suggests that the outmigration of students from the EBR school system may be slowing. High school achievement increased dramatically in the 2003-04 school year, while elementary school achievement improved greatly in the current school year after years of minimal or no growth. And, two of EBR's dedicated magnet schools ranked in the top 35 of 1,375 schools statewide.

Despite these advances, the system still has a long way to go on its journey of improvement. EBR ranks near the bottom of districts (52 of 66) for its overall performance. Although school performance has increased overall since the implementation of the state's education accountability system, EBR schools perform lower than the state average, and growth at the elementary and middle school levels has slowed or, in some areas, declined over time.

Part of this decline can possibly be attributed to the shifting demographics of the district. The percentage of at-risk students increased by twenty percentage points, from 51% in the 1998-99 school year to 72% in 2003-04; in contrast, the state average only increased four percentage points, from 58% to 62%. The percentage of black students also significantly increased over this five-year time period, rising from 66% to 76% of total student enrollment; statewide, the black student enrollment remained at 47%.

*This report can be accessed on PAR's Web site at [www.la-par.org](http://www.la-par.org).  
Click on "Recent PAR Publications" on the home page.  
You may download the entire report in PDF format.*

## INTRODUCTION

Teacher certification in EBR has generally followed the statewide trend, steadily declining before eventually improving in the last two years. Despite recent improvement of teacher quality, 16% of classes are still not being taught by a “highly qualified” teacher, and 11% of teachers in the district have not earned certification. Furthermore, teachers in EBR receive, on average, \$2,000 less per year than teachers in Livingston and Ascension. The challenge of attracting and retaining qualified teachers is difficult enough for EBR, particularly given its history of racial tension, poor academic performance and rapidly increasing at-risk student population. With a disparity in teacher pay so large, it is nearly impossible for the district to compete with Ascension and Livingston, school systems that both already outperform EBR in nearly every measure of school and district performance.

Complying with the FSA and addressing any problematic areas must also remain a top priority for the district. Currently, the district’s magnet school program, the centerpiece of the FSA, faces two critical challenges. The enrollment targets and the racial composition goal of having a 55% black, 45% white racial mix in each of the magnet schools have not been achieved. The roughly 4,200 students enrolled in the district’s magnet programs fell more than 1,300 students short of the targeted total enrollment of 5,550. While the district has also reserved the appropriate number of seats to meet the FSA requirements, all but one of its 13 magnet programs have failed to attract a sufficient number of white students.

Second, and perhaps more importantly, the district is missing an opportunity to promote the academic success of its magnet school program and present these programs as an alternative to private schools or the public schools in Ascension and Livingston. This is because the district neither consistently disaggregates nor publishes the student achievement data for its seven within-school magnet programs, wherein magnet and traditional students attend the same school but different classes. A brief analysis conducted by the district, as requested by PAR, reveals that magnet students perform significantly better than the total student population in schools offering within-school magnet programs. Further, it appears that students in within-school magnet programs perform similarly to students in Ascension and Livingston, on average.

The EBR school district must continue to improve, despite the difficult, though not insurmountable, challenges it faces. The final resolution of its school desegregation case, new leadership and its partnership with the Stupski Foundation, a non-profit organization that is providing resources to improve academic achievement and close the achievement gap, make the district ripe for the innovative changes that will be necessary to accomplish this goal.

Public confidence ultimately plays a major role in whether a school system is locally and financially supported. Decades of court supervision, coupled with persistently low academic achievement, have led to a significant erosion of public support for the East Baton Rouge (EBR) Parish School System.

On August 12, 2003, federal Judge James Brady signed the Final Settlement Agreement (FSA) to *Davis, et al. v. East Baton Rouge Parish School Board et al.*, marking the end of the school district’s 47-year-long school desegregation case, the longest in U.S. history. The FSA requires that a plan, agreed upon both by the original plaintiffs and the EBR school system, be carried out “in good faith” throughout the 2006-07 school year. It primarily calls for a plan that was similar to the 1996 Consent Decree, which largely focused on the district’s magnet school program.

Left in the wake of the desegregation case is a poorly performing, racially imbalanced school district. Once a majority-white school system, EBR nearly 50 years later has evolved into what experts predict, given current student enrollment trends, will eventually be an all-black system.

Throughout the last decade, student enrollment in the EBR school district has steadily declined, while the Ascension and Livingston Parish school systems have continued to grow. Furthermore, the 2003 secessions of the cities of Baker and Zachary from the EBR school system have exacerbated the dilemma of student outmigration, and the potential exodus of Central threatens to do so as well.

As families leave the EBR school district, they take with them their political and financial support, further eroding public confidence in the system. Another challenge facing the district is that it must improve student performance to meet the state’s accountability program requirements while, at the same time, improving its image to retain its current students and possibly attract others back into the system.

The resolution of the district’s desegregation case offers an opportunity to rebuild public confidence in the school system. The primary goal of this study is to provide the public with an objective information source to allow it to judge the district’s performance. It also serves as a case study in school desegregation that could be used by an estimated 50 other school districts throughout the state grappling with their own desegregation cases.

This report evaluates the changes that have occurred in the EBR school district since its release from close control by the federal court. It also analyzes whether the district has complied with the FSA and

attempts to determine how successful these efforts have been, or will be, in restoring public confidence in the EBR school system.

## **FINAL SETTLEMENT AGREEMENT (FSA)**

The EBR school desegregation case, *Davis, et al. v. East Baton Rouge Parish School Board, et al.*, was filed in 1956 to challenge *de jure*, or institutionalized, racial segregation. Desegregation became voluntary – though with very little to no success – in the 1960s, as black and white students were allowed to attend each others’ schools under the district’s “freedom of choice” plan.

A much stricter plan to desegregate EBR schools was implemented in 1981, when Federal District Court Judge John Parker ordered the closure of 15 schools along with forced busing throughout the district. According to desegregation experts, this aggressive plan led to the exodus of approximately 7,000 students, or what is roughly equivalent to four high schools, in one year alone from the district. During this same time, student enrollment in private schools increased by 2,000 students.

The 1996 Consent Decree eliminated much of the forced busing required under the 1981 plan. It also created 24 new magnet programs, in addition to the existing nine, to attract white students into the district’s majority-black inner city schools. The Final Settlement Agreement (FSA) of Davis, decided in August 2003, is similar to the 1996 plan and calls for a number of commitments to be fulfilled by the school district throughout the 2006-07 school year.

Heading the list of requirements is a primary focus on the magnet school program. The FSA calls for four new dedicated magnets and a continuation of several others. Other areas address the continuation of the majority-to-minority school transfer option; student assignment measures including enrollment caps, attendance zone changes and school transfers required by the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001; facilities; extracurricular activities; and, educational programs including extended-day, extended-year, pre-kindergarten, and gifted and talented programs.

### **Magnet School Program**

The 1996 Consent Decree was an attempt by the school district and the original plaintiffs to retain and, perhaps, even attract white students back to the district. It created three new dedicated magnet schools and 21 within-school magnet programs, wherein magnet and traditional students attend the same school but

different classes. However, these programs were largely unsuccessful and did little to facilitate racial diversity in the system.

As a result, the emphasis under the FSA has shifted to dedicated magnet schools from the seemingly less academically successful, less popular within-school magnet programs. Specifically, it called for three existing dedicated magnet programs, and two Montessori magnets to remain in operation. It also authorizes four new dedicated magnet schools – two elementary and two middle – to be established. (For a list of magnet school programs see Table 1.)

Three schools were converted into dedicated magnet schools in 2004-05, while a fourth is expected to open in 2005-06. Five within-school magnet programs – two elementary and three middle schools – were discontinued in 2004-05; in fact, two of these schools were closed entirely this school year. A sixth program will be eliminated after 2005-06, as a similar type of program will be administered as part of a new dedicated magnet program.

However, the FSA allowed the existing within-school magnet programs at one middle school and three high schools to remain in operation. These schools were also required to establish, and implement by 2004-05, complementary Centers of Excellence, which are programs with more of a career and technical emphasis. Another goal of these Centers was to strengthen the schools’ ties to local post-secondary institutions; thus the schools are also required to offer honors and advanced placement (AP) courses to their students.

