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Administrative responses to hurricane-induced mobility

Christopher J. Fontenot
Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College, cfontenot8@cox.net

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ADMINISTRATIVE RESPONSES TO HURRICANE–INDUCED MOBILITY

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of Educational
Theory, Policy and Practice

by

Christopher J. Fontenot
B.A., Louisiana State University, 1973
B.S., Louisiana State University, 1975
M.Ed. University of Southwestern Louisiana, 1995
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ABSTRACT

Hurricanes Katrina and Rita posed serious challenges to school systems as children displaced by the storms attended schools across Louisiana and in most of the states of the Union. This qualitative case study examined the administrative challenges of one school district that received over 6,800 new students in less than a month. Research questions posed in the study focused on the planning, placement, and support of displaced students, the leadership of the superintendent and principals in integrating displaced students into the district and schools, which problems arose, and whether any policies or procedures were changed as a result hurricane-induced mobility. An oral history methodology was used to examine the problem from an organizational learning perspective. The case study utilized an embedded single case design to examine the efforts of the central office and several schools to integrate thousands of students into the district. Two distinct leadership styles emerged as driving forces in shaping the responses at the central office and within the schools. Evidence of transformative leadership practices combined with practices focused on maintenance of the status quo and attention to administrative detail served to stabilize the district through the year. Although no permanent administrative changes resulted that year the district and schools evidenced great flexibility in taking on temporary duties, satisfying state and federal mandates, and addressing the needs of the displaced families. District and school staff managed to create a welcoming, inclusive climate with clear expectations of high achievement for all students, both displaced and indigenous. Test scores in several of the study schools declined, but the average school performance scores of the district improved. The single greatest problem faced by the district was the mobility of students during the year. Recommendations for practice and a model of crisis planning are proposed. A model of emergent themes from the data suggests similar patterns across schools and the district office.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The eye of Hurricane Katrina crossed the Louisiana coastline on August 29, 2005 near
the town of Buras, near the mouth of the Mississippi River and devastated the city of New
Orleans. Emerging over the waters of Lake Borgne and the Mississippi Sound the storm made
landfall again over the Mississippi-Alabama coastline. Hurricane Rita struck the Louisiana –
Texas coastline 27 days later, raking the entire Louisiana coastline from the Mississippi River to
the Texas-Louisiana state line before turning north into Texas. An estimated 200,000 to 370,000
Louisiana students were forced to leave their schools because of the storms; 83% of the students
were from Orleans, Jefferson and Calcasieu Parishes (Pane, McCaffrey, Tharp-Taylor, Asmus, &
Stokes, 2006; Cook, 2006). This number reflects only public school students impacted by the
storms of 2005. The total would be higher if private school and home-schooled students were
included in the count.

School districts across Louisiana and across more than 40 states of the Union received
children displaced by the hurricanes of 2005. How schools and school districts responded to the
challenges presented by the arrival of two hurricanes 27 days apart depended upon the
organizational resilience of the school systems to identify and respond effectively to the
challenges.

According to the Saffir-Simpson scale, hurricane force winds at category 3, the
classification of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita at landfall, can cause damage to residential
structures and utility buildings, minor flooding of land five or less feet in elevation up to eight
miles inland and considerable damage to vegetation (National Oceanic and Atmospheric
Administration, n.d.). A hurricane that moves forward at ten miles per hour would cause
hurricane force winds to persist for up to ten hours in the area near the eye wall weakening then ultimately destroying structures.

Figure 1.1 Katrina Wind Speed and Tidal Surge (United States Geological Survey, 2005)

Hurricane force winds (74+ MPH) extended nearly a hundred miles on each side of the eye wall, while tropical force winds in excess of 45 miles per hour were felt as far away as 250 miles to the east side, slightly less on the west side, bringing damage and power failures to much of eastern Louisiana, southern Mississippi, southern Alabama and the western Florida panhandle.
As the figure above indicates, high winds extended deep into Mississippi (shaded areas in orange and shades of light brown) and flooding was extensive along the coastlines of Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama due to wind driven storm surge (purple shading). The most damaging winds occurred to the east of the center of the storm, sparing large areas of low-lying central and western coastal Louisiana until the arrival of Hurricane Rita 27 days later.

Figure 1.2 Rita Wind Map, courtesy of National Weather Service, Lake Charles (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, 2007).

Hurricane Rita arrived off the coast of Louisiana as a category five hurricane September 24, 2005, weakening before it came ashore. Western Louisiana is less densely populated than the eastern region of the state yet still sustained considerable damage to infrastructure and schools near the coast and along the path of the storm.
Problem Statement

The likelihood of disastrous consequences to natural events like hurricanes, earthquakes, wild fires, tsunamis, tornadoes, and large scale flooding increases each year as populations continue to grow in areas prone to such natural occurrences. Examining how districts respond to such displacement of populations allows us to prepare models to inform districts in the event of future disruptions. There is no better opportunity to study large scale disruption than by examining the effects of the hurricanes of 2005.

In an era of accountability and high stakes testing the massive displacement of families can wreak havoc with student learning and school and district test results. From what we know of school community, school culture, and leadership in educational literature, we can expect the disruption of the lives of the families displaced by the storms to impact schools negatively as well. Community is built upon feelings of belonging and willingness to cooperate for common purposes (Royal and Rossi, 1997; Strike, 2000), but displaced families are not always seen, or see themselves, as belonging to the community in which they find themselves. School culture is an enduring quality of how schools go about their business of teaching and learning. It has been defined as patterns of behavior that have been transmitted through the years and are accepted by the members of the school’s community (Stolp, 1994), but displaced families bring with them the memories of the culture that they left and which may no longer exist. Successful leadership acts in ways to define and achieve goals, but displaced families may not feel that their input is wanted or welcome in shaping any particular goals for the schools to which they find their children assigned. How community, culture, and leadership are accomplished depends on the particular orientation the leader or community takes and at what stage they currently exist. Communally organized schools were described by Bryk and Driscoll (1988) as having shared values, common activities, an ethos of caring, close interactions among staff, and a role for teachers that extend
School culture was described by Deal and Peterson (1999, pp. 2-3) as the “unwritten rules and traditions, norms, and expectations that permeate everything: the way people act, how they dress, what they talk about…and how teachers feel about their work and their students.” School climate, on the other hand, although it shared similar characteristics with school culture, relates to a shorter time frame. Teddlie and Stringfield (1993, pp. 18-21) included characteristics as “student sense of academic futility, student perception of teacher push, student academic norms, teacher ability, teacher expectations for students, [and] teacher-student efforts to improve.”

Leadership is also a construct that defies easy definition, but in schools leadership in the person of the principal includes such characteristics as collaboration and shared decision making (Leithwood, Leonard, and Sharratt, 1998), encouraging professional development among their staffs (Leithwood, 1992), being a visible presence in the school (Hallinger, 1993; Andrews and Sodor, 1987), and setting clear goals and expectations (Leithwood, Begley, and Cousins, 1990; Hallinger and Heck, 1996). Sergiovanni (1990) describes several stages of leadership in which schools may at one time or other exist: a bartering stage – essentially a form of transactional leadership in which the leader and the followers negotiate an exchange of something the followers want for what the leader wants, or any of several transformative stages: building in which the leader provides an atmosphere conducive for achieving higher order needs among the faculty, bonding in which the leader develops an atmosphere that led to shared common goals and commitment, or banking in which school improvements are routinized. Whatever stage of leadership a school occupied the day before Katrina, the school faced a vastly changed atmosphere in the weeks after. School community concepts hearken back to a pre-industrial assumption of stability that, at one extreme could describe the tightly knit but essentially closed culture of the Amish; but which, in twenty-first century America, no longer commonly exists and
is replaced by increasing diversity, self-imposed isolation – what Putnam (2007, p. 149) describes as “hunker[ing] down,” and struggle to pull diverse cultural threads together to achieve school success. How schools reacted to the influx of families and students from devastated areas of the gulf coast and managed to continue their mission of teaching and learning is largely a result of the organizational resilience of the school district and the character of the schools themselves. The purpose of this embedded case study was to examine the administrative responses to the massive disruptions caused by two category five hurricanes that struck the Louisiana coastline within a twenty-seven day period. How do districts and their schools respond to large numbers of displaced students and what do they learn from the experience?

Research Questions

The following questions frame this study:

1. How did the district leaders plan for, place, and provide support for displaced students?

2. How did school leadership impact the integration of displaced students into the existing school culture?

3. What problems impeded district and school responses to hurricane-induced mobility?

4. What, if any, changes become institutionalized in the district or schools’ policies and procedures?

Significance of the Study

Although Category Five hurricanes are relatively rare events, the results of this investigation will provide valuable insights in an effort to assist in planning early responses to large-scale disruptions, and in the process, perhaps offer significant assistance in planning for smaller scale disruptions associated with school closures, consolidations, small-scale catastrophes like school fires, continuing desegregation cases, and the continual flow of students
and their families from one school to another. Preliminary reports from Louisiana Department of Education suggest that test scores for 2005 – 2006 fell from the levels they had achieved in the 2004 – 2005 school year (Lussier, 2006b) in a year in which total state enrollment fell about 77,180 students. On the surface this would suggest that the movement of students and the disruptions to class time had a detrimental effect on the achievement of students in the 2005 – 2006 school year. The Louisiana State Department of Education gave districts the option to calculate district scores with and without displaced students and use the better scores. Some districts did not count the high-stakes test results that year as gatekeepers and allowed all students to advance to the next grade regardless of results of those tests; most districts in the state did count the test results. Some districts’ test scores declined when the children of Katrina, many of whom were one, two, or even three years below grade level, were added to their testing pool (Cook, 2006; Pane et al., 2006). Some districts did not show any detrimental effects and maintained high levels of achievement while at the same time taking in numbers of displaced students. Discovering what policies, programs, or actions instituted by the districts or schools helped minimize the effects of sudden disruption on the students and the schools facilitates the development of models to mitigate the effects of future storms or large scale disruptions. Not only those students who were forced by circumstances to move were affected; Kerbow (1996) suggested that mobility also affected those who did not move.

