

# GulfGov Reports: Education

## An Examination of the Impact of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita on the Public School Districts in 15 Communities



School district field research sites shown on the map above.

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Public Affairs Research  
Council of Louisiana

**Principal Author:  
Karen Rowley**

***Special Projects Manager,  
Public Affairs Research  
Council of Louisiana***



**The Nelson A. Rockefeller  
Institute of Government**

### School District Field Researchers

#### Louisiana

**Daryl V. Burckel** — Cameron Parish & Calcasieu Parish (City of Lake Charles)

*Professor of Accounting, Department of Accounting, Economics, and Finance, McNeese State University*

**Rachel L. Emanuel** — St. Bernard Parish & St. Tammany Parish  
*Director of Publications and Electronic Media, Southern University Law Center*

**Michael M. Kurth** — Cameron Parish & Calcasieu Parish (City of Lake Charles)  
*Head, Department of Accounting, Economics, and Finance, McNeese State University*

**Emily Metzgar** — Orleans Parish (City of New Orleans)  
*Independent Contractor/Doctoral Student/Adjunct Instructor,anship School of Mass Communication, Louisiana State University*

**Karen Rowley** — East Baton Rouge Parish  
*Special Projects Manager, Public Affairs Research Council of Louisiana*

**Carlos A. Thomas** — Jefferson Parish  
*Research Manager, Louisiana Family Recovery Corps*

#### Mississippi

**Harvey Johnson Jr.** — Cities of Hattiesburg & Laurel  
*Visiting Professor, College of Business, Center for Urban Planning and Policy Assessment, Jackson State University*

**LaNell Kellum** — Bay St. Louis/Waveland (Hancock County), Biloxi & Gulfport (Harrison County) & Pascagoula (Jackson County)

*Senior Research Associate, Stennis Institute of Government, Mississippi State University*

**L. Frances P. Liddell** — City of Jackson  
*Interim Chair, Department of Public Policy and Administration, Center for Urban Planning and Policy Assessment, Jackson State University*

#### Alabama

**Ty Keller** — Mobile County (Cities of Mobile & Bayou La Batre)  
*Senior Research Associate, Emeritus, Public Affairs Research Council of Louisiana*

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Public Affairs Research Council of Louisiana  
4664 Jamestown Avenue, Suite 300  
Baton Rouge, LA 70808-4776  
[www.la-par.org](http://www.la-par.org)

The Nelson A. Rockefeller Institute of Government  
411 State Street  
Albany, New York 12203-1003  
[www.rockinst.org](http://www.rockinst.org)

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# GulfGov Reports: Education **An Examination of the Impact of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita on the Public School Districts in 15 Communities**

## **Overview Analysis**

**H**urricanes Katrina and Rita wreaked havoc not only on the Gulf Coast region, but on every aspect of community life. Among the most affected areas were public school systems. Existing problems and concerns were magnified in the aftermath of the storms, while new problems emerged. As Katrina and Rita bore down on Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama, school officials from Cameron Parish in Louisiana to Mobile County in Alabama shut down their districts and prepared to ride out the storms.

For some of the districts that are the focus of this study, the closure was short-lived — one to two weeks. For others, reopening was delayed by a month or two, and one newly created district did not start operations until the 2006-2007 school year. Despite the fact that all of the districts in this study are up and running, challenges for school officials continue.

Financial stability both in the immediate aftermath of the storms and today is one of the primary issues with which officials have had to contend. The length of time it takes to receive FEMA and insurance reimbursements is one aspect. Uncertain state funding in Louisiana where the money follows the student is another, while in Mississippi, devastated local tax bases have severely diminished school districts' finances. Adding to the financial woes have been the rising cost of construction and the problem of finding affordable insurance. District officials also have been faced with the challenge of replacing large amounts of classroom furniture, textbooks, computers, athletic equipment, and other essential school supplies all at once.

Another concern for school officials has been the uncertainty surrounding enrollment numbers. In Louisiana, in particular, where the displaced population is still very mobile, officials have struggled to come up with reasonably accurate projections for how many students they will have. Enrollment, in turn, affects officials' decisions on how to proceed with repairs and rebuilding, how many teachers and staff to hire, and where exactly to place students.

Then there is New Orleans, where one of the biggest experiments in education is taking place in a system that has been splintered into two public school districts and an assortment of charter schools, along with the numerous Catholic and private schools that existed prior to Katrina. Essentially, the pre-existing Orleans Parish School Board has been relegated to overseeing five public schools and 12 charter schools, while state-level officials struggle to construct an entirely new entity — the Recovery School District — which consists of 21 public schools and 17 charter schools at the moment. In a parish where little is certain, the

only thing school officials know for sure is that students are re-enrolling at a rate that ranges from 75 to 300 a week and the RSD is fighting to keep up.

This report is part of the ongoing *GulfGov Reports* research project conducted by the Public Affairs Research Council of Louisiana and the Nelson A. Rockefeller Institute of Government under a grant provided by the Ford Foundation. The multi-year study is tracking the progress and recovery of several communities across Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama. In the initial *GulfGov Reports* study, which was released Aug. 22, 2006, one of the most notable findings was the range of damage and recovery in the affected communities and the natural separation of these communities into three distinct categories:

- A. Areas that are struggling** — New Orleans (Orleans Parish) and Cameron and St. Bernard parishes in Louisiana; Hancock (Waveland and Bay St. Louis) and Harrison (Biloxi and Gulfport) counties in Mississippi; and Bayou La Batre in Alabama
- B. Areas that are rebounding** — Lake Charles (Calcasieu Parish) and Jefferson Parish in Louisiana; Jackson County (Pascagoula) in Mississippi; and Mobile (Mobile County in Alabama)
- C. Areas that are growing** — East Baton Rouge and St. Tammany parishes in Louisiana; Jackson, Hattiesburg, and Laurel in Mississippi; and Gulf Shores in Alabama

One of the most visible signs of an area's recovery after a catastrophic event is the state of its public school system. When the school system is functioning, it gives both children and parents a sense of normalcy in at least one aspect of their lives. Such has been the case with the areas affected by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

In this special interim report, *GulfGov Reports* looks at the impact of the hurricanes on 15 communities. The school districts are parish and county wide in Louisiana and Mississippi. (In Louisiana, counties are called parishes.) In Mississippi, the school districts examined are all city districts. Specifically, the study examines systems in Calcasieu, Cameron, East Baton Rouge, Jefferson, Orleans, St. Bernard, and St. Tammany parishes in Louisiana; Bay St. Louis/Waveland, Biloxi, Gulfport, Jackson, Hattiesburg, Laurel, and Pascagoula in Mississippi; and Mobile County in Alabama. For a look at the specific numbers through the end of 2006, see Tables 1, 2, and 3. Table 1 shows the percentage change in enrollment each of the districts experienced between the 2004-2005 school year and the current school year. With the exception of two of the districts, all of the others have suffered a decline in enrollment. Table 2 shows the effect of the storms on the number of schools each district is able to operate, and Table 3 looks at the impact of the storms on the operating budgets of the districts that make up this study. Here again, with the exception of one district, every other district has seen its operating budget increase, and nine have experienced double-digit percentage increases in their budgets.

The data for this study were collected by 10 field researchers from a variety of sources, including state Department of Education records, local school district records, published reports, and interviews with officials in the affected districts.