In total, 13 schools – six elementary, three middle and four high – currently comprise the district’s magnet school program. This number will increase to 14 in the next school year, when Sherwood Middle is opened, but will drop back down to 13 in the following year once the Visual and Performing Arts (VPA) program at Broadmoor is discontinued.

### ***Student Demographics***

The EBR magnet program serves over 4,200 students, 69% black and 31% non-black, throughout the district. In contrast, the EBR school system is composed of 46,269 students, 77% black and 23% non-black. Approximately 8% of the district’s black population and 12% of its non-black population are enrolled in the magnet program. In sum, 9% of EBR’s total student population is enrolled in a dedicated magnet school or participates in a within-school magnet program.

In an effort to encourage racial diversity, the FSA specifies that for the first two years, the racial composition of the entering class of each dedicated magnet school must not exceed 55% black students and must operate with empty seats even if a waiting list

**Table 1. EBR Dedicated and Within-School Magnet Programs, 2004-2005**

School	Status of Program	% Black	% Non-black	Targeted Enrollment	Total Magnet Enrollment	2003 SPS	2004 SPS	Change in SPS	School Improvement (SI)
<b>Dedicated Magnet Programs</b>									
Baton Rouge Center for Performing Arts (BRCPA)	Continued	54%	46%	390	398	125.1	125.2	0.1	Not in SI
Forest Heights Academy of Excellence	Opened in 2004-05	84%	16%	390	243	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
South Boulevard Elementary Foreign Language Academic Magnet	Continued	77%	23%	259	222	90.4	88.1	-2.3	SI 1
Westdale Heights Academic Magnet	Opened in 2004-05	61%	39%	390	380	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
McKinley Middle Academic/VPA Magnet	Converted in 2004-05	94%	6%	750	431	60.8	59.1	-1.7	N/A
Sherwood Middle Magnet	Will open in 2005-06	N/A	N/A	500	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Baton Rouge Magnet High	Continued	48%	52%	1,285	1,264	159	172	13	Not in SI
<b>Within-School Magnet Programs</b>									
Belfair Elementary Montessori Magnet	Continued	63%	37%	200	179	66.9	65.4	-1.5	SI 1
Dufrocq Elementary Montessori Magnet	Continued	56%	44%	100	84	71.4	73.7	2.3	SI 1
Broadmoor Middle VPA Magnet	Continued	55%	45%	200	178	74.2	77.7	3.5	SI 1
Crestworth Middle Magnet	Continued	92%	8%	200	91	47.9	52.3	4.4	SI 1
<i>Center of Excellence</i>		93%	7%	N/A	74				
Glen Oaks Magnet High	Continued	99%	1%	535	210	49.6	61.2	11.6	Not in SI
<i>Center of Excellence</i>		99%	1%	N/A	31				
Istrouma High Technology Magnet	Continued	99%	1%	200	70	40.8	59.3	18.5	Not in SI
<i>Center of Excellence</i>		98%	2%	N/A	10				
Scotlandville Magnet High	Continued	98%	1%	902	347	62.1	72.3	10.2	Not in SI
<i>Center of Excellence</i>		80%	20%	N/A	5				
<b>Total</b>		<b>69%</b>	<b>31%</b>	<b>5,551</b>	<b>4,217</b>				

Source: EBR School System, 2004.

exists. Each school must maintain a specified enrollment count and a targeted racial composition of 55% black and 45% non-black students.

The school district is meeting this requirement and has reserved the appropriate number of seats to ensure that each dedicated magnet school, if fully enrolled, would meet the required racial targets. Forest Heights Elementary and McKinley Middle, for example, have waiting lists comprised of black students, yet both have operated this school year with a significant number of empty (non-black) seats. Further, South Boulevard, Westdale Heights, Dufrocq and Belfair all met the target enrollment mix in the entry-level grades.

Although the FSA requirements are being met, the district's desired racial composition goals have not been achieved. As seen in Table 1, only two dedicated magnet schools, BRCVPA and Baton Rouge High, came close to achieving an overall racial mix of roughly 55% black, 45% white. With the exception of Broadmoor Middle, all magnet schools, including both dedicated and within-school, failed to reach this goal. In fact, in at least five schools – one dedicated magnet and four within-school magnet programs – the black student population exceeded 90%. Only in one school, Baton Rouge High, were there more non-black students (52%) than are required.

The FSA also specifies that the dedicated elementary magnets should enroll approximately 450 students: 60 in pre-kindergarten, 60 in kindergarten and 330 in grades 1-5; the middle school magnets should enroll 750 at McKinley and 500 at Sherwood; and, the dedicated academic high school magnet should enroll 1,350 students. In 2004-05, only one school, BRCVPA, met, and even exceeded, its enrollment target. (See Table 1.) And, the roughly 4,200 students enrolled in the district's magnet programs fell more than 1,300 students short of the targeted total enrollment of 5,550.

### *School Performance*

Although the magnet programs have done little to curb white flight from the district since the 1996 Consent Decree, some have been highly successful and, if better promoted, could help attract, or at least retain, white students. However, others appear to have had only limited academic success.

Under the state's education accountability program, every school annually receives a school performance score (SPS), ranging from 0 to 150 (and beyond), which measures how much a school has improved or declined from one year to the next. Scores are calculated using a formula based upon a combination of student testing results as well as attendance and dropout rates. All schools also receive an annual growth

target and are expected to reach a score of 120 by the 2013-14 school year. Schools that fail to meet their growth target are subject to state- and/or federally mandated reforms, also known as "school improvement."

As seen in Table 1, two schools, BRCVPA and Baton Rouge High, were extremely successful and have already achieved – even exceeded – the state's 2013-14 performance goal of 120. In fact, Baton Rouge High was the third highest-performing school in the state, while BRCVPA was ranked 31 out of 1,375 schools.

Aside from these two schools, it is nearly impossible to measure the academic success of the district's magnet program. The performance of two of the six dedicated magnet schools, Forest Heights Academy of Excellence and Westdale Heights Academic Magnet, cannot yet be measured, as they were only opened this school year. Similarly, McKinley Middle was only recently converted from a within-school magnet program to a dedicated magnet program in 2004-05. It is also unclear whether its former within-magnet program was academically successful. As reported in Table 1, McKinley's performance score declined from 60.8 in 2003 to 59.1 in 2004, placing the school on track to being labeled as "academically unacceptable," the state's lowest possible rating, if it had not been converted.

The academic progress of McKinley, as well as the district's seven other within-school magnet programs, cannot fully be determined because of the way in which student achievement and school performance data are currently collected and reported. Each school receives a performance score that is based upon the student achievement of all students. As a result, the achievement scores of students participating in a within-school magnet program are likely concealed by the presumably lower scores of the traditional students in the school, thus making it appear that the magnet programs are performing at a lower level than they actually are. Likewise, the magnet programs could potentially enable a school to appear to be performing at a higher level than it actually is.

For example, two of the seven schools, Crestworth Middle and Glen Oaks High, have a performance score that is lower than 60 and are both on track to being labeled as academically unacceptable if they do not improve by next school year. Four schools failed to meet the state's education accountability requirements and are currently in school improvement. The performance score of one school, Belfair, declined from the previous school year. And, the average school performance score for the seven schools currently offering a within-school magnet program was 66, nearly four points lower than the average for all other (non-magnet) schools in the district (excluding the three existing dedicated magnet schools, McKinley Middle

and five schools that were closed in 2003-04).

Disentangling the achievement scores of magnet students from traditional students would provide a better depiction of the academic performance of the district’s magnet program. At the same time, it would also place more pressure upon schools to improve the achievement of their traditional students. However, the Louisiana Department of Education is only required by (state and/or federal) law to report student achievement by district, school and student subgroup (e.g., race/ethnicity and poverty). Whether student achievement is further disaggregated within each school is left up to the discretion of the school district. Currently, EBR neither consistently maintains nor publishes its within-school magnet program student achievement data.