Such research will also be of value to evaluate the effects on school systems caused by catastrophic events. Responses to such natural occurrences are unplanned, quick and dirty, pragmatic responses based on intuition and experience making the qualities of leadership a significant factor in how the schools and the district responded to those challenges. Leadership qualities have been studied in hope of providing models for future leaders. Effective leaders are more than just managers; principals must be more transformative than transactional – that is they
must do more than just make deals with their faculties and staff to get results, but rather seek to raise faculty and staff members to higher levels of competence and imbue their efforts with moral purposes. Schools also have distinct cultures, fostered by administrators and faculties that nurture students even under the stress of sudden change. Learning how school leaders at the district and school building level act to mitigate the effects of hurricane-induced mobility, especially if the negative results are limited, or if the school actually flourishes in spite of the situation, could be useful.

Additionally, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 (U. S. Congress, 2002) and many state or local initiatives rely upon standardized tests to determine if schools are improving. One assumption involving those tests is that schools are relatively stable. Student mobility has emerged as a threat to schools with highly mobile populations and any testing assumptions based on student stability. If the population of a school changes as much as some studies suggest the test results from any given year do not represent the hard work of teachers or school programs for reform, but reflect instead essentially random student movement as families come and go. Examination of the effects of mobility may reveal whether programs that do not explicitly take mobility in account yield useful results for comparing schools.

Research Methods

This project was designed using an oral history methodology because of the time that elapsed between the events of 2005 and the interviews with the participants. Interviews were conducted with the district superintendent, numerous central office personnel, principals, counselors, a librarian, and teachers utilizing a generalized protocol based on the research questions to keep the interview from straying from the topic without unduly constricting the memories and reflections of the participants (see Appendix A).
Limitations and Caveats

While formulating this project, I was employed in a small, private school that, while already considered at full capacity, took in nearly a hundred twenty students from New Orleans and Mississippi. I came to know, and worked closely with, students from many schools, of different ages and ability levels, and shared vicariously their expressed hopes and fears while awaiting their return home. At the same time, relatives from New Orleans lived in my home while they waited for the floodwaters to recede and eventually sought more permanent living accommodations. I am the product of a parochial education from a rural Catholic school. The last thirty years were spent in similar schools teaching children from across central Louisiana. For the above reasons I am aware that some likelihood of personal bias may present itself. There is a part of me that views public schools as bureaucracies that are slow to respond to changing circumstances or unwilling to address the emotional or spiritual needs of students and their families.

In addition, case studies in general have been criticized for being less rigorous than other forms of research. In this project, the researcher will design a carefully planned research plan utilizing a single case embedded design with multiple embedded units and both an interview methodology and examination of documents to defer such complaints. Another criticism of the case study is the limitation on the generalizability of the conclusions. Yin (2008) points out that in experimental designs single experiments have been criticized for the same point. Such criticism cannot be avoided except to suggest that the decision to examine several schools from one district will enhance the ability to apply the lessons learned to other similar situations.

Another limitation in this research project concerns the time that has passed since the Hurricanes of 2005. Many of the memories of participants had started to recede and become confounded with more recent events and memories. Because of the passage of time I utilized an
oral history methodology (Ritchie, 1995) and allowed the participants to speak in their own voices from their own experiences. Current images and considerations may contaminate or become contaminated by images and memories of the past; the results must be viewed with this limitation in mind. Oral historians are well aware of this limitation. Ritchie (1995) asserts that people constantly revisit past events and revise the meanings they had ascribed to those events to reflect new insights. “There is nothing invalidating about this reflectivity” (p. 13).

Theoretical Orientation

This study was conceived as a study of the ability of school systems to react to sudden change. Organizational theory applies to the topic in a variety of ways and will serve as a theoretical foundation upon which to build this research project. In particular, of the several variations of organizational behavior, open systems theory fits this situation best. Rational models articulated in works like Taylor’s *Scientific Management* (1947) offered mechanistic visions of management. The Hawthorn studies in the 1930’s revealed a more humane aspect that had been overlooked by the rationalists. That aspect generally led to Natural Systems models. Where Taylor focused on the organization and the Hawthorn studies noted the effect of people in the organization, a synthesis of the two came to be known as an Open Systems perspective (Hoy and Miskel, 2001). Open systems perspectives consider the needs of organizations for structure and the needs of employees for recognition. Parsons (1960) may have been one of the first to understand that organizations are open to their environments. From an open systems perspective, the effects of events like Katrina and Rita can be explained because there is an explicit assumption that outside forces can impinge on the workings of an organization like a school.

Organizational learning applies to this project because successful organizations and schools must be able to identify, respond, and address threats and challenges; learning from past experiences as a way to prepare for future challenges. Identifying evidence of organizational
learning may explain how some schools adapt to circumstances better than others. Argyris (1999) described the difference between single loop and double loop learning. Single loop learning reacts to change with an appropriate response; double loop learning questions the underlying reasoning behind the responses to problems. Organizations frequently identify issues that threaten them; they rarely question the underlying issues behind the problems and move to address those faulty, outmoded, or negative issues.

Another orientation that has relevance in relation to student mobility is social constructivism (Liang and Gabel, 2005). Among other things, this theory suggests that a stable social environment is necessary for students to integrate what they are learning with what they already know. When students are more concerned with where they will live, or when they will be forced to move again, their concerns are more personal than intellectual; learning slows, and with it even social development may be stymied. One exception to the deleterious effects of movement can be found among military families who move annually. Mobility is less an issue with them because their moves can be anticipated and are generally known well in advance; they can prepare mentally for the transition. In addition, military families have a support structure that is not generally present in civilian schools. Students from military families, in particular students of Department of Defense (DoD) schools routinely perform in the top ten percent nationally (Smrekar, Guthrie, Owens, & Sims, 2001). Examination of 8th grade reading and writing scores indicate that DoD students are second only to Connecticut students; score first or second place levels among white, African-American, and Hispanic students; and that the achievement gap between those ethnic groups is lower than among public schools (Smrekar, et al., 2001). Military families, though, represent a very small percentage of the school-age population. When Katrina struck, families were forced to move suddenly from their homes, neighborhoods, and schools.
The social contexts that they knew, the academic contexts wherein they functioned, changed overnight.

Significant declines in achievement could be explained by constructivist concepts or sociocultural theories. If children learn through some form of interaction with their environment, or in association with other learners or adults (Liang & Gabel, 2005), then the constant shifting of homes and schools that is commonplace in many large urban environments may doom children to gradual but predictable delays or declines in achievement. If the socio-cultural perspective of constructivism is correct then the social context in which a child finds him or herself will be disruptive of the learning process if the context at the school is significantly different from that of the home (Edwards, 2005) or perhaps from that of their previous school. Students who were displaced by the hurricanes of 2005 found themselves in different cities or even different states as well as different schools. Not only did their academic lives suffer significant disruption, their personal lives remained in crisis for weeks or months. Either way, mobility reduces those contexts wherein the student can achieve at an optimum level or pace. If the school context is radically different from the home context, the child finds it difficult to build new ideas on already learned concepts. In addition, if we accept that Maslow’s hierarchy of needs operates in school contexts, then students will be preoccupied by considerations of safety and basic human needs before they can begin to consider academic pursuits more commonly found in the higher levels of the needs hierarchy. Safety concerns became prominent in the recent past due to a series of fights reported in some of the schools in the Baton Rouge, Louisiana area, and in Houston, Texas, between displaced New Orleans students and local students (Lussier, 2006a; Radcliffe, Ruiz, & Villafranca, 2006). Movement due to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita and the subsequent search of stability left thousands of children at the lowest rungs of Maslow’s ladder for a substantial portion of a year.
Definition of Terms

School Performance Score: The Board of Education assigns a rating to the schools based on a combination of academic scores, absences, and for grades 8 – 12, dropout rates. The scores are computed with 90% of the score based on test results, 5% based on absences, and, for grades 8 – 12, 5% based on dropouts. The goal for the schools in the state is to achieve a School Performance Score of 120 by the year 2014. In 2005-06, the baseline School Performance Scores for all state schools was 85.1 and the state growth score (the improvement goal for the school year) was 87.6 (Louisiana Department of Education, User Guide, 2005b).

LEAP and LEAP21: Two tests administered in Louisiana to measure academic achievement. The Louisiana Educational Assessment Program and the Louisiana Academic Assessment Program for the 21st Century are criterion referenced examinations used to measure student achievement against the state’s content standards. These tests are given in the fourth and eighth grades. LEAP 21 was phased in to replace the LEAP in 1999. The newer tests were better aligned with state standards, were designed to be as rigorous as the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), and were configured to indicate at what level students were performing rather than just a simple pass/fail result (Louisiana Department of Education, Assessment Program, 2005a).

iLEAP: integrated LEAP test combining the traditional Iowa Test of Basic Skills with criterion referenced items keyed directly to the Louisiana Grade Level Expectations – “a statement that defines what all students should know and be able to do at the end of a given grade level” (Louisiana Department of Education, 2007a). The change aligned the state evaluation to the state’s performance standards and satisfied the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 (U. S. Congress, 2002). The iLEAP was being used in grades 3, 5, 6, 7, and 9 starting in the spring of 2006 (Louisiana Department of Education, 2007b).
Mobility: Variously defined in research, in this study it describes a student who enters or leaves a school one or more times after the start of the school year. This study will examine the effects of mobility forced upon students and their families displaced by the hurricanes of 2005 and subsequent shifting from shelters to other living accommodations.

ITBS: Iowa Test of Basic Skills, a test routinely used by schools to identify the academic progress of elementary school students. This test was no longer used by the district in which this study was conducted, but has been used in other studies based on dates earlier than 2005-2006.

Displaced: A student who entered or left a school because of the hurricanes of 2005. Students who do not attend school because the school was closed due to damage and attend the school upon reopening are not considered displaced. Students dropped from the school’s rolls by the school system because of hurricane-related closure are considered displaced.

Executive Leadership Team (ELT): the administrators reporting directly to the district superintendent composed of the superintendent, chief office for accountability, assessment, and evaluation, special assistant to the superintendent for instructional leadership, chief academic officer, associate superintendent for instructional support services, assistant superintendent for instructional services area I, assistant superintendent for instructional services area II, assistant superintendent for instructional services area III, assistant superintendent for instructional services area IV, chief technology officer, associate superintendent for human resources, director for communications and community engagement, advisory member/legal counsel, and director of equal educational opportunity (no longer staffed at this time) (East Baton Rouge Parish School System, n.d.).