<b>Table 1. Student Enrollment</b>				
	<i>2004-2005</i>	<i>2005-2006</i>	<i>2006-2007</i>	<i>% change from 04-05 to 06-07</i>
St. Bernard Parish, LA	8,800	2,350	3,750	-57.4%
Orleans Parish, LA (includes RSD & OPSB) <sup>1</sup>	60,000	12,000	27,420	-54.3%
Bay St. Louis/Waveland, MS	2,383	1,441	1,624	-31.9%
Biloxi, MS	6,305	5,244	4,711	-25.3%
Jefferson Parish, LA	52,367	41,671	41,232	-21.3%
Cameron Parish, LA	1,844	1,512	1,567	-15.1%
Gulfport, MS	6,291	4,326	5,480	-12.9%
Pascagoula, MS	7,559	6,748	6,965	-7.9%
Mobile County, AL	67,747	65,344	64,481	-4.9%
Hattiesburg, MS	4,620	4,494	4,469	-3.3%
St. Tammany Parish, LA	36,169	34,971	35,294	-2.5%
Calcasieu Parish, LA	31,622	30,491	31,375	-0.8%
Laurel, MS	3,004	3,033	2,991	-0.4%
Jackson, MS	31,656	32,345	31,832	0.6%
East Baton Rouge Parish, LA	45,266	46,459	49,021	8.3%
1 RSD : Recovery School District OPSB: Orleans Parish School Board				

<b>Table 2. Number of Schools Open</b>				
	<i>2004-2005</i>	<i>2005-2006</i>	<i>2006-2007</i>	<i>% change from 04-05 to 06-07</i>
St. Bernard Parish, LA	15	1	3	-80.0%
Orleans Parish, LA (includes RSD, OPSB, charter schools) <sup>1</sup>	128	25	57	-55.5%
Cameron Parish, LA	6	4	4	-33.4%
Biloxi, MS	11	9	9	-18.2%
Pascagoula, MS	17	15	15	-11.8%
Gulfport, MS	10	9	9	-10.0%
Jefferson Parish, LA	85	81	81	-4.8%
East Baton Rouge Parish, LA	87	88	91	4.5%
St. Tammany Parish, LA	51	52	52	2.0%
Bay St. Louis/Waveland, MS*	5	5	5	0.0%
Calcasieu Parish, LA	58	58	58	0.0%
Hattiesburg, MS	10	10	10	0.0%
Jackson, MS	59	59	59	0.0%
Laurel, MS	6	6	6	0.0%
Mobile County, AL	100	100	100	0.0%
<p>1 RSD : Recovery School District  OPSB: Orleans Parish School Board  * The district's elementary schools and central office are all in mobile units.</p>				



<b>Table 3. School District Operating Budgets</b>				
	<i>2004-2005</i>	<i>2005-2006</i>	<i>2006-2007</i>	<i>% change from 04-05 to 06-07</i>
St. Bernard Parish, LA	\$57,307,686	\$59,840,926	\$35,261,233	-38.5%
Gulfport, MS	\$53,143,979	\$76,540,744	\$73,307,698	37.9%
Hattiesburg, MS	\$47,148,918	\$50,386,071	\$63,369,904	34.4%
Biloxi, MS	\$59,429,696	\$67,671,777	\$75,379,722	26.8%
Laurel, MS	\$35,649,714	\$42,136,983	\$43,413,558	21.8%
Pascagoula, MS	\$67,670,673	\$70,892,410	\$80,290,753	18.6%
Orleans Parish, LA Total	\$430,200,000	\$235,195,090	\$509,409,296	18.4%
RSD <sup>1</sup>			\$286,495,220	
OPSB <sup>1</sup>			\$222,914,076	
East Baton Rouge Parish, LA	\$290,381,759	\$325,161,863	\$341,639,776	17.7%
Mobile County, AL	\$469,200,000	\$522,200,000	\$540,000,000	15.1%
St. Tammany Parish, LA	\$272,844,089	\$354,063,695	\$308,822,627	13.2%
Jefferson Parish, LA	\$319,383,759	\$330,081,321	\$351,000,000	9.9%
Jackson, MS	\$194,762,746	\$208,025,427	\$213,066,759	9.4%
Calcasieu Parish, LA	\$205,926,929	\$217,692,119	\$224,380,979	9.0%
Cameron Parish, LA	\$17,318,845	\$25,996,999	\$18,776,413	8.4%
Bay St. Louis/ Waveland, MS	\$18,562,451	\$19,000,000	\$20,000,000	7.8%
1 RSD : Recovery School District OPSB: Orleans Parish School Board				

## A. AREAS THAT ARE STRUGGLING

### 1. Orleans Parish, Louisiana

*Of the 128 schools operated by the Orleans Parish School Board prior to Katrina, only the eight located across the Mississippi River on the west bank of the parish escaped with minimal damage. The others were flooded — along with the rest of the parish — when several levees gave way. Troubled and dysfunctional before the storm, the district now is fragmented into two public school systems, an assortment of charter schools, and numerous private and parochial schools. 2004-2005 enrollment: 60,000; 2006-2007 enrollment: 27,420.*

Not surprisingly, school officials face some of their greatest challenges in Orleans Parish. While the city was still drying out, the Louisiana Legislature voted in a special legislative session in November 2005 to authorize the state to take control of 107 of the Orleans Parish School Board's 128 schools. Prior to Hurricane Katrina, the New Orleans district was in disarray, with most of its schools designated as failing. Numerous attempts over the past few decades to effect meaningful reforms had met with open hostility and outright resistance from officials, and most students lagged far behind state and national achievement norms. The district's financial state was abysmal, and the outside firm hired by the state to figure things out found district officials could not account for millions of dollars in funding or numerous employees supposedly on the payroll.

More than one education expert suggested the best course of action was simply to "blow up" the system and start over, but few took the sentiment seriously. Then Katrina intervened, and the OPSB found itself having to deal with the same issues of damage and diaspora as the municipal communities around it. Only eight of the district's school sites escaped relatively undamaged. Those schools, which were on the west bank of the Mississippi River in the city of Algiers, reopened in December 2005 under the auspices of the Algiers Charter Schools Association.

The rest of the district was effectively dismantled when state legislators pushed through measures to hand control of the majority of the system's other schools over to the state Department of Education. The department created a new district — the Recovery School District — whose officials spent 2005-2006 overseeing repairs to those buildings that could be salvaged, hiring faculty and staff, and creating an operating structure. In September 2006, the RSD opened 17 schools; as of February 2007, that number had risen to 21.

The Orleans Parish School Board, which retained control of five schools, fired almost all of its teachers and staff and did not reopen until the spring of 2006. By the end of July 2006, OPSB officials said, the district was operating five schools and 12 charter schools.

In addition, the state contracted with both private groups and with universities to set up charter schools under the auspices of the RSD. The Orleans Parish School Board also set up contracts with various groups to

run charter schools. As of August 2006, 31 charter schools were operating in the parish. Seventeen were under the jurisdiction of the RSD, including six run by the Algiers Charter Schools Association and two run by the University of New Orleans. Twelve were under the jurisdiction of the OPSB, including two in the Algiers Charter Schools Association. The Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) also operates two charter schools independently of either the RSD or the OPSB. In the fall of 2007, nine more charter schools could open after BESE gave its approval earlier this year.

In the current school year, Orleans Parish continues to struggle with a fractured public education system. Families living in or returning to the parish must choose from public schools run by the Recovery School District or the Orleans Parish School Board, or from a multitude of charter schools. The information parents need to make their decisions is difficult to obtain, because there is no central place for them to go.

Further, demand for enrollment far outstrips supply, and more students are returning to the parish every day. Only the RSD is required to take every student who wants to enroll, and at one point, the district started a waiting list because students were returning faster than it could find space for them. The waiting list had grown to 300 by February 2007 when the district opened two more schools. Although the RSD has resolved the capacity problem for the moment, officials indicated that they expect student enrollment to keep increasing as more families return to the city. Adding to their concern are plans by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and the Housing Authority of New Orleans to bring back 1,300 families by the spring of 2007 and 2,200 more families by December 2008, which will further increase demand. Officials with the OPSB or the various charter schools also have not offered to increase their class sizes to help take some of the extra load. Only the Archdiocese of New Orleans has said that it would work to find a space for every child in need and that it would make accommodations if parents could not afford the tuition.

Compounding the problem for the RSD is a severe teacher shortage. The RSD does not have nearly enough teachers to match the current demand, and it is having tremendous difficulty in recruiting faculty. Conditions in the city also have added to the district's woes. Housing is in short supply, infrastructure is still fragile, and the crime problem has stymied local officials. Even if the RSD could hire all the teachers it needs, it does not have the facilities to accommodate additional students at the moment. Most of the school buildings not already in use by the RSD have been deemed unsalvageable as a result of decades of neglect by the Orleans Parish School Board and the damage caused by Katrina, and there is limited acreage available on which to build new schools.

All told, 57 public schools in Orleans Parish are serving 28,328 students in the current school year, down markedly from the nearly 60,000 students enrolled in the district pre-Katrina. However, more construction is planned or under way, and officials are looking to add 14,916 seats primarily through the use of modular buildings. Moreover, officials with both the Recovery School District and the Orleans Parish School Board have begun work on a joint Facility Master Plan. The two are seeking bids right now for a company to oversee the project. The work will entail holding a series of public meetings to gather community input, projecting the city's re-population pattern, and evaluating the state of school district property. The ultimate goal of the project is to provide a blueprint for officials to follow as they reopen schools. In another project, the New York-based group New Leaders for New Schools has announced an initiative to recruit and train 40 school principals for New Orleans over the next four years, which should help ease some of the staffing problems.