**Table 2. Within-School Magnet Program Students Score Higher on Iowa Tests \***

ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS				
	GRADE 3		GRADE 5	
	Magnet Students	All Students	Magnet Students	All Students
Belfair	52	39	58	50
Dufroq	70	40	**	39
Forest Heights	75	43	71	45
MIDDLE SCHOOLS				
	GRADE 6		GRADE 7	
	Magnet Students	All Students	Magnet Students	All Students
Broadmoor	54	41	57	44
Capitol	53	25	57	31
Crestworth	53	24	54	31
McKinley	48	30	49	36
HIGH SCHOOLS				
	GRADE 9			
	Magnet Students	All Students		
Glen Oaks	45	35		
Istrouma	51	32		
Scotlandville	54	37		

\*Data are reported in percentile rankings. A rank of 50 means that the average score in that category is equal to or better than 50% of students in the same grade nationally.

\*\*Data cannot be reported, because the total number of students is less than 10.

Source: East Baton Rouge Parish School System, May 2005.

However, the school district conducted a brief analysis, specifically for this report, of its within-school magnet programs. As seen in Table 2, students participating in within-school magnet programs

performed significantly better – roughly twenty points higher at the elementary-school level – than their school as a whole. In grades 3, 5, 6 and 7 students are required to take the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) and in grade 9 are required to take the Iowa Test of Educational Development (ITED). These are norm-referenced tests, reported in percentile rankings, which measure how well students in Louisiana compare to a national sample of students, or “norm” group. Results such as these could be used to highlight the academic success of the district’s magnet program.

***Court-Appointed Magnet School Evaluator***

The FSA requires that an independent magnet program evaluator be appointed to monitor the school district’s magnet programs throughout the 2006-07 school year. The school district must grant the evaluator full access to school facilities, documents, staff and consultants, and the evaluator may make suggestions on the planning or implementation of the district’s magnet school programs.

Thus far, four reports have been issued with each focusing on a different subject area and providing specific recommendations. The school district must ensure that the recommendations suggested by the court evaluator are addressed and, when appropriate, implemented into policy.

The April 30, 2004, report was by far the most comprehensive and focused primarily on whether the school district had complied with the main requirements of the FSA. The evaluator found conflicts between the FSA and the district’s proposed magnet school program themes; criticized the district for having no standardized measurement for monitoring magnet student progress; determined that there were no established standards for the district’s “academic” magnet program theme; and, had several questions regarding specific magnet programs and their curriculums, budgetary allocations, staffing proposals and/or facilities.

The August 2, 2004, report contained a revised summary interpretation of the FSA; a clarification of the earlier recommendations; and, a third document outlining how the evaluator would measure the success of the magnet program. The evaluator has suggested that academic achievement be used to measure the success of the magnet school program; however, the school district feels this measure is unfair, as it was not specifically included in the Agreement.

The October 31, 2004, report examined the magnet program’s “academic” curriculum standards as well as the scope of the “visual and performing arts” curriculum. The evaluator suggested that all students participating in an academic magnet program be required

to score higher than the state's long-term achievement goal; however, the evaluator found that the academic curriculums of five schools would not adequately prepare students to reach this goal. Further, the VPA curriculum at two schools may not adequately prepare students for advanced middle and high school work. The evaluator, however, concluded that the academic curriculum at Baton Rouge High was sufficiently rigorous.

The January 31, 2005, report focused on the magnet school application procedures and examined the Montessori programs at Belfair and Dufroq elementary schools. The evaluator concluded that students participating in the Montessori programs have been performing significantly better than traditional students and that steps should be taken to improve the achievement of the traditional students in these schools.

## Majority-to-Minority Transfers

The majority-to-minority, or racial, transfer policy was first implemented in the 1996-97 school year, as part of a requirement of the 1996 Consent Decree. Designed to facilitate desegregation, it enables students to transfer to a more racially balanced school. As originally required, black students attending a school composed of a majority, or 55%, of black students were allowed to transfer to a school having a majority of white students. However, the transfer option was slightly modified under the FSA. A black student attending a school having 45% black students can now transfer to a school with 45% or more non-black students. Likewise, a white student attending a school having 55% white students can transfer to a school with 55% black students. Free transportation is provided to all students who are eligible for a transfer.

On average, an estimated 905 black students, or roughly 2.4% of the total black student population, and 24 white students, or less than 1% of the total white student population, are granted a new transfer each year. The total number of students participating in the program over the last six years averages out to 1,680 students a year, or roughly 3% of the total elementary and secondary student population. The number of students participating in the program steadily increased through much of this time period but began to decline in the last school year, the first under the FSA. The total percentage of student participants fell to 4% in 2003-04 and to 2.9% in 2004-05.

The school district also has an obligation to actively recruit students to participate in the program. Specifically, it must provide parents and students with informational flyers; "sending" and "receiving" schools must hold meetings to inform parents about the transfer option; and, trained staff must respond to inquiries

about the transfer policy. The deadline for a transfer is two weeks prior to the start of each school year, but applications may continue to be accepted and granted depending upon availability.

The district has actively recruited student participation in the program. The option has been marketed to students through school announcements in monthly newsletters, advertised on the district's Web site and printed in the local newspaper. Transportation has also been provided for all participating students.

## Other Desegregation Requirements

The FSA also calls for district compliance with enrollment caps; the elimination of temporary buildings; changes in attendance zones; completion of construction and improvement projects begun in 1998; publication of a report of student participation in extracurricular activities; funding of additional teacher positions; continuation of the extended-day and extended-year programs, the pre-K programs, and the gifted and talented program; and, the implementation of the federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) school-transfer option.

### *NCLB transfers*

NCLB allows any student who attends a school that has been identified for improvement for at least two consecutive years to attend a better-performing school within the district. Yet, as with the majority-to-minority program, few students have chosen to participate in the school-choice transfer option.

In 2003-04, six schools were placed in school improvement level two or higher and required to offer a school-choice transfer. Of the 3,249 students eligible for a transfer that school year, only 194, or 6%, actually transferred to another school.

The following school year four schools were required to offer school-choice transfers, while two schools improved substantially and exited school improvement. Similar to the previous school year, very few students participated in school choice. Of the 2,517 eligible students, 319 requested a transfer, while only 171, or 7%, actually transferred.

### *Enrollment limits*

The school district must adhere to enrollment limits specified in the FSA but may exceed them under certain conditions as listed in a July 3, 2003, court order. An enrollment cap may be exceeded if it would shift the student enrollment of a school closer to 50% black, 50% non-black or a targeted range of 48% to 55% black.

Of the 86 schools listed as Exhibit A in the FSA and excluding five that have since closed, 17 schools – nine elementary, six middle and two high schools – exceeded their enrollment caps in 2004-05. However, all but two schools fell under the exclusions carved out in the July 2003 order. Eight schools exceeded their caps because of five recent school closures and/or consolidations; five schools met the racial composition goal of 48% to 55% black; and, two schools brought the racial mix closer to 50% white, 50% black. The remaining two schools, Central Middle and Capital Middle, received special permission by the U.S. Department of Justice (USDOJ) to exceed their enrollment limits in order to accommodate the over two hundred students who requested an NCLB school-choice transfer from either Prescott or Glen Oaks middle schools.

### *Attendance Zone Changes*

The FSA requires the district to make every “reasonable good-faith effort” to desegregate the system whenever it redraws its attendance zone lines to open or close any schools. Following the 2003-04 school year, major modifications were made to the district’s attendance zones to accommodate five school closures and the change of Sherwood Middle to a dedicated magnet school. Although these changes may have been necessary, the impact has been a significant increase in student enrollment, ranging from a low of 4.46% in Westdale Middle to a high of 65% in Capitol Middle, in at least seven schools with specified enrollment limits.

### *T-buildings*

The school district has an obligation to eliminate 75%, or 148 out of 197, of the temporary (“T”) buildings that existed during, or were obtained after, the 1996-97 school year, the year in which the Consent Decree was signed. Since that time, the district has purchased 27 additional T-buildings, bringing the total number to 224 and requiring the district to eliminate 175 buildings to reach the FSA requirement of only 49. By the 2004-05 school year, the district had either closed, sold, demolished or transferred ownership (either to Baker or Zachary) of the required number of T-buildings and has met the FSA requirements. Four T-buildings that are currently considered as closed are still being used because of school renovations; however, this practice is permissible under the FSA.