District Leadership Team (DLT): the administrators who report directly to the superintendent, and administrators who report to the ELT, including the administrative director for federal programs, director of exceptional student services, assistant superintendent for
auxiliary services, director of career and technical education, director of magnet programs, director of reading, director of curriculum, director of elementary programs, instructional services area I, director of elementary programs, instructional services area IV, director of middle schools, instructional services area II, and director of professional development (East Baton Rouge Parish School System, n.d.).

**Saffir-Simpson Scale:** A scale devised to describe the amount of damage from wind and surge effects of a hurricane. Category 3 on this scale represents wind speeds of 111 – 130 mph and anticipated tidal surges of 9 – 12 feet above normal. Under Category 3 conditions structural damage to curtain walls (non-load bearing walls) and loss of limbs and downed trees are expected. Category 5 represents wind speeds over 155 mph and storm surges in excess of 18 feet above normal. Structural damage includes complete roof failure and total destruction of trailer homes. “All shrubs, trees, and signs blown down” (National Weather Service, 2007).
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Research conducted in past years that have relevance to this study comes from several different directions. Among the various factors that play a part in improving school achievement are the culture of the school, the leadership of the school principal and his staff, the ability of the school to adapt and change, and student mobility, each of which will be described below. The topic that has the most relevance to this study of Katrina-displaced students, however, is the issue of mobility, defined here as changing schools in the middle of a single school year (Rosen, 2005; Black, 2006).

Mobility

Mobility is defined differently from study to study. Rhodes (n.d.) defines student mobility as changing school at times other than times prompted by school or program design” (p. 1). Other researchers may see students as mobile if they change schools at the end of the school year (Myers and Heiser, 1995). Most researchers count a student as mobile only if the student changes school within the school year – as it is defined in this study and by Engec (2006). The differences can lead to large variations in mobility rates. Regardless of how mobility is conceptualized, in general, research consistently links students who change schools frequently to lower standardized test scores than students who do not change schools. Using Louisiana school data from the 1997-1998 school year, Engec (2006) examined ITBS data to investigate the relationship between mobility and test scores. Engec found strong evidence among Louisiana students that linked mobility to low test scores. No information was available as to the reasons for the change in schools, or whether the behavioral problems that were tracked were the cause or result of changing schools, still, the relationship was strong and statistically significant. This finding is similar to that of Rosen (2005) and Mao, Whitset, and Mellor (1998) who analyzed
mobility in Chicago schools and among Texas students respectively. Mobility appears to be a problem particularly among the poor or less advantaged children. In urban settings mobility rates approach 50% within four years – that is, if attempting to track a cohort of first grade students, only half would still remain together by the end of the fourth grade (Hartman, 2006) making longitudinal studies problematic. Kerbow (1996) found that highly mobile students tend to cluster in the same schools and shuffle between schools in similar socioeconomic neighborhoods.

Demie, Lewis, and Taplin (2005), and Demie (2005), report on school efforts in London to study mobility and identify several motives for changing school. Among the many reasons cited are change in lifestyle, promotion or transfer, military service, exclusion from school, or refugee and asylum status. Demie, et al (2005) report that students with high mobility also tend to have low incomes, live in poor or temporary housing, speak English as a second language, and often have suffered some major disruption in their lives. Analysis of their achievement indicates that their scores are similar to other mobile students and generally lower than those of stable students. Rates of mobility in London schools tend to be fairly stable over time in that schools with high rates of mobility tend to keep high rates while schools with little or no mobility tend to remain that way. Average achievement differences between mobile and non-mobile students of as much as 50% were reported (Demie, 2002).

Lower elementary students have higher rates of mobility than secondary students. Among urban poor the numbers are typically in the low 20% range for elementary and low teens for high school (for Engac (2006) the numbers in Louisiana were 8-9% for younger students and 2.5-3% for high school students). Engec showed an average rate of mobility of only about 6% from Kindergarten to Twelfth grade. This is considerably lower than urban rates cited by Demie and others.
Not all families move to avoid legal trouble or to avoid paying rents as is reported in several of the studies cited above. Many moves are job related or change-of-life events. Young families may move more frequently in search of permanent jobs or to establish careers. Mobility issues among the poorer parents of young school children are often a move away from negative economic issues rather than moves toward positive economic outcomes. The data support such a scenario as urban mobility rates in first grade may be as high as 20% whereas secondary school rates are much lower – suggesting a more settled pattern (Kerbow, 1996). Black (2006) reports that, for some families, mobility is strategic: to attend magnet schools or avoid poor schools. Black also noted that the rate is not consistent within some schools or districts; changes in the rate of mobility of 5 or more percent per year were noted in some Massachusetts schools suggesting that the issue is not even predictable – a major problem for districts trying to plan strategically to address staffing, finances, or mobility.

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 (NCLB) (U. S. Congress, 2002) includes provisions that permit parents to move their children to better schools if the schools their children attend score low on school accountability measures. Although the intent of the Act seems to encourage movement of families out of poorly performing schools, if mobility is harmful to students who transfer from one school to another the Act could do more harm to already disadvantaged children. Although the NCLB is responsible for some mobility, less than one percent of those eligible to transfer out of poorly performing schools actually do so (Black, 2006). Those percentages are repeated in the largest school system in Louisiana since the hurricanes: Lussier (2007) reports that of those students eligible to request transfers from schools identified as failing to meet academic standards, less than one percent had actually done so. As of yet, no specific research has determined if the low achievement linked with mobility is a cause or result of mobility. Some families and students may move because the children perform poorly
in their previous school and are seeking a new start; for other students, their academic
performance may have been good in the former school, but their scores fell in the new school.
Rhodes (n.d.) cites research indicating that up to 30% of mobility was the result of district
discipline, safety, or academic issues.

Not all researchers agree that student mobility is the prime factor in low achievement
(Student Mobility and Achievement, 2005); however, even one move in the four years between
eighth grade and twelfth grade appears to increase the chances of dropping out by as much as
50%. Suggestions offered to reduce the detrimental effects of mobility may help when students
are making local moves, but fail to address moves that cross district or state lines. Programs like
Project SMART in Texas or U.S. Department of Education Project ESTRELLA, utilize
technology to address the needs of the children of migrant workers (U.S. Department of
Education, 2002). Staying Put, a Chicago initiative, allows primary school students to remain in
the same school for the entire school year, even if the family changes address to a different
district. Similarly, secondary students may remain in the same school in which they begin their
secondary years and remain until graduation (Kerbow, Azcoitia, and Buell, 2003). The
Department of Defense schools, for which mobility is unavoidable, have an effective program of
tracking student records and making accommodations for students of military personnel
including a provision to allow personnel to remain at the same post or base two consecutive
years if they have children about to enter their senior year in high school (Hartman, 2006).
Studies conducted by Smrekar, Guthrie, Owens, and Sims (2001) and Bridglall and Gordon
(2003) confirm that DoD schools have an excellent record of educating children who move
frequently; for many students the moves are annual. Students in DoD schools routinely score in
the top ten percent of schools nationwide (Smrekar et al., 2001).
Schools in states like Texas or Georgia received thousands of Louisiana and Mississippi students from Katrina. Houston and nearby districts, for example, received over 20,000 students in the weeks after Katrina, some of whom were two or even three years below grade level compared to their Texas classmates (Cook, 2006). Because of the influx of students some Louisiana districts were granted waivers for the 2005-06 school year in which test scores could not be used to evaluate school progress for the NCLB accountability program. However, for the 2006-2007 school year all schools had to meet expectations for improvement, regardless of the presence of students displaced by Katrina many of whom would still be one or more years behind their peers academically. Most Louisiana schools no longer consider Katrina-displaced students to be “displaced” for the 2006-07 school year according to Everett Parker, Student Information Systems, City of Baker School System (personal communication, August, 2006). Accountability measures may show substantial drops in districts that received many Katrina children simply due to their inclusion in the testing pool.

Schools also had to adjust to social and personal issues as well as academic issues. Sanderson (2003) examined attitudes and expectations among faculties and students in schools with highly transient populations. Teachers related the feelings they had about students who came and went with a “kind of fight attitude” (p. 602) or that students acted as though their behavior did not matter because they would leave again soon. In my own classes I noted the apparent disinterest on the part of some students who knew they would be leaving in a matter of weeks or who expressed the suspicion that any work done in my classroom would not be counted when they moved to a different school or returned to their original school. Rhodes (n.d.) chronicles other aspects of behavior among highly mobile students including methods to handle situations in which the mobile students were being “tested” by their peers, but who found ways to identify potential friends, or attract other students into conversation.
Research published by the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (NCREL) (Student Mobility and Achievement, 2005) suggested that “mobility, combined with other risk factors” is not just an issue for the child who moves, it is an issue for the school, the district, and the students who do not move (p. 84; Hartman, 2006; Schafft, 2006). Recommendations by NCREL and other researchers like Rhodes above include standardized curriculum, targeted professional development for the staff and teachers who work with highly mobile student populations, and attempting to minimize school or district-related policies that exacerbate mobility (such as redrawing attendance zones, inflexible transfer policies, or attempts to remove troublesome students).

The effects of movement are cumulative. Kerbow (1996) reported that students who move once suffer an immediate loss of achievement that, with no further moves, is usually recovered within the second year. However, multiple moves within six years generally result in students falling as much as one complete year behind their more stable peers. This effect is generally the same for less disadvantaged students as it is for disadvantaged or at-risk students, suggesting that socio-economic status has less effect than mobility. Black (2006) noted that highly mobile student take four to six months to recover academically; a “factor that often leads to retention, truancy, and dropping out” (p. 61).

Astone and McLanahan (1994) examined the High School and Beyond Study data to determine if mobility explained any of the disadvantages that students may have had in relation to family organization. Students living in intact two-parent families (either with natural parents or adoptive parents) fare better academically (in this study they graduate at a higher rate) than students in one-parent families, families with a step-parent, or families in which neither natural parent remained. Mobility among students in single-parent families accounted for 18% of the disadvantage, and among stepfamilies mobility accounted for 29% of the disadvantage. The
authors noted also that earlier studies could not identify any factors to explain why a stepfamily (with two parents and potentially twice the economic resources) should have a greater educational disadvantage than would a single-parent family. Their view was that mobility may have provided an explanation missing from other studies.