## 2. Cameron Parish, Louisiana

*Hurricane Rita leveled this southwestern Louisiana parish, forcing school officials to consolidate the number of schools from six to four and find alternative sites to house the campuses. Still, district rebuilding is progressing and student enrollment numbers are 85 percent of what they were before the storm. 2004-2005 enrollment: 1,844; 2006-2007 enrollment: 1,567.*

Prior to Hurricane Rita, Cameron Parish had a substantial tax base relative to its population; its teachers were paid well and it had modern school facilities. There were six school campuses, many with multi-purpose buildings and recreational facilities that allowed them to be the center of social activity in their communities. The parish operated two K-7 elementary schools and four K-12 schools. Cameron Elementary, South Cameron Elementary, and South Cameron High School were destroyed by Rita; the schools in Johnson Bayou were significantly damaged and could not be occupied, while the Hackberry and Grand Lake schools were operational but sustained extensive damage totaling \$6.2 million.

For 2006-2007, the Cameron Parish School Board is operating four school sites instead of the six prior to the storm. Almost all of the schools are using temporary buildings while renovations and rebuilding take place. The schools also have returned to a regular five-day week schedule. Although enrollment is down, all teachers and staff have been retained, allowing for smaller classes. The School Board hopes to complete repairs to the Johnson Bayou schools by April 2007 and to complete construction of a new K-12 campus in the town of Creole to replace Cameron Elementary, South Cameron Elementary, and South Cameron High by fall 2009.

Enrollment has declined from 1,844 students in 2004-2005 to 1,567 for the current year. This is significant since enrollment in 2005-2006 began with 1,910 students, a 3.5 percent increase. However, post-hurricane the enrollment dropped to 1,512, a 20.8 percent decline. Teacher positions have declined by 13 since the storm but remain at a stable level for the current school year. Finally, the operating budget has remained stable since Hurricane Rita and is actually up compared to 2004-2005.

## 3. St. Bernard Parish, Louisiana

*Virtually every structure in this parish was flooded during Katrina, leaving school district officials scrambling to find some way to reopen for the 2005-2006 school year. Against all odds, they succeeded by slashing the number of schools from 15 to one that housed all grades and by reopening in trailers set up on the football field of one of the high schools. 2004-2005 enrollment: 8,800; 2006-2007 enrollment: 3,750.*

Prior to Hurricane Katrina, the St. Bernard Parish School District comprised 15 public school sites, serving almost 9,000 students in pre-kindergarten through 12th grade. All of the district's schools were damaged by the storm, and the district remained closed until Nov. 14, 2005, when it opened one unified school site serving pre-K-12. In 2004-2005, the system served approximately 8,800 students. When

classrooms were opened in trailers on the football field at Chalmette High School in November 2005, roughly 330 students had returned. About 650 were enrolled by December 2005, 1,500 returned for the 2006 spring semester, and by the end of 2005-2006, 2,350 students were enrolled. For 2006-2007, the district was able to open two schools — an elementary and a high school — in August. A third school — for special needs students — opened in February 2007. Currently, about 3,750 students, or 42 percent of the pre-Katrina number, are enrolled.

Still, while school officials are doing their best to provide a “normal” educational environment for students, the fact is that little else is normal for them. The district has set up a counseling program with the help of the LSU Health Sciences Center and the Tulane University/Children’s Health Fund. In addition, all students have been declared homeless and are eligible for free lunches. The system also has added free after-school programs so students will have more time with planned, constructive activities before going home to FEMA trailers and debris-filled neighborhoods.

Approximately 300 of the district’s pre-Katrina total of 1,200 employees have returned to work. The majority have left the area. Despite this, district officials believe they have adequate faculty and staff for 2006-2007, although there is a lack of certified teachers in such areas as special education, mathematics, and science.

The cost to rebuild the district’s schools is estimated at approximately \$22 million, with the expectation that FEMA will pay 90 percent and the parish share will be 10 percent. The state of Louisiana already has indicated that it will provide the funds for the 10 percent share. The St. Bernard system also has lost a majority of its state funding, which followed its displaced students to other districts, as well as most of its tax base. Additional money will come through some newly funded federal grant programs, such as the Emergency Impact Aid to Displaced Students and Restart Funding. The district also has received a federal Community Disaster Loan to assist with operational expenses.

#### 4. Bay St. Louis/Waveland, Mississippi

*The combined school district serves the cities of Bay St. Louis and Waveland on the western end of the Mississippi Gulf Coast. This area of the Mississippi coast bore the brunt of Katrina’s fury with the storm surge reaching some 30 feet. 2004-2005 enrollment: 2,383; 2006-2007 enrollment: 1,624.*

All of the Bay St. Louis/Waveland School District’s facilities sustained severe to catastrophic damage, and when officials reopened schools on Nov. 7, 2005, it was with the use of portable classrooms, including tents, and the eBus, which is a mobile educational facility overseen by the Pearson Foundation. Student enrollment plummeted after Katrina hit, with only 30 percent of the pre-Katrina population of 2,383 returning when the district reopened. In the current school year, enrollment is up to 59 percent of what it was prior to the storm, and district officials report that more students are returning every day.

Ninety-six percent of the district's students now qualify for the federal free and reduced-price lunch program. Prior to the storm, only 60 percent qualified. The stress of the ongoing recovery is tremendous, both on students and staff, so the district has placed a counselor at each school and has contracted with a private licensed psychologist for staff counseling.

In terms of facility repair, the district has repaired its middle school. However, it is going to have to rebuild two elementary schools and is still working to repair part of the high school. The best estimates to date show that the district's overall recovery effort may require more than \$40 million. Local revenue has decreased by at least 50 percent, creating strained budgets and overall belt tightening. The district's tax revenue is projected to be 50 percent to 65 percent less than in previous years, and until families rebuild and businesses reopen, the local revenues will be insufficient to meet budgetary needs.

The district acquired a \$10 million loan from the Mississippi Development Bank so schools could reopen and is currently operating with \$3.7 million from FEMA, \$5 million from insurance companies, and \$13 million from the U.S. Department of Education. Despite this, the district still will be \$14 million to \$17 million shy of what it needs to recover.

## 5. Biloxi, Mississippi

*This school district was among the better-funded districts along the coast, thanks to a steady stream of gaming revenue. Katrina temporarily cut off that source of revenue when it shut down all 12 Gulf Coast casinos, and the Biloxi district had to tap into its reserves to keep operating. With many of the casinos back in operation and more scheduled to open, the revenue crunch for the district is easing somewhat. 2004-2005 enrollment: 6,305; 2006-2007 enrollment: 4,711.*

The Biloxi School District reopened nine of its 11 schools on Sept. 26, 2005, barely a month after Katrina devastated the Mississippi Gulf Coast. The other two schools were closed until December 2006 as they underwent major repairs. Enrollment in the district remains significantly below pre-Katrina levels, dropping from 6,300 students to about 4,711 this year. The numbers do not tell the whole story, however. Repopulation patterns in Biloxi vary markedly, with only about half of the students who used to live in East Biloxi having returned, for example. Elsewhere in the city, the schools have regained nearly 90 percent of their enrollment levels. As a result, the Biloxi School Board is considering closing one of the elementary schools in East Biloxi for the next school year.

Damages to district facilities totaled about \$23 million. The district did not have flood insurance; however, after the storm, officials purchased the maximum coverage (\$500,000) from the National Flood Insurance Program for two of its elementary schools at a cost of \$4,000. The district was unable to obtain excess flood coverage for the remaining \$10 million in value of the two schools. Instead, the district was given a waiver from the state insurance commissioner and FEMA relaxed the requirement for the coverage on the two schools. The district will have to prove to the insurance commissioner annually that the excess flood coverage is either unavailable or prohibitively expensive, or FEMA will require the district to obtain it. The district's wind storm premium did not change between the 2005-2006 and 2006-2007 school years

because the rate increase went into effect after the policy was renewed. However, based on a 281 percent increase, the wind storm coverage for 2007-2008 will rise from \$125,936 to \$353,880 a year. Since the wind storm policy only covers the district for about \$11 million, \$100 million in excess coverage must be purchased through the open market. The premium for that amount of coverage rose 311 percent from \$324,830 in 2005-2006 to \$1.3 million in 2006-2007.