### *Facilities*

The FSA requires the district to complete the school construction, renovation and improvement projects authorized by a one-cent sales tax approved by voters in 1998. The district must also complete 12 scheduled projects in eight different schools at a cost of nearly \$800,000. In addition, the district must spend a minimum of \$250,000 to enhance and improve the facilities of its elementary dedicated magnet schools.

As of February 2005, all projects had been completed successfully. The school system built four schools, completed 22 classroom additions and replaced 85 roofs. The one-cent sales tax was renewed by voters in May 2003 and is paying for seven new schools and at least four major renovations.

### *Extracurricular Activities*

Each year the school district is required to publish a report of student participation in extracurricular activities at each middle and high school, by race and by activity. In 2003-04, two reports, both middle and high school, were published by the district, specifying the total number of black and non-black student participants in every available extracurricular activity.

The number and type of activities in which black and non-black students participated differed slightly. Non-black participants were much more likely to participate in clubs, while black participants were more likely to participate in sports. The total number of black student participants in extracurricular activities also slightly under-represents the proportion of black students in the district’s middle and high schools. EBR’s 15 high schools are composed of roughly 67% black students, yet only 60% of the total number of extracurricular activity participants were black. Likewise, at the middle-school level black students comprise roughly 75% of the student population but only 67% of the total number of extracurricular activity participants.

### *“Highly Qualified” Teachers*

The district is required by the 2004-05 school year to fund 108 additional “highly qualified” teacher staffing positions in 27 elementary schools, or four teachers per school. Of the 27 schools listed in the FSA as eligible to receive these teachers, two schools have since closed. As a result, four of the eight teachers slated to go to either of these two schools have instead been placed in Sharon Hills, which was listed among five

other possible alternate schools in the FSA. The other four teachers have been placed in Belfair Elementary, which was not listed among the six alternate schools in the FSA. However, all parties agreed to this change, as evidenced by a memo submitted to the USDOJ and NAACP by the attorneys representing the school district.

### ***Educational Programs***

The FSA requires a continuation of the Extended-Day and Extended-Year programs, given the availability of state and federal funding. It also requires the district to continue operating its existing pre-K programs, given the availability of state and federal funding, which include Head Start, Even Start, Title I, 8(g) Early Childhood Block grants and Starting Points. The district must also continue to operate programs for Gifted and Talented students in accordance with state and federal laws.

The Extended-Day and Extended-Year programs have been continued and serve roughly 3,045 students in 32 schools throughout the district. The district's pre-K program has been expanded and in the 2003-04 school year served an estimated 2,945 students of an estimated 6,206 four-year-old student population throughout the district. Roughly 80% of these pre-K students were considered to be at risk and participated in the programs as noted in the FSA. The Louisiana Department of Education estimated that 1,510 at-risk students in the district would likely not receive services this school year.

The Gifted and Talented program was also continued and currently operates in 13 different schools. It serves 1,926 students and has a racial composition of 39% black, 61% non-black. The program operates in compliance with all state and federal laws, as students are required to have an individualized education plan (IEP), and the teachers must hold a special certification.

### ***Magnet Program Grant***

As required by the FSA the school district applied for a federal Magnet Program grant in December 2003. The district met this requirement and was among 120 applicants for the federal Magnet Schools Assistance Program. However, EBR did not receive an award and, under U.S. Department of Education guidelines, is not eligible to resubmit an application until the 2007-08 school year.

## **Scope and Implementation of the FSA**

Failure to comply with the FSA would entail a breach of contract and could result in further litigation. The "sole remedy" as specified in the Agreement for a

breach of contract would be for the court to require the district to fulfill the breached provisions and possibly to pay court costs and attorney's fees.

The school district's compliance with the FSA is currently being monitored by several parties, including the school board's attorneys; the law firm that represented the school board in its negotiations with the plaintiffs; an FSA Committee, along with several subcommittees representing each major section, that is composed of members of the EBR central office; and, two desegregation specialists in the central office who have been assigned to provide data and records to the court, attorneys and any other interested parties. No independent monitor, other than the court-appointed magnet program evaluator has tracked the district's compliance with the FSA; and no one has issued a comprehensive evaluation.

Based on the data provided by the school district and presented in this report, PAR finds that the district has complied with the FSA. (For a summary of the FSA, see Table 3.) The appropriate number of magnet programs has been established, or continued, and is currently being independently monitored. The majority-to-minority school-transfer option is annually offered to both black and white students. Eligible students in poorly performing schools are allowed to transfer to a better school under the NCLB school-transfer policy. Of the 17 schools that exceeded their enrollment caps, all fell under the exemptions either carved out by the court or by the U.S. Department of Justice. All school construction, renovation and improvement projects, authorized by a one-cent sales tax approved by voters in 1998, have been completed successfully. Reports outlining student participation in extracurricular activities have been published for all middle and high schools. An additional 108 "highly qualified" teaching positions have been funded. And, several of the district's educational programs have been continued.

Although the district has largely complied with the FSA, PAR finds that the racial composition goals outlined for the district's magnet schools have not been achieved. Among the district's six dedicated magnet schools and seven within-school magnet programs, only one school achieved the desired racial mix of 55% black, 45% white students.

PAR also calls for improvement in several areas that are not required by the FSA. The academic achievement of the district's within-school magnet school programs has neither consistently been disaggregated nor published. As a result, the district is missing an opportunity to promote these programs as an academic success and an alternative to private schools or the public schools in Ascension and Livingston. It is unclear how effective the majority-to-minority transfer

**Table 3. PAR Analysis of the EBR School System’s Compliance  
with the Final Settlement Agreement\***

<b>Final Settlement Agreement Requirements</b>		<b>Full Compliance</b>	<b>Partial Compliance</b>
<b>Magnet School Program</b>	Maintain existing dedicated magnet programs.	✓	
	Establish new dedicated magnet programs.	✓	
	Meet enrollment Targets of 55% black, 45% white.**		✓
	Require admissions requirements/preferences.	✓	
	Provide transportation.	✓	
	Implement dedicated magnet programs.	✓	
	Establish Centers of Excellence.	✓	
	Develop a comprehensive plan to carry out FSA.	✓	
	Appoint a Magnet School Program Evaluator.	✓	
<b>Majority-to-Minority Transfers</b>	Continue program; provide transportation for transfers; and recruit students to participate.	✓	
<b>Other Desegregation Requirements</b>	Offer “No Child Left Behind” Act transfers.	✓	
	Comply with enrollment limits.	✓	
	Make effort to achieve desegregation with any attendance zone changes.	✓	
	Eliminate temporary buildings.	✓	
<b>Facilities</b>	Complete school construction, renovation and improvement projects authorized by the one-cent sales tax approved by voters in 1998.	✓	
<b>Extracurricular Activities</b>	Publish annual report on the number of students participating in extracurricular activities by school, race and activity.	✓	
<b>Educational Programs</b>	Provide 108 “highly qualified” teaching positions.	✓	
	Continue to operate Extended-Day and Extended-Year programs.	✓	
	Continue to operate Pre-kindergarten programs.	✓	
	Continue Gifted and Talented Program.	✓	
	Apply for a federal Magnet Program Grant in December 2003.	✓	

\*As evaluated by PAR. This is not an official determination of the court or court-appointed evaluator.

\*\*According to the FSA, a failure to attract the targeted student enrollment to the new or existing dedicated magnet schools does not, by itself, constitute a breach of contract.

option has been in desegregating schools, as only 3% of the district's total student population, on average, choose to participate in the program. Likewise, few eligible students have chosen to participate in the federal NCLB school-choice transfer option. Major changes to attendance zones have also resulted in significant increases in student enrollment in at least seven schools listed in the FSA.

## **CURRENT CONDITION OF EBR PARISH SCHOOL SYSTEM**

The EBR school district is faced with the challenge of fixing what many consider to be a broken system. After nearly half of a century of court-ordered desegregation, EBR is no longer at the mercy of the court and is now solely responsible for its ultimate success or failure. Yet, many factors still at play in the district explain at least part of its current condition as well as threaten its future success.