To summarize the mobility issue: Students who move frequently for reasons other than advancing to the next grade as a result of promotion share a disturbing set of characteristics. They tend to be poor, minority students from single parent families. Their language skills (for the London students cited above) are rudimentary and often their first language is not English. Movement from school to school is often to escape a bill collector or landlord seeking back rent. Continually mobile students may fall as much as a year behind their more stable peers by the sixth year. One striking feature is that movement is not entirely random. Children tend to move from low scoring schools to low scoring schools, contradicting the assumption that most families move to secure an advantage for their children and confounding the basic premise of the NCLB Act encouraging families in poor schools to seek better schools. Most parents apparently do not see a way to get to better schools as only about 1% of those who are eligible actually request a transfer.

The disaster of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita forced thousands to move into new neighborhoods, attend new schools, and for some, switch schools several times in a short span of time. Whether mobility is a major problem or not may depend on the factors unique to the schools themselves. One of the other factors that have a strong influence on schools and the students who attend the schools is the school’s culture and community. Mobility researchers frequently comment on the climate of the school that receives the new students and urge the schools to make the effort to welcome the new students and their families including such practices as including parents in open house nights, formal welcoming sessions, and assigning
school buddies (Demie, et al., 2005; Rhodes, n.d.). When the school has a warm, welcoming atmosphere the new students are more quickly drawn into the school community.

Community

Studies identifying the importance of school culture have indicated many common features found in schools that have been identified as schools of excellence. Although it would be inaccurate to state that a school was excellent because it had a specific type of culture, the connections between the school’s culture and its quality are too strong to ignore. One strong strand within the fabric of school culture is the school community strand. Within this particular area are several issues that have been studied and apply to the current subject of Katrina-induced mobility. Although there has been much printed, the actual research base is still fairly sparse (Furman-Brown, 1999). Community issues include schools as professional communities of educators, schools in which communities exist within the classrooms, schools which have close links with the external communities that they serve, and some version of democratic communities. More recent writings suggest alternative notions of community based on differences, as mentioned by Furman-Brown (1999), including notions that spring in part from feminist views of community and the conundrum of discussing community in modern urban schools where there is considerable diversity in student populations (Strike, 1999, 2000, 2004).

Noddings (1992) suggests that just as families wonder what it is that would be best that their children know, schools need to move beyond the academic curriculum to an approach that emphasizes care. Furman (2004) also reminds us that education is a moral endeavor advocated by Dewey (1922) and echoed by numerous researchers of the 1990s. Either way, the school and its community, both internal and external, determine to a large degree the way students are perceived and treated. How that strengthens or fails to strengthen academic growth depends on
many factors. Considering the ongoing problem of mobility and the schools’ response to suddenly changing populations, every tool that can be used should be employed.

Intergenerational Closure

In general terms, one “tool” of school community comes from a sociological perspective. The value of community has been reported in numerous research articles. Academic and social advantages of schools as communities have been reported by Hunt, Hirose-Hatae, and Doering (2000), Coleman (1985, 1987), and Carbonaro (1998). These advantages may stem from the close association of students, their teachers, and school staff that create a warm, accepting climate. Coleman and Carbonaro in particular speak of the concept of intergenerational closure – or rather the increasing lack thereof. Intergenerational closure is defined as children and their classmates who have parents who also know each other outside of the immediate school context. This creates a closed loop of relationships that provide parents alternative sources of information and support. Modern urban society fragments and isolates both communities and people often leaving the teacher-student relationship the only source of information for families about the school. Although Carbonaro identifies specific advantages in math achievement, Morgan and Sørenson (1999) report no such effect. The difference, Carbonaro (1999) argues, is that Morgan and Sørenson are studying whole school effects while Coleman and others are concerned more with the effects on individual students. The issue of closure is still unresolved, but of interest to researchers of mobility, and this report, because many storm-displaced and highly mobile families are, by virtue of their circumstances, social isolates for months at a time. Among the positive effects of intergenerational closure is the existence of multiple channels of information available to parents; the negative effects include the formation and propagation of reputations that could threaten equality of opportunity of those children, and the smothering effects of everyone in town knowing everyone else’s business - as reported by authors like Peshkin (1978)
who studied rural communities. If schools are “constructed” institutions designed to complement the “nonconstructed” institution of the family, when family institutions change, schools must also change (Coleman, 1987, p. 35-6). For Coleman, many of the changes weakening intergenerational closure have not been beneficial. Carbonaro argues, however, that if schools wanted to, activities to increase closure would be cheap and easy to accomplish.

This strand has direct application to the crisis of education posed by disasters like Katrina. Students who arrive in new schools because of dislocation, who may be shifted to other schools as temporary housing is replaced with more permanent arrangements, will associate with students already in those schools, but their parents will not know each other. There will be a group of students for whom intergenerational closure may be a fact, and a group for whom intergenerational closure does not exist. It is very likely that such groupings exist in all schools to some degree, but Katrina and Rita shifted thousands of families – and students – suddenly.

The School as a Community

Several common characteristics of community include shared values, common activities, and an ethos of caring (Bryk and Driscoll, 1988), respect, caring, inclusiveness, trust, empowerment, and commitment (Raywid, 1993), open communications, widespread participation, and teamwork (Royal and Rossi, 1997). Benefits from such a combination of characteristics include improved behavior and achievement and lower drop-out rates. School characteristics that seem to impede the formation of close communities include bureaucratic inertia, politics, and buffering attempts by the staff to keep parents out of the school (Crowson and Boyd, 2001). Smrekar and Cohen-Vogel (2001) studied the deeply ingrained – and often unintentional – scripts that define how school personnel relate to parents and the school’s external public. They report that there is substantial evidence that “achievement and cognitive
development increase when effective parental involvement practices are in place” (p. 78). Parents, however, report that most communications with schools are negative and school-initiated. The perception of parents, possibly because of social status or ethnicity, is that the school will not welcome them on campus or be interested in their input. Whether intentional or not, most parents feel that social class differences contribute to a wall of separation that inhibits access and limits how much and how successfully parents can intervene on behalf of their children. If class differences are noticeable among parents who live in the community, then storm-displaced parents have even fewer resources upon which to draw in their interactions with schools. Understandably, such attitudes are subdued or absent in high performing schools. Deal and Peterson (1999) remind us that schools must come to some understanding of how the school will interface with the community around it, whether it is to include parents in direct ways – class aides, committees, and task forces – or more distantly as band or athletics boosters, as contributors in fundraising efforts, or simply as spectators.

The fact that very few schools are true communities does not speak well of the choices that most schools have made in that regard. Misunderstandings, missed signals, or conflicting signals – all get in the way of what should be close working relationships between the schools and the children’s first teachers, their parents.

Community and Inclusion

In this strand of community Strike (1999, 2000, 2004) provides an eloquent and incisive analysis of community and the contradictions inherent in communities. He wondered whether any community can be inclusive without at the same time being exclusive or illiberal. If communities are based on shared values, Strike questions whether those values that are shared are thick enough to constitute community without being too thick and prevent inclusion of those whose values do not exactly match. The more we stretch the fabric of our shared values to
include everyone, the less likely community is to evolve. On the other hand, the more specific we become in identifying those values, the fewer individuals we manage to include. Strike reiterates many of the characteristics of community mentioned above. They include membership or some sign of loyalty or ownership, familial or nurturing relationships, interaction of members in mutually reinforcing contexts, and informal rather than bureaucratic structures. These communities tend to work on shared projects. The values that they share tend to be constitutive. Here, Strike (1999) sees a dilemma in that constitutive values tend to be thick enough to create community, but, in the process, become too thick to be inclusive. How are schools, most of which are public and increasingly multicultural, capable of becoming communities? His answer is to recognize degrees of association, levels of commitment, and have big-tented, but sufficiently vague, values to permit the type of inclusion that a liberal democracy would demand. Some examples of this would include smaller schools or schools within schools in which sufficiently constitutive values can form the basis for community.

In another commentary, Strike (2004) notes that although the No Child Left Behind Act (U. S. Congress, 2002) has language that includes parents, the Act itself is not communitarian. The idea of community in schools is one of local responsiveness. Strike questions whether schools can be responsive to local control and local needs if external – national, state, or even district – controls are imposed.

This strand of community is interesting in that it raises the crucial question of how much community is possible without becoming exclusive of some members. With the aftermath of Katrina and the massive shifting of student populations, there are likely to be disruptions in the balance of the schools that host displaced students. Groups that functioned before the arrival of the Katrina children will have to accommodate new members, compete for attention – and possibly resources – with any new groups that form, or some combination of the two.
Balance appears to be the key in that too much of anything may be harmful. Rather than just a scientific or political issue, the value of community is that it holds important elements of interconnections between people and the purposes of education. This makes it a moral or ethical endeavor; one in which the people involved should have some input. I discuss the ethical implications next.

Ethical and Moral Community Implications

Greenfield (2004) examined empirical studies of leadership and moral forces active in schools and came to the conclusion that there is a moral force in school leadership that can be detected and that shapes the environment of the schools wherein such leaders practice. Principals who practice moral leadership often shape the school in their image and are often proactive and creative in finding the time to accomplish their objectives. The moral component is central to the work of being a principal. For superintendents, it is important that the values and skills of their subordinates be congruent with “the conventional wisdom in educational administration” (Kasten and Ashbaugh, 1991, p. 64, in Greenfield, 2004). The symbolic leadership of principals flavors the entire school and transmits to the school’s public, its staff, and students what is important and what the mission of the school is (Greenfield, 2004). This moral leadership is visible not only in what principals say, but in how they approach issues at the school. “Effective leadership is transformative political work,” wrote Dillard (1995, p. 558-560, in Greenfield, 2004). What principals do comes from their values, from their backgrounds, their lived experiences, and that flavors what they do and how they do it. As the pony given as a gift can be seen in different perspectives, a principal can see the arrival of new students and challenges as either a way to ride farther than before or as more manure to shovel.

Furman (2004) sees the ethic of community as “the moral responsibility to engage in communal processes as educators pursue the moral purposes of their work” (2004, p. 215).
Furman sees three overlapping strands in the literature, moral leadership, moral purposes of leadership, and ethical leadership practices. As many recent writers like Furman and Serviovanni (1990) state, leadership is a moral activity, based on values, and centered in the values of the leader. Such an individual can imbue those values into the fabric of the school. Contemporary scholarship is less concerned with the what, how and by whom, and more on the why of leadership (Furman, 2004). Recent work reflects a “thin but growing” research base on the positive claims associated with building community (Furman, 2004, p. 221). The ethic of community is growing in importance as seen in the inclusion of ethics in the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards of 1996. Normally seen as principles guiding ethical reasoning and decision-making or as “perspectives that inform perceptions, character and beliefs” (Beck and Murphy, 1997, p. 33, in Furman, 2004), ethics is increasingly viewed as complex interaction of beliefs and behaviors. Starratt (1994, 2003, in Furman, 2004) has devised a frame of reference that includes an ethic of justice, of critique, and of care. This frame is later expanded by Schapiro and Stefkovich (2001, in Furman, 2004) to include an ethic of professionalism. If the ethic of justice applies equally to all, the ethic of critique challenges all barriers to fairness, and an ethic of caring focuses attention on the relationship between educators and students, then the ethic of profession binds up the three into an imperative to seek what is best for the student. Community standards are set by the community, “including both the professional community and the community in which the leader works” (Furman, 2004, p. 22).