The district's budget went from \$65.7 million in 2005-2006 to \$75.4 million in 2006-2007, so in a financial sense things are stable. In addition, the district had some cash reserves built up before the storm, as well as a rider on the City of Biloxi's "Business Interruption Insurance" policy, which allowed it to recoup nearly \$3 million in lost casino revenues. FEMA also has provided \$61.1 million to help rebuild schools in Harrison County, which is home to both Biloxi and Gulfport.

## 6. Gulfport, Mississippi

*The district reopened less than a month after Katrina hit, with the most significant damage occurring to one elementary school and the district's technology center, which was located on the beach. Enrollment prior to Katrina ranged between 6,000 and 6,500. Immediately after the storm, it dropped to 4,326; however, this year enrollment is returning to pre-Katrina levels. Among officials' immediate concerns is the city's diminished tax base, which provides the bulk of the district's revenue. 2004-2005 enrollment: 6,291; 2006-2007 enrollment: 5,480.*

The Gulfport School District also was able to reopen on Sept. 26, 2005. High school students went back first, and then all other students returned a week later. In terms of facilities, the most significant damage occurred to one of the district's elementary schools and to its technology center, which was located on the beach. The loss of the technology center meant that to complete all of its post-Katrina reports, district staff had to pull hard copies of records and tabulate the data by hand. In addition, teachers and staff lost access to the state's student level database system, which is used to track attendance, test scores, discipline, contact information, student schedules, personnel data, and other information.

Enrollment in the district's schools prior to Katrina ranged between 6,000 and 6,500. Immediately after the storm, enrollment dropped to 4,326, and this year it is returning to pre-Katrina levels, with about 5,480 students enrolled as of November 2006.

Since the district's facilities suffered minimal damage, officials' immediate concerns are focused on the city's tax base and the personal losses suffered by students, faculty, and staff. For instance, most of the district's losses involving textbooks, band uniforms, instruments, etc., occurred because those items were in students' homes. Through donations and other means, the district has managed to find replacements for most of these items, although the high cost of textbooks has been a strain. The district was well-insured before the storm, which has helped with the damage expenses it has incurred.

## B. AREAS THAT ARE REBOUNDED

### 1. Jefferson Parish, Louisiana

*The Jefferson Parish School System sustained significant damage to 70 of its 85 buildings in Hurricane Katrina. Enrollment, when the district reopened five weeks later, was about 54 percent of its pre-storm level. Prior to Katrina, the Jefferson Parish district was the second-largest school district in the state after the Orleans Parish district. Today it remains the No. 2 district in size, behind the East Baton Rouge Parish School System. 2004-2005 enrollment: 52,367; 2006-2007 enrollment: 41,232.*

Jefferson Parish avoided much of the flooding that devastated the New Orleans metropolitan area. However, the parish did sustain substantial wind damage from Hurricane Katrina. After residents were allowed back into the New Orleans metro area, repopulation patterns were varied. While significant proportions of the “original” (pre-Katrina) residents of Jefferson Parish did not return, residents from nearby parishes (Orleans, St. Bernard, and Plaquemines) filled the population gaps by seeking refuge in Jefferson, often with family members. Thus, the decrease in students who resided in Jefferson Parish before Hurricane Katrina was made up by the influx of students from nearby parishes afterward.

A survey of school buildings immediately after Hurricane Katrina revealed that 70 out of the 85 school buildings sustained significant damage, with four of them sustaining catastrophic damage. However, five weeks after Katrina, the district reopened on Oct. 3 with an enrollment of about 28,000, down from 52,367. For this school year, 41,232 students are enrolled, and the district is slowly moving back toward its pre-Katrina size.

During 2005-2006, the system experienced tremendous financial pressure from lowered student enrollment, reduced state financing, and uncertainties in sales tax revenue. However, attrition through voluntary retirements, resignations, leaves-of-absence, and hiring and promotion freezes, as well as moratoriums on large purchases, helped the district stay solvent and avoid default. Aware of the lack of housing stock after Katrina, the district was instrumental in securing temporary housing for staff, teachers, and administrators through collaborative efforts with FEMA. Administrators also reassigned teachers to schools that were overcrowded and allocated \$13 million for portable classrooms to ease crowding in elementary schools in the West Bank area of the parish. Presently, the system has an adequate number of teachers but is recruiting more to meet anticipated increases in enrollment as more former Jefferson Parish residents return, and the system continues to grow.

The Jefferson Parish government experienced robust sales tax revenue growth and correspondingly funded the district to requested capacity during the 2005-2006 and 2006-2007 school years. However, there are significant challenges it must overcome, including an increase in behavioral problems resulting from Katrina-related post-traumatic stress disorder.



## 2. Calcasieu Parish, Louisiana

*Calcasieu Parish, which is just north of Cameron Parish in the southwestern corner of Louisiana, suffered significant damage in Hurricane Rita. Despite the damage, the school district was able to reopen a month after Rita hit. Enrollment, which dropped immediately after the storm, has rebounded to nearly pre-Rita levels. 2004-2005 enrollment: 31,622; 2006-2007 enrollment: 31,375.*

The Calcasieu Parish School Board, which serves the unincorporated areas, as well as Lake Charles and five other municipalities, operates 58 schools and had a pre-Rita enrollment of 31,622 students, not including the 2,000 children of Katrina evacuees who were enrolled following that disaster. The School Board estimates that it cost \$24 million to clean up, repair, and remove mold from its facilities following Rita. Most of this cost was covered by insurance or is being reimbursed by FEMA.

Some schools were damaged far more extensively than others by Rita, but officials decided not to reopen any schools until all sites could be reopened in order to avoid having students at different points in the curriculum. Classes finally resumed on Oct. 25, with students attending an extra hour each day to make up for missed time. When the public schools reopened, they had 30,491 students, a decrease of approximately 1,100 students from the beginning of the 2005 school year. This fall enrollment rebounded to 31,375, a decrease of only 247 students from the 2004-2005 school year.

Teaching positions actually increased during the year of the hurricane from 2,223 to 2,328 positions. While teaching positions for the current year have declined slightly to 2,290, they are still 3 percent above the number of positions in 2004-2005. Operating budgets are stable and the School Board has received more than \$17.6 million in federal aid as a result of the hurricane.

Overall, the morale of both the faculty and students is good. There is no evidence at this time of any widespread problems brought about by the hurricane, and recent test score results show no adverse impact.

## 3. Pascagoula, Mississippi

*Of the four Gulf Coast school districts in this study, the Pascagoula district was the least damaged, primarily because of geography. That is, Pascagoula is located on the eastern end of the Mississippi coast, where the storm surge was considerably lower. Only two of the district's school buildings were so badly damaged that they remain closed. The system itself reopened in early October 2005, five weeks after Katrina hit. 2004-2005 enrollment: 7,559; 2006-2007 enrollment: 6,965.*

The Pascagoula School District sustained \$26 million in damages as a result of Katrina. Besides the physical damage, the losses included furniture, technology, textbooks, band instruments, uniforms, and athletic equipment. The district did not reopen until Oct. 6, 2005. Before the storm, enrollment stood at 7,559 in 17 schools. In the aftermath of Katrina, enrollment dropped to 6,748. For the current year, enrollment is up slightly to 6,965. In addition, two of the 17 school buildings were so badly damaged that they remain closed.

When the schools reopened, visiting counselors, private licensed counselors, and local church groups were on hand to talk with students and staff. Eventually, the district employed three counselors through a \$250,000 Chevron grant and state grant funds to provide the needed services for the “Hurricane Katrina Counseling Initiative.” The district has used the grant money and federal funds to provide mental health counseling to children and adults affected by Hurricane Katrina.

The district’s total operating budget has not changed drastically since the storm. The current budget is \$78 million, and the district employs roughly 1,100 teachers, administrators, and other support personnel. The district also received a Community Disaster Loan to help maintain its normal budget and make up any shortfall, and it has acquired other revenue from the federal government (approximately \$2 million in Restart Funds and \$2 million in Displaced Student Funds). In addition, three Pascagoula schools received FEMA grants for repair and construction.

