

# New Orleans schools fail to provide equal education opportunity, study says

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After Hurricane Katrina destroyed much of the public school infrastructure in New Orleans, Louisiana embarked on a massive effort to rebuild the entire New Orleans public school system, launching the nation's most extensive charter school experiment. The goal was to provide a quality education to all New Orleans students, regardless of race, socioeconomic class, or where they live.

The University of Minnesota Law School's Institute on Race and Poverty (IRP) evaluated the success of the rebuilding efforts in a new study --The State of Public Schools In Post-Katrina New Orleans: The Challenge of Creating Equal Opportunity -- which found that the rebuilt public school system fails to adequately provide equal educational opportunity to all New Orleans [students](#).

The study finds that the state-driven reorganization has created a "separate but unequal tiered system of schools" which sorts white students and a relatively small share of students of color into selective, high-performing schools, while steering the majority of low-income students of color to high-poverty, low-performing schools.

The study also finds racial and economic segregation in the city and metropolitan area to be a continuing concern, still undermining the life chances and educational opportunities of low-income students and students of color. It documents that school choice in the form of [charter schools](#) does not by itself empower students of color to escape the [negative consequences](#) of segregation, especially when it leads them to

racially-segregated, high-poverty, low-performing schools.

The IRP report details how the growing charter sector in New Orleans has undermined equality of opportunity in the city's schools by directly selecting their students (through selective admission requirements in the case of Orleans Parish School Board- and Board of Elementary and Secondary Education-run charter sectors) and by skimming the most motivated students (through their enrollment strategies, discipline and expulsion practices, transportation policies, location decisions, and marketing and recruitment efforts in the case of Recovery School District-run charters). The report shows that school performance varies significantly across five sectors, and not so much by charter versus traditional schools, because schools in each sector have different abilities to select their students.

The report criticizes the single-strategy approach that exclusively relies on the expansion of the charter sector, recommending instead a multi-pronged strategy which expands school choice on a regional basis. It calls for a more balanced, regional approach to public education, including a renewed commitment to the city's traditional public schools and enhanced choices for students in the form of regional magnet schools and new inter-district programs.

Provided by University of Minnesota

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