Educators need to be more in tune with the home life and culture of their students in order to develop an ethical sense of place. Educators must be better at listening; bypassing inherent assumptions and biases. Democratic communities are tightly woven to issues of social justice (ibid). Rather than seeking to maintain the status quo, schools that are ethical places actively seek to identify and nurture processes that bring communities together. It is in communities built
around a deep democracy that real justice occurs because all the publics involved in the school are included; all voices heard. The ethic of community described by Furman (2004) and built on communal processes accomplish more than the heroic efforts of individuals who often struggle against great odds while pursuing a vision that he or she alone sees. Although a forceful and talented principal can effect change in a school, such heroics rarely survive the exit from the scene of that principal. Only in deep democratic practices involving all the members of the community and all of the school’s publics can lasting change occur (ibid).

Ethical or moral purposes to education in the past centuries were nothing new to discussions about leadership and community. The issue is reemerging now with the efforts of Greenfield, Furman, Sergiovanni and others. With the current trend of dissociating religion from all public spheres, these and other researchers are finding the void left by removing moral considerations from schools difficult to fill, and the consequences dismaying. Moral or ethical considerations are a major component in the building of a climate of care and support in schools. I turn now to considerations of school climate and how it contributes to community in schools.

School Climate and Culture

By way of introduction to this topic I must state that there is a distinct difference between a culture within a school or school system and its climate. A quick glance through much of the literature suggests that there are many commonalities between the two constructs, but in general I understand culture to be a long term characteristic of a school or a district whereas the climate of either is likely to change, perhaps significantly, due to short term conditions. Although many of the research articles cited below seem to be repeating the same or very similar characteristics, the emphasis on the short term is a characteristic of climate.

Hallinger and Leithwood (1998) examined the impact of culture on leadership across cultures and note that relatively few researchers have examined the context of culture on school
leadership. The challenge of leadership in recent years has trended toward helping others achieve more leadership roles in school. A form of transformative leadership, this approach has both an effectiveness dimension and a moral dimension. As other research has suggested (Anderson, 1982), distributive leadership policies tend to be associated with higher achieving schools.

Hallinger and Leithwood (1998) report that climate shapes the environment in which faculty and students view learning and education. When there is a clear mission, the school is able to direct student learning, allocate the proper resources, and hopefully produce greater gains in achievement. Principals have an indirect effect on the school climate by setting high goals and through influencing the teachers and students to hold high expectations. By establishing procedures and policies that help establish norms of high expectations, principals can influence school culture. The authors note that there is an American and Canadian bias against tracking students, preferring instead to ignore perceived differences in ability and treat all children as having the same ability to achieve. This preference toward equality of educational opportunity contrasts strongly with Asian programs of tracking students by ability and prior achievement – policies that have resulted in substantial gains within relatively short time periods. These gains not only manifest in science and math, but in literacy as well (Hallinger and Leithwood, 1998).

The authors note that such differences spring from cultural values that make cross-cultural comparisons problematic. For example, in China, students are expected to be good in three areas, in order: “conduct, learning, and physical fitness;” a student with “good conduct but poor learning is unfortunate; a student with good learning but poor conduct is unacceptable” (p. 145).

The many studies of school culture point to fairly consistent and expected findings: Schools with positive climates and cultures of hard work and high expectations fare better than schools adrift with vacillating leadership or toxic environments. When taken together, elements of community and school culture share a large number of characteristics. The links between the
two are the ties that connect elements of culture with the elements of community. The following characteristics are gleaned from over thirty articles, many of which are included above. These characteristics include, but are not restricted to: shared goals, a common vision, collaborative decision-making and planning, close interactions and perhaps extended engagement between faculty and students both in the classroom and outside activities, parental involvement, high expectations, a habit of sharing and celebrating achievement as well as tolerance toward experimentation – especially when attempts are not at first successful, reflective practice, and higher levels of commitment. Culture, when it exhibits a positive force in the school, builds community among members of the school and that frequently leads to successful efforts at school improvement, improved morale, and also, frequently, improved achievement.

The school’s culture transmits to the students and external community what is important and although the principal is not always the only player, he or she is the key player in setting the pace, defining the goals and expectations, and generally leading. I turn now to the strand of leadership and its many aspects.

Leadership

Murphy (2002) rejects the old paradigm of leadership in which leaders saw their work as being defined by mental discipline, administrative roles, and being concerned with content and methods. More recently other roles have emerged as important for educational leadership. These include leaders being “moral stewards, educators, and community builders” (p. 13). Murphy urges a return to the distant past notions that education is a value-laden activity, that all actions taken in a school by the school leader are suffused with moral implications, that leaders should focus on education and not management, and that educational leaders should build community within their schools and closer ties with the external community. Rather than being top-down managers, school leaders need to lead from within a web of people.
Greenfield (1995) defines effective school administration as:

A condition wherein successful and appropriate teaching and learning are occurring for all students and teachers in the school; the morale of students, teachers, and other school members is positive; and parents, other community members, and the school district’s administration judge the school to be effectively fulfilling both the letter and spirit of local, state, and federal laws and policies. (p. 61)

Several characteristics make the difference between schools and other organizations unique: There is a moral component, a fairly permanent workforce, and they exist in a milieu in which stability is constantly threatened (Greenfield, 1995). The current crisis in Louisiana schools, both public and private, is the open, persisting nature of their external threats. Under normal circumstances schools are plagued with changes to staff, students, administrations, political leadership, and economic conditions that may threaten the schools. With Katrina came a sudden influx into individual schools of dozens or hundreds of students without warning or any immediate accompanying increase in funding or other resources. Greenfield concludes that considering the press of issues both within and outside of the school, leadership is a crucial component and must be studied both as a subject of reacting to the environmental changes in the school and because leadership is the best way to get faculty and staff to be willing to institute and maintain change.

Slater (1995) discussed four sociological paradigms of leadership: structural-functionalist, political-conflict, constructivist, and critical humanist perspectives. Structural-functionalist approaches emphasize a set of skills or behaviors. Political-conflict approaches emphasize the power relationships in an organization and suggest that legitimacy is an important condition of leadership. Constructivists remind us that leadership is a relationship between the leaders and the led based on negotiation. Critical humanists focus on getting followers to do not only what the leaders view as necessary, but also to do the right thing morally.
Maxcy, (1995) urged a change from the positivist view that still seems to dominate some of our views about leadership and adopt a critical, pragmatic approach. Maxcy urges us to recognize the cultural context in which the current generation of researchers exists: A more pluralist culture that is “profoundly unsystematic, unstructured, and disorienting” (p. 477). Rather than being fixed in a specific tradition, bound within a framework that restricts our vision, researchers need to look beyond the forms and inquire about how we think as we do about leadership. Leadership is not just efficient, rational, or effective means to an end; it is suffused with value and should be seen in its relationship to democracy as liberating for the marginalized voices of groups hitherto excluded from the discussion. Maxcy sees leadership as a process that has an emphasis on how we engage in practices that mirror the current way of life that in schools, as in life, are undergoing profound change.

Although transition is not the specific analog to what happened to schools in Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Texas, change is. From here we move on to the attributes of the leading factor in managing school change, the principal.

Principal Leadership

Years of research to discover what it takes to be a successful principal have led to long lists of attributes linked with success. Some of the most eloquent voices in that field of research include Thomas Sergiovanni and Kenneth Leithwood. Major themes that have emerged over the years have included the moral/ethical aspect of being a principal and transformational leadership in the person of the principal. Both authors, and many others, have much to say on both topics.

Sergiovanni (1982) listed ten principles of quality leadership in his article by that name. The first principle is the prerequisites, those leadership skills needed to develop and maintain competence. Such skills would include conflict management tactics, management principles, and knowledge of team management principles and group processes. Among the strategic principles
are leadership antecedents. These include: perspective, principles, platform, and politics. Other strategic principles cluster around the meanings of leadership: purposing, planning, persisting, and peopling. The final principle is patriotism: The norms and beliefs to which staff, parents, and students give their allegiance. As Sergiovanni (1982) states: “Organizational patriots are committed to purposes, they work hard, believe in what they are doing, feel a sense of excitement for the organization and its work, and find their own contributions to the organization meaningful if not inspirational” (p. 332). This analysis, evidence of which is amply found in high performance organizations and in Japanese industrial experiences in the late 1970s and 1980s, emphasized the interrelated nature of the principles.

Andrews and Soder (1987) in a brief, but intriguing article indicate that principals who act as resource providers, an instructional resource, communicator, and a visible presence in the school provide support to the notion that a strong principal can have a positive effect on student outcomes. The effects of their presence are felt greatest among those schools with large numbers of free or reduced price lunch students – a proxy for low income students. African-American students also benefited more in schools with leaders who were identified as strong. Principals identified as being strong instructional leaders were also associated with improved reading and mathematical achievement, again primarily among minorities and low income students. Implications for policy focus on pre-service training, selection, continuing education, and evaluation of principals to ensure that the pool of potential principals and cadre already in service are used to fullest benefit of the students and district. Another interesting comment by Andrews and Soder was that teachers should be seen as a “legitimate source of data regarding principal behaviors” (Andrews & Soder, 1987, p. 11).