A potential problem facing the district is a recent decline in the parish population. As reported by the U.S. Census Bureau, East Baton Rouge Parish experienced a 0.1% decline in population from 2000 to 2003. During this same time, Ascension grew by 10.2%, Livingston grew by 11.1%, and the state grew by 0.6%. EBR's population decline not only impacts the potential size of the public school student population, it may also weaken the political and/or tax base that supports the school system.

Added pressure has also been placed on the

district by recent state and federal education reform efforts. In 1999, Louisiana implemented its education accountability system, which holds schools and districts accountable for raising student achievement. In addition, the federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), signed into law in January 2002, also requires school districts to meet rigorous achievement goals, close the academic achievement gap and improve teacher quality. As a result, EBR now must show continual improvement or face costly state- and/or federally mandated school improvement sanctions.

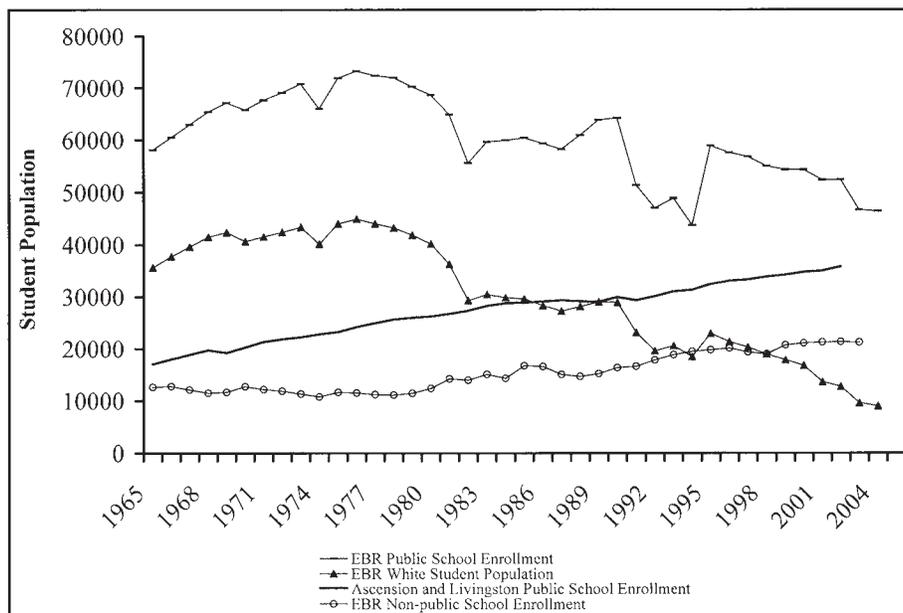
In this context, several key areas, including student demographics, school and district performance, student achievement, teacher quality and district resources, are examined below.

## **Demographics**

The demographic composition of the EBR school district has evolved over time. Once composed of 61% white students in 1965, the elementary and secondary public school population is now 77% black and no longer reflects the 56.2%, or majority, white resident population of the parish. As seen in Figure 1, the overall student population as well as the number of white students dramatically declined beginning in the 1980s and has steadily continued downward ever since.

Part of the decline is explained by a steady increase in non-public school enrollment, which has grown substantially from 1965 to 2004. EBR enrollment in non-public schools is much higher than the national

**Figure 1. Declining EBR Public Elementary and Secondary School Student Population, 1965-2004**



Source: Louisiana Department of Education; Bankston, C. and Caldas, S. (2002). "A Troubled Dream: The Promise and Failure of School Desegregation in Louisiana."

and state averages of 10% and 16%, respectively. As reported in Figure 1, the percentage of EBR students in non-public schools slowly declined from 1965 to 1980. Beginning in the 1980's, however, that percentage grew and is currently 31%.

The outmigration of students to the surrounding parishes has also changed the landscape of the EBR student population. The Livingston and Ascension school systems have continued to grow, while EBR continues to lose students. Just in the last year Livingston grew by 3.3%, while Ascension grew by 3.7%. Both systems were ranked the highest in student population growth in the state in 2005.

Racial demographics in both of these systems has also shifted slightly. The proportion of non-black students increased from 69% in 1994 to 71% in 2004 in Ascension and from 90% to 95% in Livingston. During this same time period the non-black student population in EBR fell from 42% to 23%, suggesting that the growth in Ascension and Livingston has likely been a result of white flight from the EBR school system.

The secessions of the cities of Zachary and Baker have also contributed to EBR's demographic shift. In 2003 EBR lost roughly 5,500 of its total reported student membership, when Zachary and Baker each broke away from the EBR system to form its own separate school district. Roughly 2,250 of these students went to Baker, 85% of whom were black, and another 3,250 went to Zachary, roughly 61% of whom were non-black. In sum, 16% (2,330) of EBR's non-black student population and 8% (3,188) of its black student population went to these newly formed districts in one year alone.

The net effect of outmigration, population changes and the two school district secessions was a one-year shift in the overall racial make-up of EBR from

72.7% black, 24.2% white in 2002-03 to 75.7% black, 20.6% white in 2003-04.

A declining student population is not an indicator of a healthy, thriving school system. Though depending on how the student population is measured, it appears that the outmigration of students from the EBR school system has begun to slow or perhaps even halt.

The state-adjusted enrollment figures show a marginal increase in the student population from the last school year. The total number of students increased by 124 students from 2004 to 2005. This slight increase comes after an average annual decrease of 3.56% over the last five years.

As the number of students in the district fell, the proportion of "at-risk" students – or those receiving free or reduced lunch, the standard measure of student poverty – has likewise risen. In 1999 the total student membership of EBR was 55,820 students, 67% black and 61% receiving free or reduced lunch. Five years later, there are roughly 9,250, or 17%, fewer students in the district, 79% of whom are black and 71% are considered at risk.

While EBR has a significantly large and rapidly rising at-risk student population, at least 23 other school districts have a larger proportion of these students. In fact, eight of these 23 also have larger at-risk and black student populations than EBR; however, the total student enrollment in all of these districts, with the exception of Orleans, is considerably smaller.

The demographic composition of EBR differs dramatically in comparison to its neighboring parishes, however. Ascension and Livingston rank the fourth and fifth lowest in the state, respectively, for their at-risk student populations, which are roughly 27 percentage points below that of EBR. (See Table 4.)

**Table 4. District Demographic Comparisons, 2004-05**

School District	Total Enrollment <sup>1</sup>	% At-Risk Students	% Black Students	% Students with Disabilities
EBR	46,408	71.3%	76.8%	12.1%
Ascension	16,363	44.3%	28.6%	13.4%
Livingston	21,397	44.5%	5.3%	11.2%
Caddo	43,524	58.6%	62.6%	12.1%
Jefferson	51,403	64.6%	52.0%	12.7%
State	724,002	61.6%	47.7%	12.7%

*Notes: (1) Includes total elementary and secondary public student enrollment.*

*Source: Louisiana Department of Education, 2004.*

## School and District Performance

Currently 12% of EBR's student population is classified as disabled. While this figure represents a sizable proportion of students, it is not unusual given the statewide trend. In fact, EBR's disabled student population is actually slightly lower than the state average as well as lower than Ascension.

The size and demographic composition of the EBR school district are most similar to Caddo and Jefferson. Caddo is slightly smaller than EBR and has a similarly sized black population, while Jefferson is slightly larger and has a similarly sized free or reduced lunch population. (See Table 4.)