#### 4. Mobile County, Alabama

*The largest school district in this study, the Mobile County system sustained damages to more than 100 sites, requiring more than \$16 million in repairs. The district is self-insured through the state’s risk management program. That coverage paid for the needed repairs, but in cases where the district wanted to upgrade facilities, the system had to find another source of funding. Enrollment rose slightly with the influx of some displaced students, but this year, enrollment is down from pre-Katrina levels. 2004-2005 enrollment: 67,747; 2006-2007 enrollment: 64,481.*

Alabama’s educational facilities suffered significant damage from Katrina and several thousand students were displaced. However, the magnitude of the storm’s impact on Alabama schools was far less than that in Louisiana and Mississippi. While schools in Baldwin County (Gulf Shores) and several Alabama counties to the north had storm damage and displaced students, the Mobile County Public School System felt the brunt of the storm.

As of March 2006, 5,122 displaced students had been scattered across the state. Of these, 4,819 were public school students and nearly half (2,221) were in Mobile County, where they made up less than 4 percent of the enrollment. In the neighboring Baldwin County system, only 273 displaced students were enrolled at that time.

Initially, more than half of the Mobile system’s displaced students were Alabama residents, most of whom apparently relocated from within the district. A sizeable number also came from Mississippi and Louisiana, but a large majority of those students apparently had left by the time the 2007 school year began. By the start of the 2007 school year, system-wide enrollment had returned to slightly below its pre-Katrina level.

The Mobile County district suffered damages to more than 100 sites requiring more than \$16 million in repairs. In addition, a Grand Bay Middle School building was destroyed and replacing it will cost about \$6.2 million. The district is self-insured through the state’s risk management program and the only funding received from FEMA was a reimbursement of the \$5,000 deductible for each site regardless of the district’s

out-of-pocket expenditure. The state insurance coverage paid for repairs to the damaged buildings, but in cases where the district wanted to upgrade facilities, the system had to find another source of funding. However, the district did receive some Katrina-related federal assistance for operating purposes in the form of Emergency Impact Aid for Displaced Students and Immediate Aid to Restart School Operations.

With the exception of the Grand Bay school, all of the damaged schools were reopened within two weeks. For a period of four months, the Grand Bay students shared a neighboring school using double shifts. Repairs to all other schools were essentially completed by June 2006. Repair times were shortened by the use of pre-positioned contracts, a precaution following the system's experience with previous storms.

The Mobile County school system experienced a strong up-tick in revenues in the fiscal year following Katrina. The district's general fund revenues rose 10.1 percent in fiscal year 2006 and the general fund year-end surplus rose from \$16.4 million to \$33 million. While enrollments are essentially the same as in 2005, the 2007 budget assumes a 19.3 percent two-year increase in general fund revenues over 2005.

## C. AREAS THAT ARE GROWING

### 1. East Baton Rouge Parish, Louisiana

*Prior to Katrina, this district was the third largest in the state. Post-Katrina, it has become the largest in the state since neither the Orleans Parish nor the Jefferson Parish district has fully recovered. The sudden spurt in enrollment has created challenges for officials, from finding classroom space to recruiting more teachers to hiring enough school bus drivers. 2004-2005 enrollment: 45,266; 2006-2007 enrollment: 49,021.*

The biggest impact of Hurricane Katrina on the East Baton Rouge Parish School System came in the form of increased enrollment in the weeks after the storm hit. Initially, the district received more than 10,000 applications from students seeking to register in East Baton Rouge Parish schools, and more than 6,000 ultimately enrolled for the 2005-2006 school year. That number declined steadily over the year, so that by May 2006, when the school term ended, the district was home to more than 3,000 additional students.

The system was shut down for a week after Katrina as seven schools were turned into temporary shelters. Those evacuees eventually were moved to the River Center in downtown Baton Rouge and to assorted church shelters. When it started back, the district had more than 6,000 displaced students enrolled, and officials had to find uniforms, textbooks, school supplies, desks, and classroom space to handle the extra load. They also had to find additional food supplies for school cafeterias, as well as more buses and bus drivers to accommodate the extra students. In addition, officials had to ask permission from a federal judge to expand the capacity of the schools, use temporary buildings, increase class sizes, and put students wherever they could find space.

Essentially overnight, East Baton Rouge became the largest public school district in the state, and FEMA agreed to pay for building and outfitting additional classrooms to help with the demand. As a result,

78 classrooms with a combined capacity of 3,200 were added to school campuses across the district, and the system is still using those classrooms. District officials also reopened one school that had been closed for renovations and converted another that had been an administrative center to provide classroom space for displaced students in 2005-2006. Both facilities were closed for the current school year. Enrollment in the district — after trending downward in recent years — has grown from 45,266 in 2004-2005 to 46,459 in 2005-2006 to 49,021 in 2006-2007. Every school in the district is currently at capacity. Like student enrollment, teacher employment has risen steadily over the past three school years — from 3,070 in 2004-2005 to 3,286 in 2005-2006 to 3,447 in 2006-2007.

District officials managed to adjust to the sudden growth through the use of an accumulated fund balance. In addition to the expenses incurred as a result of the hurricane, officials also had to overcome lower state funding because of the extra federal money and FEMA money the system was getting. The administration ended up spending from its own fund balance through the spring of 2006. The current operating budget (for 2006-2007) is \$342 million, which is up significantly from \$325 million in 2005-2006 and \$290 million in 2004-2005.

Among the problems the district still faces are chronic shortages of teachers, substitute teachers, and bus drivers. All three were in short supply before Katrina, but the storm has exacerbated the problem. The district has had some problems with violence and discipline in its schools but nothing officials consider extraordinary. What problems they do have are typical of a district the size of East Baton Rouge. The district also has had to increase the number of social workers working with students to address problems brought on by, or exacerbated by, the storms. In addition, many of the displaced students who enrolled in the district are behind academically, which means the system must expend more resources to try to bring them up to grade level.

In 2006-2007, the district is re-focusing on implementing its long-term strategic plan, including a literacy initiative for which it received funding from the Gates Foundation and the Baton Rouge Area Foundation, and on improving student achievement. Goals for 2005-2006 were put on the back burner as the district worked to absorb the influx of students. Some of that additional enrollment will disappear with the 2007-2008 school year when the Central Community School District goes into full effect. The new district, which was carved out of the East Baton Rouge system, will take in about 2,500 students. The district also could face more challenges if a movement to break up the system into smaller districts gains momentum.

## 2. St. Tammany Parish, Louisiana

*While the district's enrollment dropped by 4,000 students immediately after Hurricane Katrina struck, Hurricane Rita spurred the re-enrollment of many of the displaced students, because their parents decided not to delay their return to the parish. Post-Katrina and Rita, the district's enrollment mix has changed with the influx of numerous Hispanic families. Despite this, enrollment has yet to recover to pre-Katrina levels. 2004-2005 enrollment: 36,169; 2006-2007 enrollment: 35,294.*

Pre-Katrina, more than 36,169 children were enrolled in St. Tammany Parish's public schools. By Oct. 3, 2005, the district had lost more than 4,000 students. Enrollment decreased by 46.5 percent in the Slidell

area and 36.6 percent in the Pearl River area, the two areas that sustained the most storm damage. School officials said students in the early childhood grade levels, special education, pre-kindergarten, and kindergarten had the highest change in enrollment. The greatest mobility occurred among minority and economically disadvantaged students, and students with English as a second language.

Three of the parish's 52 public schools were destroyed by Hurricane Katrina. Two will be demolished and replaced, and one will be repaired. Other sites sustained extensive damage, and students at those schools were relocated to other campuses within the district.

Hurricane Rita spurred a more rapid re-enrollment of schoolchildren than might have been expected given the damage, because displaced residents decided not to delay their return to St. Tammany. In addition, the district's enrollment mix has changed in the wake of the storms with the influx of Hispanic families. Despite that influx and the return of residents and students, enrollment in the district is down this year from pre-Katrina levels. As a result, the system has lost \$6 million in anticipated funding from the state.

School officials estimate more than \$102 million in damage, of which they expect to collect more than \$72.6 million from insurance claims and from FEMA. The school system, the largest employer in the parish, could owe up to \$29.5 million for damages and related costs. The district plans to pay for its portion of the repairs by using a variety of sources, including the general fund, pending federal recovery assistance, and revenue from the parish's booming sales tax collections.