Leithwood, Begley, and Cousins (1990) attempted to identify areas in administration that needed additional research. The authors noted that the research on principal practices in relation
to outside influences and influences internal to the school were relatively scarce. Principals’ time was mainly taken up in administrative activities. Among the many findings gleaned from their review of the literature were items that noted the connection between certain leadership styles and effective school leadership. Four styles were identified: leadership that focused on interpersonal relationships and positive climates, leadership that was focused on student achievement, leadership that was focused on program structure, and leadership that was most focused on attention to administrative details. The authors noted that the most effective administrators appeared to be those who were problem solvers; administrators who were most concerned with managerial duties appeared to be the least effective. They also noted that practices associated more with managerial practice appeared to be the most common. From an administrative point of view, running a tight ship and satisfying the demands of the organization held higher importance than the more interpersonal activities. The more effective principals cited in the studies were focused on the goals of the school, particularly those goals that dealt with the achievement of the students. Effective principals set high standards and worked to develop a common understanding of those goals among their faculties. Effective decision making processes included participatory practices that involved parents and faculty. Understandably, such practices generate more loyalty among staff, particularly among secondary teachers (elementary staff loyalty was also noted, though less conclusively). Obstacles identified in some of the research suggest that many of the obstacles to good practice are external to the principal. Other obstacles included some teachers, teacher autonomy, collective bargaining, hierarchical structures, and community influences. Lack of clear expectations and school complexity were obstacles that were considered internal obstacles to the principal.

The role of the principal in building effective schools was also studied by Hallinger and Heck (1996, 1998). After noting troubling contradictions in the results of two earlier reviews
(Bridges, 1982; Bossert, et al., 1982), the authors point out that most of the early research lacked theoretical underpinnings and frequently were focused on different aspects of administrative effects. The relationship between principals and achievement are complex, indirect and “not easily subject to empirical verification” (1996, p. 6). Recent work in the area, especially when using more sophisticated designs linked to theoretical models, supports the thesis that principals do make a difference in student achievement. Principals do not have a direct influence upon the students; they have indirect influence that is internal to the school. They set norms of high expectations, policies that support those norms, and influence and support teachers in their work. The most influential effect found consistently in the study was goal-setting.

Sergiovanni (1996a) noted that it is predominately the job of the school leader, in most cases identified in the person of the principal, to set the tone for the school. Leaders typically have nine tasks they must perform: Purposing, maintaining harmony, institutionalizing values, motivating, managing, explaining, enabling, modeling, and supervising. If these tasks are taken in total to mean a moral position to lead students into adulthood with the skills needed to succeed then the job becomes a moral practice. Leadership then becomes true pedagogy whereas the school, directed by its leaders, leads students out of childhood (educere) and into adulthood (educare) (Sergiovanni, 1996a). Sergiovanni ends with the statement that leadership as pedagogy calls for leader and led to be called to higher levels of commitment, the same phraseology found in discussions of transformative leadership although he does not use that term specifically.

Whitaker (1997) noted that effective schools researchers have consistently found that effective schools have effective and visible principals. Effective principals are instructional leaders who model as well as teach good practices. Three common features of instructional leadership are that principals are active and people oriented, operate within a network of other principals, and had a mentor early in their career. Good principals are also resource providers,
are caring and attentive to the needs of the staff, are an instructional resource for their teachers, are good communicators, and are a visible presence in the school. Effective principals do not lose focus on the reason for the school: student learning.

Short (1998) examined several aspects of empowerment. In her comments on principal empowerment she identified characteristics of principals who seek to expand the leadership in their schools. Principals of empowered schools spend less time trying to pull the school in a particular direction: Empowerment means “more feet running in the same direction” (para. 12). Short believes that transformation of schools will occur only in empowered environments.

Leithwood and Jantzi (2000) replicated an earlier study on principal and teacher leadership effects on student engagement and report somewhat disappointing results. Principal leadership appeared to account for a small – only about 8% – but significant portion of the variance, and teachers accounted for even less of the variation in explaining student engagement with school. In discussing the implications of the study, the authors noted other studies that reported similar low findings and remarked that researchers seeking findings to support their arguments for more teacher leadership were not finding particularly supportive results. Rather than focus on only the contribution of the principal or of the teacher, the authors note that the process is more complex and that school change requires a multi-dimensional strategy, not just an emphasis on teacher leadership or of principal leadership. In addition to the findings, the authors comment that connecting leadership to teaching devalues both teaching and the concept of leadership as well.

The fit between the principal and the needs of the faculty was examined by Gooden (2000). As a result of the court case Rose v. Council for Better Education (1989) the state of Kentucky was ordered to overhaul the entire education system and produce a more equitable system. Research in educational change has found that one necessary ingredient was the
innovation advocate. Several studies indicated that though principals can serve in that role, teachers can be more influential in that role. A supportive principal and a collaborative working environment between teachers and between the teachers and principal were necessary. From this study two major conclusions were reached: There must be a comfortable fit between the leadership style of the principal and the perceived needs of the staff; and time must be taken for collaborative working relationships to evolve. Additionally, a relatively stable staff is necessary for the trust and cooperation to develop. Gooden (2000) reported in detail on two of the schools in the study and observed that had the principals in the study served in other school instead of their own, implementation would not have proceeded as well due to the expectations of the faculties in each school. Each principal was a good fit; in the right place at the right time.

Hallinger (2003) noted that in more than one model of leadership (instructional and transformative) effective principals were found to focus on: Creating a sense of purpose, setting high expectations and a culture of improvement, creating a reward structure that reflected the school’s goals, organizing a range of activities that stimulate the staff to further their development, and being a visible presence in the school (p. 343). Differences between the models are also noteworthy. Instructional leadership might for example emphasize first-order change – modifications to the practices of teaching, whereas transformative leadership focuses more on second-order change – a “reformulation of the system and its capacities” (Lyddon, 1990) or what Levy and Merry (1986, in Townsend and Twombly, 1998) term “multidimensional, multi-level, qualitative, discontinuous, radical change[s] involving a paradigmatic shift” (p. 77). Similarly, transformative leadership emphasizes empowerment over coordination and control, and shared control versus an individual locus of leadership. Hallinger (2003), citing recent research by others, noted that the conceptualization of leadership is more complex than earlier assumed. Hallinger cited it as a “mutual influence process” (emphasis in the
original), in which leaders respond to changes in the environment: “the leader’s behaviours are shaped by the school context” (p. 346). Hallinger takes this point farther, suggesting that the appropriate model of leadership accommodates the context of the school and moves responsively to the needs of the school. If instructional leadership is needed, leaders should use the proper behaviors. At-risk schools may require a more top-down approach, but sustained improvement requires that schools and their staffs must take more ownership of the improvement process and thus begin a journey to a more transformative leadership process. This is transformation in a different sense, a more developmental approach.

Principals have been viewed as essential to the success of schools. Until recently, most of the empirical studies have had mixed results, suffered from oversimplification and therefore suspect results, or have lacked sufficient theoretical support. More recent studies suggest that the leadership of the principal is a crucial factor in setting the tone and climate of the school. Since much of the work done is focused on school change or school improvement, the premise of this study is indirectly applicable because most studies seek to understand what happens when change is deliberately initiated. This study is concerned with what happens to schools when circumstances beyond their control force change suddenly.

District and Board Leadership

Leadership qualities also must exist at the next level up, at the superintendent and district board level. Black (2007) reminds us that effective schools and student achievement are correlated with effective superintendent leadership. Five actions that have been shown to lead to improved student achievement are goal setting, setting objectives for improved instruction, securing school board cooperation for initiatives, monitoring progress, and securing resources (ibid). Much of the recent literature concerning leadership at the district level parallels concepts found at the building level. Bryant and Houston (2002) report that building teamwork between
the superintendent and the school board is necessary to improving student achievement. Like the leadership characteristics found in good principals, school boards needed to cooperate with superintendents to establish a vision, set standards and assessment practices, encourage collaboration between boards and the superintendents, and establish a proper climate. Bingler, Blank, and Berg (2007) describe the efforts to reconnect the New Orleans Schools with their communities. The connection with neighborhoods had been lost in New Orleans before the hurricanes of 2005, a combination of the “economic and social collapse” that Adamo (2007) credits to “realignments of the Reagan era” (p. 44), and the lure of huge sums of federal funds and the tinkering of federal judges during the desegregation case there (Caldas and Bankston, 2005). Bingler, et al. (2007) cite examples of other cities in America – Cincinnati and St. Paul specifically – with similar decayed inner city schools that were revitalized by ground-up approaches that embedded schools within a larger community context that made the schools not just the 8–3 educational one-use institutions, but 24-7 community centers. The ambitious vision was not universally accepted, as Adamo (2007) relates, after the Recovery District took over 107 of the public schools in Orleans Parish, Louisiana. All of school employees had been terminated by the school board following Hurricane Katrina; Orleans Parish was starting with a clean slate. FEMA regulations required that all equipment in damaged schools be removed; Orleans started the school year with few schools, little or no equipment, and few certified staff members.

Hofman, Hofman, & Guldemond (2002) examined the sector effect of public and private schools in terms of the differences in governance structures. What makes this study unique is that, among other things, schools in the Netherlands are funded by the state equally whether they are public or private. In this context, researchers may isolate somewhat more effectively the influences of governance structures on the schools and therefore get a better view of how that would affect student achievement in math. Results indicate that Catholic schools did not have the
highest SES or IQ levels but they did achieve the highest math scores out of all of the denominational groups examined (public, Catholic, Protestant, and neutral schools). One variable that seemed to have a significant impact on math achievement was the influence of community members on school board decisions. The stronger the community members influence upon the school boards, the higher the math achievement scores. Among Catholic schools there was more contact between staff and parents and less bureaucracy. A possible explanation was the likelihood that Catholic schools were more “adjusted to parents’ wishes and are more in line with the pupils’ home environment” (p. 267). Effective leadership and coherence “within schools produce a sense of community that, in turn, shapes conditions in schools that positively affect student achievement” (p. 268). In this context, community is in part the communications between parents and school officials, and between parents and the school boards.

Opfer and Denmark (2001) also examined the relationships between school boards and parent and community groups. Three models are discussed briefly: administrative control, professional control, and community control. In general, most reforms in terms of community-based control have resulted in little or no substantive change. Opfer and Denmark (2001) also note that the literature on school change suggests that if community based reforms are enacted, increased social capital would result. In order for this to occur, according to Coleman (1990, in Opfer and Denmark, 2001), three conditions must be present: “a high degree of closure in the relationships among different kinds of actors in the school, stability among the actors in the school, and group norms that reinforce the public-good aspect of the school” (p. 104). Unfortunately, the results of the research suggest that school boards do not always create those conditions.