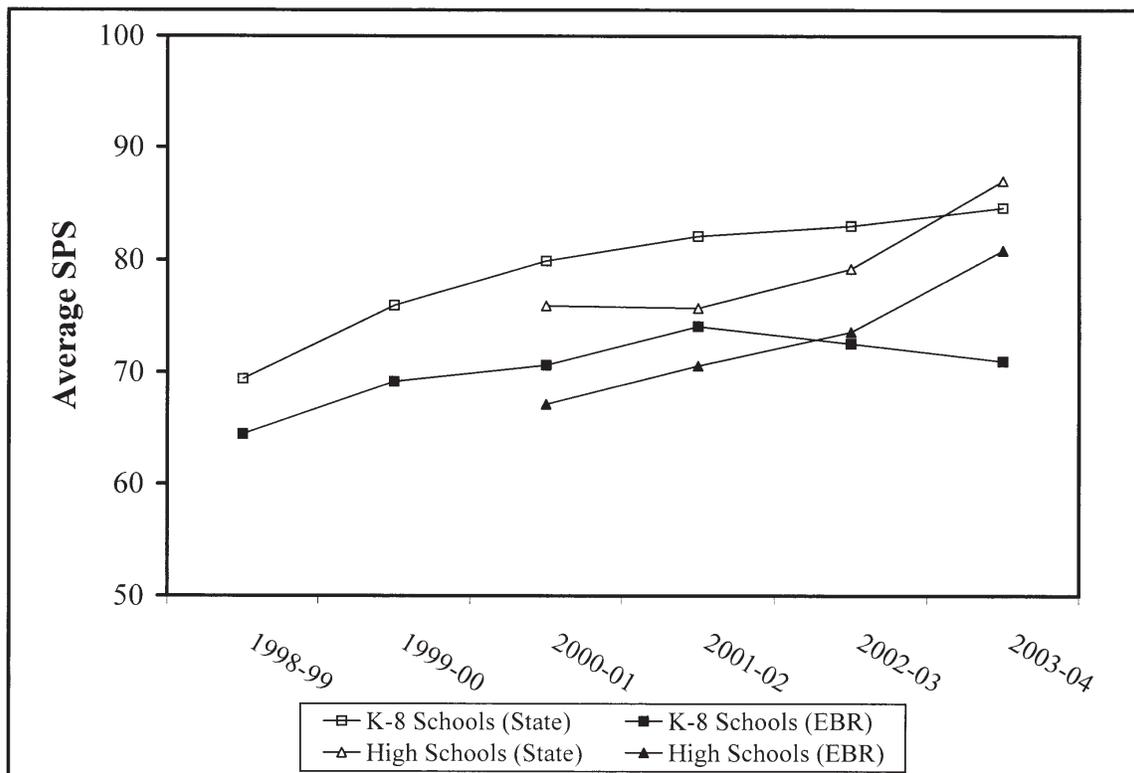
Finally, as the EBR student population has shifted so, too, has the racial makeup of the district's teaching corps. Since 1996-97, the year in which the Consent Decree was signed, EBR has cut 18.3% of its teachers. The proportion of white teachers has fallen from 63% to 57%, while the proportion of black teachers has risen from 37% to 43%. In total, the district lost roughly 700 teachers, 94% of whom were white and 6% of whom were black. During this same time period, the state as a whole lost only 1.2% of its teachers. Further, the racial mix of teachers statewide shifted only slightly from 73% white, 27% black in 1996-97 to 74% white, 26% black in 2003-04. In 2003-04, the proportion of white teachers in EBR was also significantly lower than in Ascension (81.5%), Livingston (97%) and Jefferson (78%) but was very similar to Caddo (66%).

The performance of EBR schools, as well as the district as a whole, has improved overall since the implementation of the state's education accountability program in 1999. The state goal is for all schools to reach a school performance score (SPS) of 120 by the 2013-14 school year. The average SPS for kindergarten through grade eight (K-8) schools in EBR increased five points from 1999, the first year of accountability, to 2004. Improvement at the high school level was far more dramatic, increasing 13.5 points from 2001, the first year of high school accountability, to 2004. (The district exhibited the same trends even when the Zachary and Baker schools were excluded from the analyses.)

Statewide, K-8 schools improved 15.2 points, or 22%, from 1999 to 2004. High schools improved 11.1 points, or 14.6%, from 2001 to 2004.

As seen in Figure 2, the initial spike in the average school performance score from 1999 to 2001 for K-8 schools in EBR followed the statewide trend. However, beginning in 2002, improvement in EBR began to regress, falling from an average school score of 74.1 back down to 70.9 in 2004, or roughly the same score the district had already reached in 2001. Thus while it appears EBR has kept up with the state trend at the high school level, it has fallen behind at both the elementary- and middle-school levels.

**Figure 2. School Performance Scores - EBR vs. State Averages, 1999-2004**



Source: Louisiana Department of Education, 1999-2004.

Note: High schools did not enter into the accountability system until 2000-01.

Part of this decline can possibly be attributed to the shifting demographics of the district. The percentage of at-risk students increased by twenty percentage points, from 51% in the 1998-99 school year to 72% in 2003-04; in contrast, the state average only increased four percentage points, from 58% to 62%. The percentage of black students also significantly increased over this five-year time period, rising from 66% to 76% of total student enrollment; statewide, the black student enrollment remained at 47%.

Under the state’s accountability system, schools that either meet or exceed their assigned growth targets are eligible for state rewards, while failing schools are subject to state- and/or federally mandated reforms, also known as “school improvement.” Schools in improvement level one must develop an improvement plan; in level two must offer school choice transfers; in level three must offer supplemental services, or free tutoring; and in level four or above are eligible for state takeover.

In 2003, 58 schools were placed in school improvement. The most current school performance scores released in the fall of 2004 reveal that 66% of EBR schools declined from 2003, while only 29 schools improved from the previous year. Sixty-five schools, or roughly four out of every five, were placed in some level of school improvement: 61 in level one; 2 in level two; 1 in level three; and 1 in level four. EBR makes up roughly 10% of the state’s schools identified for improvement and, proportionally, has more schools in improvement than any other district except for the City of Bogalusa. (See Table 5.)

EBR is also one among only nine districts in the state with one or more schools having reached school improvement level two or higher, or what is considered the more severe levels of improvement sanctions. In fact, only EBR and Orleans parishes have one or more schools currently eligible for takeover. The condition of EBR, however, is far less severe than that of Orleans. Only 5% of schools have reached school improvement level two or higher, and only one school, Prescott Middle, is currently eligible for takeover. In contrast, nearly half of all schools in Orleans Parish are in the more severe levels of improvement, and 14, or 12%, are eligible for takeover.

Districts are also held accountable for their overall performance and receive an annual district performance score (DPS). The DPS is simply the aggregation of all school performance scores across each district, by which districts are ranked each year.

EBR was ranked 52<sup>nd</sup> among 66 districts statewide in the spring of 2004 for its total performance. Its DPS was 71.5, nearly 10 points below the state average and a slight decline from 2002. In fact, it was among only three districts statewide, including Plaquemines Parish and the City of Monroe, to have declined from the previous school year.

EBR improved slightly with the spring 2005 release of the district performance scores but was still nearly 10 points below the state average, 25 points below Ascension and 34 points below Livingston. EBR was ranked 48<sup>th</sup> among the parishes for its one-year growth of 1.2 points but was ranked last for its two-year growth. Thus, the district’s recent improvement has simply

**Table 5. Comparison of District Performance, 2003-04**

School District	DPS <sup>1</sup>	Black/White Achievement Gap	Poverty Achievement Gap <sup>2</sup>	Education Type Achievement Gap <sup>3</sup>	% Schools in School Improvement
EBR	72.7	48.1	39.5	36.9	79.3%
Ascension	98.0	43.0	37.6	45.0	19.0%
Livingston	106.8	34.2	23.4	47.6	33.3%
Caddo	82.2	52.7	39.7	35.1	46.3%
Jefferson	74.2	30.2	16.3	39.7	59.5%
State	82.6	42.1	32.9	40.2	46.0%

Notes:

(1) District Performance Scores range from 0 to 150 and beyond.

(2) The difference in performance between students who pay for their lunch and those who receive free or reduced lunch.

(3) The difference in performance between regular education students and students with disabilities.

Source: Louisiana Department of Education, 2005.

served to gain back the ground it lost in the previous year, when its DPS dropped a point from 72.2 in 2002 to 71.5 in 2003.

NCLB requires the states to disaggregate testing data by student subgroups (e.g., race/ethnicity, poverty status and students with disabilities). Subgroup scores are calculated using a formula that is similar to the one used to calculate district performance scores. As seen in Table 5, the difference in performance, or achievement gap, between black and white students in EBR was 48.1 – up slightly from 47.4 in 2003, because white students showed slightly greater gains than black students in 2004. Although a 48-point achievement gap represents a huge academic divide between the races, it does not make EBR unique. The racial academic achievement gap for the state as a whole in 2004 was 42.1, with Ascension at 43.0 and Livingston at 34.2.