### 3. Jackson, Mississippi

*The city school district suffered minor damage in Hurricane Katrina and was closed for just a short time. The biggest impact was the addition of roughly 700 extra students in the wake of the storm, which stemmed what had been declining enrollment. This school year, the trend toward declining enrollment returned, although the numbers are still higher than prior to Katrina. 2004-2005 enrollment: 31,656; 2006-2007 enrollment: 31,832.*

The Jackson public school district, which is the largest in the state of Mississippi, operates 59 schools. While Hurricane Katrina caused some damage to the system's facilities, none of it was catastrophic, and all buildings currently are operational.

Student enrollment has fluctuated slightly over the past three school years. The system saw an increase of 700 to 1,000 students after Katrina hit, but this school year, enrollment has declined. Despite this, the number of teachers employed by the district is up.

The district's operating budget has risen from \$194.8 million in 2004-2005 to \$213 million this year. In addition, the district received \$4.3 million from the federal government to help handle the influx of displaced students.

Officials say the district's major challenge right now is dealing with cash flow issues while it waits for reimbursement funds from FEMA for the cost of repairs to damaged facilities. The district is handling this problem by using its own funds until it receives the FEMA money, and, in some cases, borrowing in anticipation of tax revenue.

#### 4. Hattiesburg, Mississippi

*The district suffered an estimated \$1 million in damages to its facilities, and most of that was covered by insurance or FEMA payments. Student enrollment was not significantly affected by Katrina, although the district did pick up an additional 93 students for the 2005-2006 school year, which helped slow a trend toward declining enrollment. 2004-2005 enrollment: 4,620; 2006-2007 enrollment: 4,469.*

The Hattiesburg Public School District sustained a relatively minimal amount of damage due to Hurricane Katrina, totaling an estimated \$1 million. Most of the damage was covered by insurance or FEMA payments. Therefore, the district did not incur any extraordinary expenditures as a result of the storm.

Prior to Hurricane Katrina, the district operated 10 schools, and it operated the same number after the storm. Student enrollment was not significantly affected by Katrina. In fact, the storm may have helped to slow a trend of declining the district had experienced before Katrina. For instance, the school district had 4,620 student enrolled in 2004-2005 and 4,494 students enrolled in 2005-2006, which included 93 students who were displaced by Hurricane Katrina. For 2006-2007, enrollment was down slightly to 4,469.

The drop in enrollment from 2005-2006 would have been more drastic had it not been for students who relocated to Hattiesburg because of the hurricane. Moreover, the slowing trend of declining enrollment can be noted in the relatively small decrease in enrollment between 2005-2006 and 2006-2007.

Students appear to be adjusting well, and the district has not had to increase services such as counseling or reduced-price lunches or provide extra remedial work. This year, the district is focusing on improving student achievement, which has been an ongoing concern. The district has seen a slight fluctuation in the number of teachers over the past three years. And although district officials believe there are adequate faculty and staff to meet the educational needs of the students, they consider the turnover rate to be somewhat problematic.

The district's operating budget has risen steadily over the past three years, from \$47 million in 2004-2005 to \$50 million in 2005-2006 to \$63 million in 2006-2007. The district has received about \$5.1 million in federal aid, including FEMA payments, funds from the federal Restart School Program, and money through the Displaced Student Funds.

Overall, the challenges faced by the Hattiesburg Public School System are not necessarily Katrina-related, but they have received renewed emphasis as a result of the storm. Increasing student achievement continues to be the top challenge for the district.

## 5. Laurel, Mississippi

*The Laurel School District reopened nine days after Katrina hit. Enrollment, which was around 3,000 students both before and after Katrina, rose slightly in 2005-2006, which probably can be attributed to displaced students relocating to Laurel. 2004-2005 enrollment: 3,004; 2006-2007 enrollment: 2,991.*

Although it sustained approximately \$2 million in damages as a result of Hurricane Katrina, the Laurel School District was back in operation nine school days after the storm hit. Prior to Katrina the district operated six schools; and it operated the same number after Katrina, although some sustained considerable damage. The damage was primarily to roof tops, some gym floors, and one gym building.

The district's enrollment was around 3,000 students both before and after Hurricane Katrina, with a trend toward declining enrollment in the years before the storm. Enrollment was up slightly in 2005-2006 from the previous year, which probably can be attributed to students relocating to Laurel after being displaced by the storm. For this school year, enrollment has dropped slightly.

All of the students appear to be adjusting well, and there has not been a need to increase such services as counseling, reduced-price lunches, or extra remedial work. In addition, all schools are operational, and the district has not had to install any portable/temporary buildings to either handle extra students or to get the schools back up and running. Although the total number of teachers in the district has fluctuated slightly over the past three years, district officials say they have adequate faculty and staff to meet the system's needs.

The district has received about \$3.3 million in federal aid since Hurricane Katrina. Additionally, about \$1.1 million was received from the district's insurance carrier for storm-related damages in 2005-2006. Most of the damage caused by the storm has been or will be covered by FEMA payments and insurance. However, early on district officials decided to upgrade some of the storm-damaged facilities; such improvements are not covered by FEMA. The system could incur nearly \$1.5 million in long-term debt as it repairs and improves facilities.

The superintendent considers facility repair and the increasing construction costs associated with these repairs to be one of the greatest challenges facing the system. The district, however, has been able to handle this challenge due to a substantial fund balance that it had accrued prior to Hurricane Katrina. This fund balance ensured adequate cash flow to undertake and complete the repairs while awaiting FEMA and insurance payments. In this regard, the district had also adequately insured its buildings and assets, resulting in very little storm-related damage that was not covered.

## Discussion and Conclusions

**T**he study found that the state of the school districts in the affected communities tends to mirror the state of the recovery in each parish and county. While not a surprising finding, this does reinforce the reality

that local school systems are a microcosm of the community around them, and the recovery of the two must go hand in hand. All of the districts in this study are fully operational. Classes are being held, and children are being educated. In that sense, things are back to normal. But serious obstacles to the recovery of the most damaged districts exist — many of them formidable.

Among the challenges faced by school officials in this study are maintaining healthy cash flows, the length of time it takes to obtain FEMA and insurance reimbursements, the rising cost of construction, the difficulty in replacing large numbers of books and supplies at once, and finding affordable insurance.

The time lag in FEMA and insurance reimbursements has left many of the districts scrambling for money to keep day-to-day operations going. Other districts that had managed to build up a cash reserve fund have been tapping into that money while they wait for the other funds to come in. The problem, of course, is that spending their cash reserves means that the districts have little left to handle any subsequent emergencies or other unexpected expenses. The diminished cash flow also makes it difficult for districts to pay for repairs and reconstruction and for necessary replacement textbooks, furniture, and other school supplies.

For some districts, insurance payments and FEMA reimbursements have covered most repair costs. Others either did not have insurance or did not have adequate insurance and must find other funding to cover the gap between FEMA reimbursements and the costs of repair and reconstruction. Still others continue to wait for both insurance and FEMA payments, which further hinders their ability to move forward.

The Mississippi Gulf Coast school districts also have faced an additional obstacle to recovery with the loss of needed sales and gaming tax revenues because of their heavy reliance on that funding. In Louisiana, district officials cited the volatility of the state's Minimum Foundation Program funding, which is their primary source of money, as one of their biggest challenges. In the wake of the storms, the state has struggled to make sure its funding follows the students, which means that sometimes there is extra money for the districts and sometimes there is not, because of the highly mobile nature of the displaced population.

For most of the districts in this study as well, problems that existed before Katrina and Rita remained after the storms. Improving student achievement is at the top of that list, as, collectively, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama continue to rank at or near the bottom of most national rankings for education. The primary indicator of student achievement has been the standardized tests administered by each state under the federal No Child Left Behind Act. In Louisiana, state officials waived some of the reporting requirements in 2005-2006, allowing districts to factor out displaced students if they so desired. However, the Louisiana districts in this study opted not to take advantage of the waiver.

The impact of the storms showed up earlier this year when Louisiana state officials released the school-district performance scores from 2006. In general, scores declined over 2004-2005. Officials attributed the drop not only to Katrina and Rita, but also to a new test for fifth-graders.

In Mississippi, only students who have been enrolled at least 70 percent of the school year are counted in the results, so overall performance levels did not show any significant impact from Katrina. And in Alabama, while every student was required to take the standardized tests, officials allowed the districts to



separate the scores of those students who were displaced from those who were not, thus minimizing the effect on overall school ratings.