If “social capital and school community require closure, stability, and norms that reinforce the public good” then the evidence from this study is disappointing (Opfer and
Denmark, 2001, p. 116). The differing views of the relationship between principals and boards suggest several problems. Principals and board members both claim that no interference by school board members occur in the schools, but examples of interference abound. The principal is in an ambiguous position somewhere between compliance with board directives and his or her position as school-based decision leader (ibid). This suggests an inherent role ambiguity.

The implications of this are fairly serious. Most boards are political rather than social and may lose sight of their function as representatives of the community. They may remember their position relative to the community at election time, but their activities, sometimes supporting, sometimes interfering with school business, belie the rhetoric. Non-public school boards are more accountable to their support communities who, if dissatisfied with the progress of the school, may vote with their feet and remove their children. For private schools, this defection can have serious implications for the financial health of the school. Until the accountability programs mandated by the NCLB Act (U. S. Congress, 2002), public schools did not have an equivalent economic lever hanging over their heads unless they needed a bond issue.

There is a strong strand, however, in recent literature toward leadership that goes beyond the simple administration of rules and policies toward the development of human capacity. This strand is transformative leadership – as termed by Burns (1978) in his now classic study: Leadership. One of the most prolific writers on that topic is Kenneth Leithwood. I will now review some of the research on transformational leadership, as the topic is now termed.

Transformational Leadership

For Leithwood (1992), the dominant theme for the 21st century should be transformational leadership. Leithwood noted that, rather than the Type A, top-down, centralized hierarchies, schools should bear a similarity to Type Z organizations which function best through consensual relationships. Schools are complex systems composed of interdependencies that
require facilitative leadership to make the best use of the talents and training of their staffs. Transformational school leaders studied by Leithwood and his associates have three goals: help staff develop collaborative professional cultures, foster professional development, and help teachers solve their problems effectively. Effective school leaders make a concerted effort to view problems from different perspectives and view problems in the specific perspective of how it affects the goals for the school. By involving school staff in open communications about school issues, transformative school leaders avoid taking easy, canned solutions that may create problems later. Leithwood also noted that transactional leadership does not make the same kind of lasting changes as transformational leadership (transactional leadership is characterized by a quid pro quo transaction between a leader and the led).

Leithwood (1994) described expectations about leadership and school restructuring. A recent focus in research in the 1990s and early 2000s has been the concept of transformative leadership. Leithwood argues that first and second order change is necessary for school change to succeed. First-order change is the change in core technology of the school. Included in this may be the application of knowledge about constructivist learning models and improved instructional techniques. Second-order change is about changing the culture of the school before it strangles the incipient changes in core technologies. Restructuring failures are frequently caused by procedures practiced by recalcitrant leadership not committed to fundamental changes in the thought processes involved in running the school. Some of those procedures may be similar to the defensive practices discussed by Argyris (1999). Leithwood (1994) also cites transformative effects of leadership that seek to improve the potential of school personnel through collaborative culture and empowerment, professionalism, and shared decision making. Transformative leadership seems well suited for the task. Leithwood noted that the individual tenets of transformational leadership are not especially new. What is perhaps most noteworthy of
this concept is that attention should be paid to all facets of transformative leadership. It may be that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts in this area. Leadership that is transformative is value-added. Activities that appear managerial, that are essentially routine in nature, but which are infused with particular meaning by the leader can become transformational.

Jantzi & Leithwood (1996) examined leadership in schools from a cognitive science perspective. From the discussion of this study, Jantzi and Leithwood noted that acting like a leader, at least to the faculty of the school, may count for more than who the leader is. Being seen to do positive things for the school carries weight. Another finding of their study was that some school practices seem to marginalize the influences of effective leaders. For example, institutional practices of moving effective principals every few years inhibit the positive influences that such leaders can exert on a school and its faculty. A third assertion that gender may play a part in both the role of the leader and that of the followers was suggested as possibly misleading due to the predominance of women in teaching and leadership positions in the elementary schools examined in this study.

Jason (2000) argued that transformational leadership is uniquely capable of flourishing in multicultural settings. As Burns (1978) noted, transforming leadership seeks to raise both the leader and led to higher levels of motivation and morality. In a multicultural setting, found in most urban and suburban areas or in rural settings undergoing consolidation or desegregation, the unique talents of a transformational leader are an asset. Jason observed that transformational leaders are open to change and realize that personal (and personnel) development and school improvement are connected. Such leadership encourages and supports the development of democratic interaction and consensus, involving the entire faculty in decision-making. This would be crucial in preparing the way for the development of a multicultural program. Research constantly reinforces the notion that empowerment is a consequence of transformational
leadership. This theme is also found in research focused on business leadership. This type of leadership benefits the school because it creates a learning environment in which the teachers model their own learning for students, feel appreciated and safe, and where issues are decided with sensitivity and attention to multiple perspectives. It is an ethical school, a school in which diversity is celebrated and respected, and that leads to deeper learning.

Geijssel, Sleegers, Leithwood, and Jantzi, (2003) examined the effects that transformational leadership seem to have on the commitment to reform on the part of teachers in school settings. This study built upon the work of Bass and Avolio (1994, in Geijssel, et al, 2003), among others, whose four dimensions of transformational leadership were: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Of special interest were the importance of vision and intellectual stimulation as they apply to teachers. The assumption behind the study was that transformational leadership would influence teachers’ commitment to reform efforts in the school which in turn would motivate the teachers and lead to improved student outcomes.

Professional development for school leaders is briefly discussed by Kochan, Bredson, and Riehl (2002). The authors cite several barriers to effective professional development. One is the nature of the work itself which requires leaders to seek immediately useful information at the expense of more difficult to acquire knowledge that comes from critical reflection. Another issue is the apparent reticence to admit that principals need more professional development. Accountability mandates from district, state, or federal levels also distract principals from focusing on innovation. Principals need to be model learners, stewards of learning, and builders of community. The authors urge more professional development practices for principals, seeking ways to motivate principals to want to improve their practice, formal structures to engage principals in reflection, peer interaction including mentorships, graduate programs, and learning-
focused sabbaticals. Training needs to be applicable to their roles as school leaders and should lead principals to be model learners bringing their schools to higher levels of performance.

Because many school principals still practice their art the way their principals did in the past, Crow, Hausman, and Scribner (2002) urge a reshaping of the role of principal to reflect a postindustrial world. There is a tension today between the requirements of standardized testing and accountability on one hand and the apparent need to change the paradigm to more inclusive, innovative strategies on the other. The desire for collaborative communities of learners requires that principals become collaborative instructional leaders, build professional communities, build shared commitment among faculty, and foster shared decision making. The authors also note that because there appears to be a growing market orientation, principals must be prepared to market their schools to parents and build civic capacity in the schools while still satisfying the demands of accountability measures.

What is not stated in the above summaries is the other end of the continuum of transformational leadership – that is the transactional side. It appears that the two concepts are not mutually exclusive and that principals can and often must exercise some of each (Somech and Wenderow, 2006). In transactional leadership the principal bargains with his staff to get specific activities done. The transaction is a trade-off of some contingent reward – something teachers want – for services performed in the school. It may be that any given school has a balance of the two, but that transformational leadership elicits more dedicated followership and more successful – and sustained – change (Leithwood, Leonard, and Sharratt, 1998; Geijsel, et al., 2003).

Fullan (2001) pointed up several curious elements of leadership that may seemingly contradict conventional wisdom, among them: charismatic leaders are short term solutions to problems, heroes on white chargers do not build strong organizations that survive their
departures, and that leaders should seek opportunities to encourage leadership in those below and around them. What is needed, Fullan argues, is leadership that must be developed at many levels and that leaders must master five core capacities: “moral purpose, understanding the change process, building relationships, knowledge building, and coherence making” (p. 137).

Bridging and Buffering

Leithwood and Prestine (2002) discuss several approaches to leadership at the school and district level and present a case study summary of one successful effort. In that report, though, a single comment seemed appropriate to this theme of bridging and buffering. “Leaders must buffer staff from counterproductive policies, build school improvement initiatives that address external reforms, and meet the needs of the school’s students and parents” (p. 11).

DiPaola and Tschannen-Moran (2005) described the concepts of bridging and buffering as they apply to administrators who either attempt to identify useful resources outside of the school and integrate them into school processes, or seek to isolate the school from perceived dangers outside of the school. In this study, the DiPaola and Tschannen-Moran attempt to discern whether bridging or buffering is more effective in improving student achievement and school development. Bridging activities appear to be more supportive of the mission of the school, but buffering strategies seem to have a negative impact on student achievement (Hoy, Tarter, and Kottkamp, 1991).

From an economic perspective, the concept of bridging and buffering fall under the resource dependence theory as means of securing needed resources to accomplish the purposes of the organization. Johnson (1995) sees buffering strategies as a means of reducing uncertainties by protecting organizational boundaries. Bridging, on the other hand expands organizational boundaries, decreasing dependence on limited resource providers by involving other providers in cooperative ventures.
Some schools may try to limit harm to the system by buffering the school from farther impact by parents or community members after the arrival of Katrina students. Similar efforts to buffer communities were seen as communities refused to allow FEMA trailer parks in their neighborhoods out of fear of increased crime, or by arguing that their neighborhoods could not support additional population pressure on existing infrastructure (Nelson, 2005; Pitchford, 2005).

To summarize: In the research cited above, leadership is a diverse area of study that the many differing images and concepts, some apparently contradictory, can cause more smoke than light. Of the several concepts that repeat throughout the research base, in personal reflection, and in commentaries, the most frequently mentioned was professional development, both for faculties and staff, and for principals. This single concept is followed in decreasing order by goal setting and establishing a clear vision – or visioning, encouraging collaboration among faculty, staff and other stakeholders. To this concept is added the related idea of peer assistance. Other concepts that show frequently in the literature are shared decision-making, principal’s support of faculty and staff, the principal’s ability to secure and provide adequate resources, involve external community cooperation, create or nurture a climate for empowerment, and maintain open and frank communications with faculty, parents, and external community stakeholders. Themes that appear less frequently include setting high and clear expectations, peer support, recognizing the moral purpose of the school, involving others in goal setting, encouraging or inspiring commitment, purposing, and being an instructional leader. One theme that was conspicuous in its absence was maintaining a stable staff, though that concept appears in literature on community and culture, one would expect a school principal, or other school leaders, would find their efforts supported more by a relatively stable faculty and staff. One finding frequently cited in the literature is the advantage students have when in contact with the same teachers for extended time – often combined with team teaching. If faculty turnover is
severe the odds are the school is suffering some deeper problem of which leadership may only be a part.