EBR also has a sizable poverty achievement gap, which measures the difference in performance between students who pay for their lunch and those who receive free or reduced lunch. The gap increased nearly five points, because the free/reduced lunch subgroup improved less than one point while the paid lunch subgroup improved nearly seven points. Again, however, EBR’s poverty gap was not significantly higher than the state average.

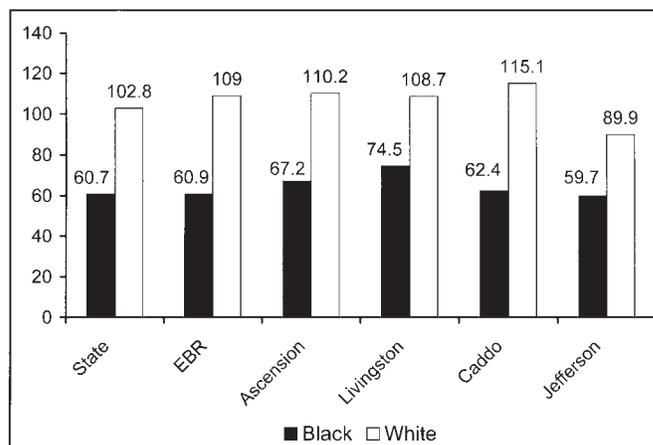
While the racial and poverty gaps increased from 2003 to 2004, the achievement gap between students enrolled in regular education classes and students with disabilities (SWD) decreased during this same period more than three points. In fact, the achievement gap in EBR was three points lower than the state average, eight points lower than Ascension and nearly 10 points lower than Livingston. This decrease occurred because the SWD subgroup gained nearly five points in one year alone.

Comparing only the size of the achievement gaps between the districts is somewhat misleading, however, because of the type of students within each district. Orleans Parish, for example, has the largest racial gap of 83.1 in the state; however, such a large gap exists because Orleans also has the best school in the state, a magnet program, as well as the worst performing school in the state. Likewise, white student enrollment in EBR’s magnet school program likely inflates the white student subgroup score for the district, thus creating a larger racial achievement gap than in other districts with smaller, or no magnet school programs.

Alternatively, subgroup performance scores across districts better describe the racial and poverty gaps. As seen in Figure 3, black subgroup performance in EBR is actually higher than both the state average and Jefferson and only slightly lower than Caddo. In fact, EBR’s white subgroup performance score falls less than two points short of Ascension and actually exceeds

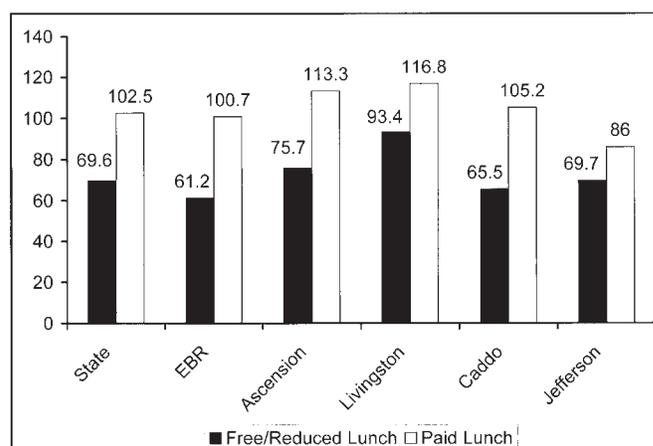
Livingston, which was ranked second in the state for its overall academic performance. However, as shown in Figure 4, the free/reduced lunch performance score in EBR still falls well below the state average as well as the rest of the districts.

**Figure 3. Black/White Achievement Gap**



Source: Louisiana Department of Education, 2005.

**Figure 4. Poverty Achievement Gap**



Source: Louisiana Department of Education, 2005.

Although overall gains in school performance have been made in EBR since the implementation of accountability, improvement at the lower grade levels has receded. And, while most student subgroups improved from the previous school year, vast achievement gaps are still evident. With the exception of students with disabilities, the racial and poverty achievement gaps increased in 2004 and still remain above the state and local averages.

EBR also continues to lag far behind its neighboring parishes, Ascension and Livingston, which both outperformed EBR on most measures of school, district and subgroup performance. At least part of this disparity, however, can be attributed to differences in district characteristics. Ascension and Livingston

have much smaller school systems with far fewer impoverished students. As noted above, the size and demographic composition of EBR is most similar to that of Caddo and Jefferson. When compared to these parishes, EBR appears to perform somewhat better.

## Student Achievement

NCLB requires all students to reach an academic achievement standard of “proficiency” by the 2013-14 school year. Louisiana defines proficient as the “basic” standard on its standards-based tests, the Louisiana Education Assessment Program (LEAP 21), administered in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades, and the General

elementary- and middle-school levels.

Students in EBR also generally tend to perform worse in comparison to their national peers. As compared to a national percentile rank of 50 on the Iowa tests (ITBS and ITED), EBR performed lower in all grades except in grade five in 2005. (See Table 7.) EBR also performed lower than the state average and significantly worse than Ascension, Livingston and Caddo. Its scores were most similar to Jefferson but were still lower in every grade except for grade nine. However, students enrolled in EBR’s within-school magnet programs, as reported earlier in this report (see Table 2), appear to perform similarly to students in Ascension and Livingston, on average.

**Table 6. Fewer Students are Proficient in EBR Than in the State, 2005\***

	% Proficient English/ Language Arts			% Proficient Mathematics		
	4th	8th	10th	4th	8th	10th
EBR	54%	40%	59%	51%	34%	55%
Ascension	68%	65%	69%	69%	70%	74%
Livingston	75%	66%	70%	73%	69%	74%
Caddo	64%	49%	62%	59%	44%	57%
Jefferson	60%	46%	56%	56%	43%	52%
State	64%	50%	62%	61%	51%	62%

\* Data are preliminary.

Note: All students are expected to reach “proficiency,” or the state’s basic standard, by the 2013-14 school year.

Source: Louisiana Department of Education, 2005.

Exit Exam (GEE), administered in the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grades. Basic is defined as the fundamental knowledge and skills necessary for the next level of schooling, and all students are expected to reach this standard in both English/language arts and mathematics by the 2013-14 school year.

As seen in Table 6, fewer than half of 8th-grade students in EBR were at the state’s basic standard in 2005. In fact, scores actually declined from the previous school year. Improvement in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade was mixed, while 4th-grade achievement increased significantly after a decline in the previous school year.

EBR student achievement fell far below the state average in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades and was substantially lower than Ascension and Livingston in all grades. Student achievement in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade, however, nearly reached the state average and even surpassed Jefferson. Although EBR has managed to keep up with the rest of the state by some measures, it has failed to do so at the

EBR high school students also score lower than their national counterparts on the ACT, a standardized test used to measure college readiness. In 2002, the average ACT score for EBR was at the state average but slightly below Ascension, Livingston and the national average. (See Figure 5.) EBR showed dramatic improvement in 2004 and grew at a rate five times that of the nation. The growth of EBR also outpaced that of Ascension and Livingston; however, its average composite score still fell below either of the two. As compared to Caddo and Jefferson, EBR had a significantly higher average ACT score than Jefferson but slightly lower score than Caddo. Students in EBR are still below their national counterparts, though the district has managed to close this gap by two-tenths of a point since 2000.

**Table 7. EBR Students Score Below State and National Peers on 2005 Iowa Tests\***

School District	Grade 3	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 9
EBR	46	52	37	42	47
Ascension	65	64	54	56	58
Livingston	69	69	59	62	58
Caddo	56	62	43	49	50
Jefferson	50	52	39	44	44
State Average	57	59	47	49	49

\*Data are reported in percentile rankings. A rank of 50 means that the average score in that category is equal to or better than 50% of students in the same grade nationally.

Source: Louisiana Department of Education, 2005.