One of the most noticeable findings for Mississippi was the fact that the Gulf Coast districts in this study still have enrollments significantly below their pre-Katrina levels, despite indications that nearly 100 percent of the residents in the region have returned. A possible explanation for that is that the population patterns have shifted, with many residents moving into the northern part of the coastal counties. As a result, their children would fall into different school districts than the ones studied here. In total, the three Gulf Coast counties are divided into 12 school districts. This study focused on the four coastal districts that encompassed the most populated areas pre-Katrina.

East Baton Rouge Parish, which is now Louisiana's largest school district, faces some challenges similar to those in New Orleans, including difficulty in hiring teachers, substitute teachers, and bus drivers, and improving student achievement. In addition, the district is faced with the ongoing threat of fragmentation. Since the late 1990s, three areas have pulled out of the East Baton Rouge Parish School System and formed their own school districts; the most recent was the community of Central, which will begin operating its schools in the 2007-2008 school year. Further, at least one local legislator has indicated that he is considering introducing legislation that would allow the dismantling of the East Baton Rouge district into four smaller community school districts. In addition, school officials believe there are a number of displaced students living in the parish who are simply not enrolled in the school system, a sentiment backed up by a Rand Corp. study that examined what happened to the nearly 200,000 Louisiana public school students displaced by Katrina.

The Rand study found that 31 percent of displaced students — slightly more than 60,000 — could not be accounted for at the end of the 2005-2006 school year. That is, there were no data to suggest that they had re-enrolled in any Louisiana public school. Information from other states — particularly Texas — indicates that some of the displaced students are enrolled outside Louisiana, but Rand concludes those numbers probably do not account for every missing displaced student. Still, the study acknowledges that there is no reliable way to determine exactly how many students never re-enrolled.<sup>1</sup>

Clearly the most dramatic example of pre-existing problems being exacerbated by the storms is New Orleans. There, state officials are trying to reconstruct an entire school system out of the ruins left by decades of corruption and neglect, followed by Katrina's floodwaters. The missteps have been many and the successes slow, but what existed before the storm was not working. What the newly formed Recovery School District needs most at the moment is time — time to repair, rebuild, and reconstruct. Unfortunately, neither community leaders nor residents are inclined to be patient, and some state legislators already are calling for the dismantling of the RSD before it really has had a chance to make any progress.

Further, Orleans Parish has become the site for a vast charter school experiment. These schools also need time to operate before any evaluation can be made of their effectiveness. And the Orleans Parish

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1 John F. Pane, Daniel F. McCaffrey, Shannah Tharp-Taylor, Gary J. Asmus, and Billy R. Stokes, "Student Displacement in Louisiana after the Hurricanes of 2005: Experiences of Public Schools and Their Students," Rand Corporation, 2006.

School Board is still in the business of educating children, albeit on a much smaller scale than before the storm. Out of this splintered system, the city must find a viable way to provide a sound education for its children, or its recovery simply will not happen.

What this study showed most clearly is that in those districts where officials had done some advance planning, the recovery has gone more smoothly. Most notably, they had pre-positioned contracts in place to help with clean-up and repair. They carried adequate insurance on their facilities — which is more problematic now given the skyrocketing cost of premiums, and may require districts to consider such alternatives as a state-run, self-insurance risk fund like Alabama has. And, perhaps most important of all, they had built up a cash reserve fund, which has allowed them to maintain cash flow and pay bills while waiting for federal assistance to come through.

Obviously, no one person or entity can anticipate everything that will be needed in a disaster the magnitude of Katrina and Rita, but there are things that can be done in advance that will help mitigate the impact, and this study makes a convincing case for that preparation.

## Advisory Committee

- Chair: William F. Winter, former Governor of Mississippi, Attorney, Watkins Ludlam Winter and Stennis, P.A.
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- James Richardson, Director, Public Administration Institute, E.J. Ourso College of Business, Louisiana State University
- Oliver M. Thomas, Jr., President, New Orleans City Council

## Methodology

*GulfGov Reports* is a longitudinal field network study of a representative sample of state and local governments damaged by the Katrina and Rita hurricanes of 2005. The 22 sites in Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama covered in this report are cities and counties (parishes) that experienced varied levels of destruction and economic effects following the twin disasters. The sample includes communities that experienced severe damage and concomitant population decline and others that experienced population and economic growth because of the influx of household and business evacuees. The research is based on uniformly structured field research reports by professional experts from a range of backgrounds and social science disciplines. Over the course of this research program, the field researchers will collect and analyze data and reports and interview public officials, leaders of nonprofit organizations and community organizations, and businesses. Field researchers do their own analysis of conditions and issues in the communities studied; their reports are guided by a standard format of open- and closed-ended research questions. Reports submitted by field researchers to the central study staff are reviewed and compiled into summary reports.

## RESEARCH STAFF

The **Public Affairs Research Council of Louisiana** (PAR) is an independent voice, offering solutions to critical public issues in Louisiana through accurate, objective research and focusing public attention on those solutions. As a private, nonprofit research organization, PAR is supported through the tax-deductible membership contributions of thousands of Louisiana citizens who want better, more efficient, and more responsive government. Although PAR does not lobby, PAR's research gets results. Many governmental reforms can be traced to PAR recommendations. In addition to serving as a catalyst for governmental reform, PAR has an extensive program of citizen education, believing that the soundest way to achieve political progress is through deep-rooted public understanding and support rather than political pressure.

The **Nelson A. Rockefeller Institute of Government** is the public policy research arm of the State University of New York. The Institute conducts studies and special projects to assist government and enhance the capacity of states and localities to meet critical challenges. Through its research, publications, and conferences, the Institute works with the best policy experts in the country and with top officials at all levels of government to forge creative solutions to public problems. The work of the Institute focuses on the role of state governments in the American federal system. Many of the Institute's projects are comparative and multistate in nature.

## CO-PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATORS



**James C. Brandt**

*President, Public Affairs Research Council of Louisiana*

Jim Brandt was appointed president of PAR in May 1999. He has more than 30 years of experience in government administration, public policy research, and nonprofit management. He is the author of more than 75 studies or reports in the areas of governmental finance, state and local tax issues, public administration, and governmental structure and organization. In addition, he has received numerous national, state, and local awards for his work. Prior to joining PAR, Mr. Brandt served for 12 years as president and CEO of the Bureau of Governmental Research in New Orleans. His previous professional experience also includes his affiliation with the Institute for Governmental Studies at Loyola University in New Orleans, where he was the assistant director and senior associate. Mr. Brandt is an honors graduate of the University of Colorado where he earned a bachelor of arts degree in history and political science and was elected Phi Beta Kappa. He received his master's degree in community organization and planning from Tulane University.



**Richard P. Nathan**

*Co-Director, Rockefeller Institute of Government*

Richard Nathan is co-director of the Rockefeller Institute and the Distinguished Professor of Political Science and Public Policy at the State University of New York at Albany. Dr. Nathan has written and edited books on the implementation of domestic public programs in the United States and on American federalism. Prior to coming to Albany, he was a professor at Princeton University. He served in the federal government as assistant director of the U.S. Office of Management and Budget, deputy undersecretary for welfare reform of the U.S. Department of Health Education and Welfare, and director of domestic policy for the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders (The Kerner Commission).

## FIELD RESEARCH ASSOCIATES

### Louisiana



**Daryl V. Burckel** — Lake Charles & Cameron Parish

*Professor, Department of Accounting, Finance and Economics, McNeese State University*

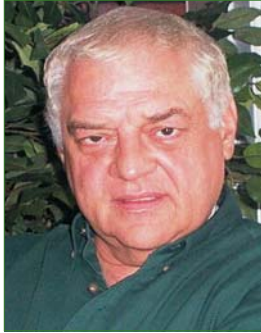
Daryl Burckel is a professor of accounting, past department head of the Accounting, Finance and Economics Department and the First National Bank Endowed Professor of Business Research in the McNeese State University College of Business. He earned his doctorate at Mississippi State University and specializes in the areas of financial analysis, business valuation of closely-held business interests, and taxation. In addition, he is a Certified Public Accountant and a Certified Valuation Analyst. He has held faculty positions at the University of New Orleans and Mississippi State University, as well as McNeese State University. He has published more than 50 refereed articles in journals such as the *Journal of Accountancy*, *Applied Economics*, *North American Journal of Economics and Finance*, *Tax Notes*, *Taxes: The Tax Magazine*, *Journal of Taxation*, *The CPA Journal*, *Akron Business and Economic Review*. He has received the Powell Group Business Faculty Excellence Award for more than five consecutive years and has been the recipient of numerous other university and professional organization awards. He has performed consulting work for local and state governmental agencies, small businesses, and publicly traded companies and serves as a member of numerous boards and professional organizations.