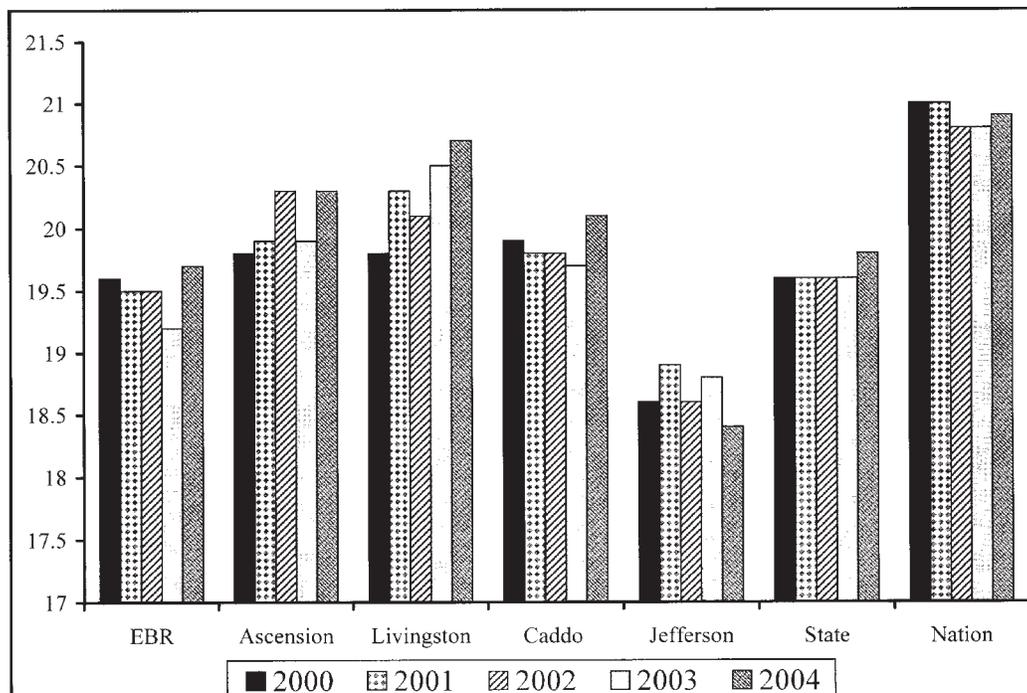
Another measure of student performance shows slightly more high school graduates qualified for and participated in TOPS in EBR than in most other school districts in the state. TOPS is Louisiana’s merit-based scholarship program that pays for in-state college tuition. In order to qualify for TOPS, students must earn a 2.5 grade-point average, a 20 on the ACT and 16.5 college-prep units.

In 2003, EBR ranked 7<sup>th</sup> highest in the state for the percentage of its graduates who were eligible to receive TOPS and the percentage who enrolled in college in the fall. As seen in Table 8, the percentage of TOPS participants in EBR exceeded the state average and was higher than the percentages of Ascension, Caddo and Jefferson. EBR fell short of Livingston in 2003 but surpassed it in 2004 for the percentage of graduates who

had taken the TOPS core curriculum.

Despite EBR’s relatively high student participation in the TOPS core curriculum, there is a large and growing gap between those taking the core and those who are ultimately deemed eligible to receive TOPS. Presumably, this is because students cannot meet the ACT requirements. In 2003, EBR ranked 28<sup>th</sup> highest in the state for the 20% of its graduates who took the core but were ineligible to receive TOPS. The gap increased to 25% in 2004, moving EBR up to the state average and to the ranking of 19<sup>th</sup> highest among the districts. The most extreme example, however, is Orleans Parish. Seventy-percent of students took the core in 2004, yet only 31% qualified for TOPS. These disparities may reflect a serious lack of rigor at the high school level both within as well as across the districts.

**Figure 5. District Comparison of ACT Scores, 2000-2004**



Source: Louisiana Department of Education, 2000-2004.

**Table 8. More EBR Graduates Qualify for and Participate in TOPS, 2003**

	# H.S. Graduates	% TOPS Core	% Eligible	% Enrolled in Fall 2003
EBR	4,227	59%	39%	35%
Ascension	866	51%	32%	29%
Livingston	1,078	62%	42%	38%
Caddo	2,774	39%	24%	21%
Jefferson	3,470	61%	31%	28%
State	45,226	56%	33%	29%

Source: Louisiana Board of Regents, 2004.

### Teacher Quality

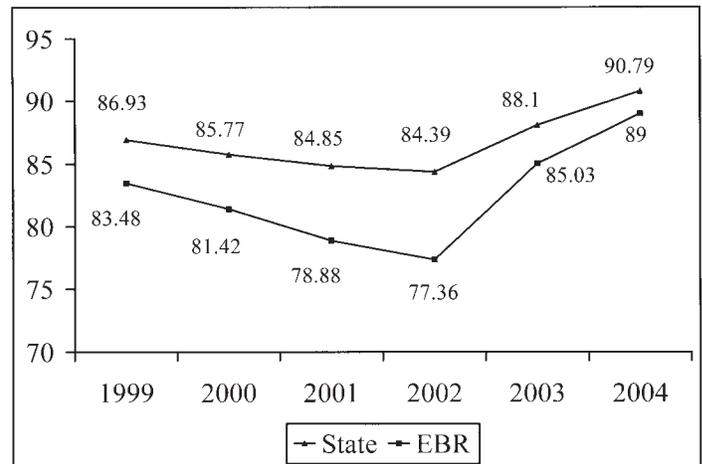
Teacher quality in EBR, as measured by teacher certification, has generally followed the statewide trend, steadily declining before eventually improving in the last two years. EBR ranks in the bottom half of parishes for its proportion of certified teachers and still lags nearly eight percentage points behind Ascension and Livingston, which rank at 4<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> highest in the state, respectively. (See Figure 6.)

EBR also falls short at 84% for the total number of classes taught by a “highly qualified” teacher. Federal accountability mandates require that, by the 2005-06 school year, all teachers be highly qualified, or have a bachelor’s degree, state certification and subject-area competency in core subject areas (e.g., English, reading/language arts and math). While EBR is only slightly below the state average, it is again significantly lower than Ascension and Livingston. (See Table 9.)

A large variance in teacher quality is also evident within the district. Between its high and low poverty schools is a gap of nearly seven-percentage points in the number of classes taught by a highly qualified teacher. High poverty schools in EBR tend to have fewer qualified teachers than low poverty schools. However, this trend appears to run across all of the parishes and is not unique to EBR.

Although EBR is most similar to Caddo and Jefferson, it still has fewer qualified teachers than either of the two. EBR falls below both parishes in its proportion of certified teachers as well as its total number of classes taught by a highly qualified teacher. However, the teacher-quality gap in EBR between its high and low poverty schools was slightly smaller than in either Caddo or Jefferson.

**Figure 6. Teacher Certification in EBR Falls Below State Average, 1999-2004**



Source: Louisiana Department of Education, 2004.

### District Resources

The level of spending in EBR is higher than most other districts in the state. In 2003-04, the average per-pupil expenditure was \$8,219, nearly \$1,000 more than the state average of \$7,248. EBR spent significantly more than its neighboring parishes, Ascension (\$7,198) and Livingston (\$6,045). In fact, Livingston ranked the second lowest in the state for its spending, which was nearly \$2,200 less than EBR. As compared to Caddo (\$7,444) and Jefferson (\$7,061), districts with similar student demographics, EBR still spent more.

EBR ranks 19<sup>th</sup> highest in the state for its average teacher pay. In 2003-04, EBR teachers earned, on average, \$38,627, or roughly \$700 more than the state average. Although teacher pay in EBR is higher than in two-thirds of districts in the state, including Jefferson and Orleans, it is significantly lower than in its suburban parishes. Teachers in EBR receive, on average, \$2,000 less than teachers in Livingston and Ascension. The challenge of attracting and retaining qualified teachers is difficult enough for EBR, particularly given its history of racial tension, poor academic performance and rapidly increasing at-risk student population. With a disparity in teacher pay so large, it makes it nearly impossible for the district to compete with Ascension and Livingston, districts that both already outperform EBR in nearly every measure of district performance.

### Innovative Changes

Some promising innovations for improving the academic performance of the district are currently taking place. In December 2003, former EBR Parish Superintendent Clayton Wilcox created the Pathways for





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