**Rachel L. Emanuel** — St. Bernard Parish & St. Tammany Parish

*Director of Publications and Electronic Media, Southern University Law Center*

Rachel Emanuel has been director of publications and electronic media for the Southern University Law Center since 1998. Prior to that, she held the same position for Southern University. In addition, she served as an adjunct professor at the Manship School of Mass Communication at Louisiana State University from 1999 to 2003. She also worked as a senior editor for the LSU Office of Public Relations and as a departmental information representative for the Louisiana Department of Urban and Community Affairs. She earned her bachelor's and master's degrees in journalism from Louisiana State University and a Ph.D. in journalism from the University of Texas at Austin. Her research projects include a forthcoming biography of Alexander Pierre Tureaud Sr., a documentary about the civil rights sit-ins in Baton Rouge, and a documentary about A.P. Tureaud's life.



**Michael M. Kurth** — Lake Charles & Cameron Parish  
*Head, Department of Accounting, Finance and Economics, McNeese State University*

Michael Kurth grew up in Saginaw, Mich., and served in the U.S. Army as a Russian linguist and intelligence analyst. He received his bachelor's degree in international economics from the Monterey Institute for International Studies and his master's degree and Ph.D. in economics from Virginia Tech, where he studied under Nobel laureate James Buchanan. He taught at Emory and Henry College in Virginia and California State University-East Bay before coming to McNeese State University in 1984. He has published numerous articles in academic journals and in 1988 received the Duncan Black Award for the best article in *Public Choice* that year. He also has written many studies on the gaming industry, the petrochemical industry and other issues affecting Southwest Louisiana and for 15 years wrote a bi-weekly column in *Lagniappe* commenting on economic and political issues. He is presently head of the Department of Accounting, Finance and Economics at McNeese and the BankOne Professor of Economics.



**Emily Metzgar** — Orleans Parish (City of New Orleans)  
*Independent Contractor/Doctoral Student/Adjunct Instructor, Manship School of Mass Communication, Louisiana State University*

Emily Metzgar is a doctoral student in media and public media affairs at Louisiana State University's Manship School of Mass Communication in Baton Rouge. Her research focuses on the impact of alternative online news and commentary on state politics around the country. She has a bachelor's degree from the University of Michigan and a master's degree from The George Washington University. She is a former U.S. diplomat with additional professional experience at the National Defense University and the U. S. Institute of Peace. Metzgar has extensive research, writing, and editing experience, and her work has appeared in *The Christian Science Monitor*, *the International Herald Tribune*, and the *Los Angeles Times*. She maintains a Web site at [www.emilymetzgar.com](http://www.emilymetzgar.com).



**Karen Rowley** — East Baton Rouge Parish  
*Special Projects Manager, Public Affairs Research Council of Louisiana*

Karen Rowley joined the PAR staff in 2006 as special projects manager. Her professional experience is in journalism, including jobs with daily newspapers in Florida and North Carolina and serving as managing editor for *The Greater Baton Rouge Business Report* in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, for eight years. She earned her bachelor of arts degree in journalism from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and her master's degree in mass communication from Louisiana State University. More recently, she earned a Ph.D. in mass communication from Louisiana State University. Her research focuses on media and public affairs — specifically on statewide public affairs television and its role in the institution of state government — and she has been the lead author on articles published in such academic journals as *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, *American Journalism* and *The Howard Journal of Communications*.



**Carlos A. Thomas** — Jefferson Parish & Kenner  
*Research Manager, Louisiana Family Recovery Corps*

Carlos Thomas has earned a bachelor of science degree in human and organizational development from Vanderbilt University, a master of arts degree in sociology from the University of Memphis, a master of science degree in information systems and decision sciences from Louisiana State University, a Ph.D. in public administration from Tennessee State University, and a Ph.D. in business administration from Louisiana State University. His research interests include e-government, IT strategic management, global IT outsourcing, public policy and technology, and technology and health care, and he has taught classes in those areas as well as on the digital divide, economic development, African-American studies, IT auditing, and systems development. Earlier this year, he joined the Louisiana Family Recovery Corps, a nonprofit agency whose goal is to help displaced residents find the resources they need to return home.

### Mississippi



**Harvey Johnson, Jr.** — Cities of Hattiesburg & Laurel  
*Visiting Professor, College of Business, Center for Urban Planning and Policy Assessment, Jackson State University*

Harvey Johnson is the former mayor of Jackson, Mississippi, and the first African-American mayor of the city. He served two terms from 1997 to 2005 and then returned to teaching when he joined the faculty of Jackson State University in July 2005. A native of Vicksburg, Mississippi, Mr. Johnson earned a bachelor's degree in political science from Tennessee State University and a master's degree in political science from the University of Cincinnati. He has also done additional study toward a doctoral degree in public administration at the University of Southern California's Public Affairs Center in Washington, D.C. Before winning the mayor's seat, Mr. Johnson was the founder and executive director of the Mississippi Institute for Small Towns, a nonprofit agency designed to help small economically depressed towns with minority leadership with housing, community development, and infrastructure needs. He has some 25 years of experience in planning and community development and was an assistant professor previously at Jackson State University, where he taught graduate-level courses in public administration and directed the Center for Technology Transfer.



**LaNell Kellum** — Bay St. Louis/Waveland (Hancock County), Biloxi & Gulfport (Harrison County) & Pascagoula (Jackson County)  
*Senior Research Associate, Stennis Institute of Government, Mississippi State University*

LaNell Kellum is a Senior Research Associate at the John C. Stennis Institute of Government, Mississippi State University. She is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in community college leadership at MSU, where she also received her master's and bachelor's degrees in education. Ms. Kellum has more than 20 years of experience in project and grant development, administration, teaching, and business management in Mississippi and Oklahoma. While serving as a research specialist for the Mississippi State University Research and Curriculum Unit, she developed state curriculum frameworks, designed and conducted professional development for teachers and administrators, and chaired state work teams to acquire \$22 million in federal education and workforce development funds for the Mississippi Department of Education. As grant specialist for the Columbus (Mississippi) School District, she acquired and managed \$4.5 million in reading and technology state grants; directed



the McKellar Technology Center, the Mississippi Tech Prep Exemplary Site Award for 2004; and was principal of Columbus High School, directing the educational programming for 1,400 students.



**L. Frances P. Liddell** — City of Jackson

*Interim Chair, Department of Public Policy and Administration, Center for Urban Planning and Policy Assessment, Jackson State University*

In addition to being interim chair of the Department of Public Policy and Administration, Frances Liddell is associate professor and acting coordinator for the MPPA Program at Jackson State University. She earned her bachelor of science degree from Grambling State University, her master of science degree at the former Northeast Louisiana University — now the University of Louisiana at Monroe — and her Ed.Sp. and Ed.D. at Mississippi State University. Her research interests include policy, workplace issues, and welfare reform, and her teaching areas include management of information systems, professional development, and research.

## Alabama



**Ty Keller** — Mobile County (Cities of Mobile & Bayou La Batre)

*Senior Research Associate, Emeritus, Public Affairs Research Council of Louisiana*

With nearly 40 years' experience in public policy research, Ty Keller holds the position of senior research associate at PAR. Since joining PAR in 1971, he has written or directed research on dozens of publications dealing with a wide variety of Louisiana state and local government issues. His studies on economic development, comparative taxes, and community colleges have received awards for distinguished research and special achievement from the national Governmental Research Association. Mr. Keller has done extensive research on tax and fiscal policy, property tax issues, vo-tech education, and education management. He has also conducted numerous management studies of state agencies and undertaken contract studies for local governments throughout the state. Mr. Keller graduated cum laude from Brigham Young University in 1962 and did postgraduate work at BYU and the New York University Graduate School of Public Administration. Prior to joining PAR, he was an assistant professor at California State University at Fullerton and worked for the National Municipal League.