Organizational Theory

Classical Theory

Four general models of organizational theory have emerged in the past. Classical organizational theory is probably best represented in the works of Frederick W. Taylor and Max Weber. The major driving force in Taylor’s writings are both predictable and surprising in that he not only strove to improve efficiency for the employer, but also to improve the prosperity of each employee by improving the efficiency with which each employee worked to reach his potential, as well as higher wages to improve his living conditions. This mutual benefit would seem rationally comprehensible, but in the history of management and working class in America and Europe, division was the norm, not cooperative development for mutual prosperity. Taylor believed that the rational approach to management would reduce inefficiency and help not only improve in production, but also to improve the living and working conditions of the employees (Halsall, 1998). Planning was taken out of the domain of the craftsman and placed firmly within the management domain where it would benefit from scientific approach to improved efficiency (Max Weber, n.d.).

Along the same lines, Weber described three types of relationship between the worker and his employer. Weber preferred using a rational approach, described as the ideal form and termed bureaucracy characterized by systematic discipline, rules that are consistent and universally followed, leadership by officials chosen for their expertise and clearly defined hierarchy. The other forms described by Weber include the traditional form, in which leadership is based on patrimony, tradition, and feudal relationships; and a charismatic form where leadership is exercised by virtuous individuals who gain their leadership through heroic actions.
and who gain followers by force of personality. What is interesting in this view is Weber’s discussion of the cycle through which enterprises pass, usually starting with a charismatic leader and entrepreneurial structure then, as they grow in size, the ventures inevitably transition into a bureaucracy. Once the bureaucracy solidifies and begins to suffer from the negative effects common to bureaucratic forms the business transitions into a traditional, feudal form leading to disillusionment and eventually revolt from those working in the business. This revolt raises up a new charismatic leader who decentralizes the business, returns to the entrepreneurial phase wherein success first appeared and the cycle continues (Max Weber, n.d.). The history of Apple Computer is an example of this cycle in which founders Jobs and Wozniak built the company only to be pushed aside as the company grew in size and complexity and bureaucracy replaced entrepreneurial spirit. After years of drifting and floundering in a rapidly maturing market, Jobs returned to revitalize the company.

Classical organizational theory emphasized a mechanized view of work done by workers who follow impersonal orders from expert managers in large bureaucracies. Although Mary Parker Follett tried to introduce the element of more democratic control and paying attention to the psychological needs of the worker (Natemeyer and McMahon, 2001), the general trend at the turn of the Twentieth Century was toward a rational system that did not fully take into account the personal wishes of the workers.

Human Relations Theory

The aspect of psychological effects and workers wishes came to a focus with the Hawthorne studies of the 1920s and 1930s. This has been referred to in the literature as the human relations approach. In this development of administrative theory, researchers began to recognize the human element to work and the studies mentioned above revealed that most rationalistic theories did not take into account the feelings or sentiments of the workers. In
addition, the writings of Kurt Lewin, a refugee from Nazi Germany, helped create the field of social psychology and introduced ideas of group dynamics (Daniels, 2003). In conjunction with Lewin, Lippitt and White studied leadership and found that, of the three types – authoritarian, democratic, and laissez-faire, the democratic style of leadership did not result in the most production, but did result in the highest quality, satisfaction among workers, and team cohesiveness (Boje, 2000).

Behavioral Science Theory.

This model of organization theory came from the work of Argyris and Maslow among others, and was known as the behavioral science approach. This approach considered all the major components of the organization while emphasizing contingency leadership, organizational culture, systems theory, and transformational leadership. Maslow is perhaps the most recognizable name in this phase of organizational theory. Maslow’s hierarchy of needs has not been empirically proven, but provides a satisfactory, intuitive explanation for the forces that drive behavior. Students, for whom the concept of food and shelter are daily concerns, are not likely to rise above the lowest rungs of the needs pyramid to the levels of self–esteem and eventually self-actualization.

Argyris and Schön (1996) developed an idea that was at first “repugnant” to some in the field (p. xvii) that organizations were institutions that could learn. Whether all institutions could learn is no longer an issue, but rather whether the learning that occurs is productive or even desirable. Among the many intriguing concepts discussed was the idea of single-loop learning (similar to a thermostat, discover an error condition and act to return conditions to an error-free state) and double-loop learning (question why the situation is the way it is and whether it should remain that way). In dealing with error conditions and means to rectify errors, Argyris (1999) noted that sometimes there are routines that act to hinder efforts at finding solutions. Often these
efforts to maintain the status quo are invisible and un-discussable. Some problems exist and cannot be discussed because the organization cannot acknowledge that policies or procedures within the organization create the problem. This is termed defensive reasoning. One form of this defensive reasoning in schools might be to overlook or refuse to accept the possibility of conflict between faculty and staff of a school and the central office. On the local level, conflicts between departments within the school, or between elementary and middle or high school staff, would be “un-discussable” because such conflicts would not be acceptable in a “good” school.

Post Behavioral Theories.

The most recent development in organizational theory is termed post-behavioral. This current trend is broad-based and includes issues such as democratic community, transformational leadership, moral leadership, and values and ethics, all of which have been described above. Also commonly found in post-behavioral science are critical theory, contingency leadership, and studies concerning gender, race or ethnicity and class.

Most of the issues discussed in organizational theory were initially studied in the context of business practices and had limited relevance to education. Lunenburg (2003) and Maxcy (1995) reminded us that the rational or positivist system has long dominated educational administration. Positivistic attitudes are implicit in A Nation at Risk (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) and the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 (U. S. Congress, 2002). Post-modern efforts include such qualitative methodologies as ethnographies, case studies, and naturalistic inquiry.

As we attempt to understand the changes wrought by the arrival of devastating hurricanes, tornadoes, earthquakes, or any other natural or man-made disaster, we may realize that not all change is bad, sudden, or for that matter, undesirable. Schools react to change every day, every year, as students enter, mature, graduate or transfer, and occasionally die. Faculty
members gain teaching experience, marry, have children, and eventually retire or die. Administrators come and go. Change is a constant factor. One perspective on change that needs to be examined is how schools instill the needed skills to make use of what experience teaches as the years progress. One way to look at that is through an organizational learning perspective.

Organizational Learning.

Organizational learning may be defined as the way a group of people improve their capabilities to accomplish a task (Senge, n.d.). Senge postulates five “disciplines” of organizational learning: personal mastery, mental models, shared vision, team learning, and systems thinking.

Leithwood and Jantzi (1995) examined school responses to policies initiated at the district and provincial level in Canada. An organizational learning perspective was used to determine why some schools react better to certain initiatives than other schools. Schools with collaborative or harmonious cultures contributed to organizational learning. Conclusions drawn from the study include the following points:

- Teachers learn mostly from informal contacts with fellow teachers and from their own classroom experiences. When problems come up requiring some form of in-service training teachers do not usually initiate the activity and often the process leaves teachers isolated in their efforts to make sense of what they learned.
- District efforts are frequently underestimated – that is downplayed in terms of their effectiveness – but can have some effect on teacher learning, usually in association with effective policies and practices directed toward teacher development programs.
- A crucial part of organizational learning is a coherent sense of direction. When there was a clear direction in which the school was moving teachers were able to make sense of a large number of initiatives. Even when teachers remain relatively isolated...
in their classrooms, if the school is clear about its direction the teachers can gain some benefits from organizational learning initiatives.

- Some sources of sense-making in schools were relatively innocuous. Goal-setting efforts, sometimes for clearly short-term goals, may provide a sense of direction that persists into the longer term. Other sources include the culture of the school and vision of the principal as to what the school could become.

Some schools reacted well to initiatives at reform; others were not so receptive, as described below. The success of organizational learning initiatives depended on many variables not the least of which were the climate of the school and the policies in place in the school.

Principals play a large role in setting each.

Leithwood, Leonard, and Sharratt, (1998) continue earlier research on organizational learning by trying to identify those conditions that foster organizational learning. Five conditions are identified: a stimulus, out-of-school conditions, in-school conditions, leadership, and the outcomes. Results of the study suggested that leadership effects were frequently indirect, that school structures that encourage collaboration, shared decision-making, and cooperation facilitated organizational learning. Conditions of “uncertainty, lack of stability, and impermanence” often challenged organizations with centralized “planning, control, and direction” (p. 267-268). If a basic purpose of organizational learning is for schools to be able to restructure or reculture themselves, then they must have the capacity to be largely self-directed.

Organizational learning is not successfully imposed from the outside. Members of the organization must have the flexibility and freedom to explore and collaborate on problem solving. Transformational leadership seems to accommodate those conditions best.

In the context of this research, organizational learning may show some promise in explaining how well schools reacted to sudden change. If the school had a culture of learning
how to handle change and how to sustain effort, it may go a long way to explaining how well some schools dealt with events like the aftermath of natural disasters.

Goldring, Crowson, Laird, and Berk (2003) examined the change process of transitioning from schools under court ordered desegregation to unitary status. The focus of their examination was the process of how to dismantle one policy while simultaneously initiating a new policy. The authors noted that leadership during transition is a poorly understood and little-studied topic. In their examination of schools in transition to unitary status, they note that three major themes have emerged: Transition from one policy to another can induce a real sense of loss; schools in transition must be able to adjust their framework to incorporate the new realities of reframing the vision of school as community within itself to one of existing within a geographical community with which it must reconnect; and finally, a sense of direction for the school that can, at the same time, see a leaving from an old reality while going to a new reality. Findings in this examination of leadership in transition reinforce the findings of Sergiovanni (1996b) regarding developing communities as relationships, place, and mind, and Fullan (1991) regarding the need to prepare the school in order to achieve lasting change. Sometimes instructional leadership means establishing the “social fabric…before getting to the work of instructional leadership” (Goldring, et al., 2003, p. 486).

Summary

Because of time constraints, this review of the literature was not comprehensive and does not represent all the research to date on these major themes. What is represented here is a generous slice of the empirical research spiced with reflections and commentaries of practitioners in the field. The consensus is fairly clear that schools are porous entities influenced from both within and without. The context and climate of the school dictates to some degree what can and cannot be easily accomplished. The presence of a strong or weak principal, in
juxtaposition with the climate, enables or dooms efforts at sustaining change processes or
imperils the stability of an otherwise well functioning school. With the unfortunate arrival of a
category 3 hurricane on the southeastern quadrant of New Orleans, followed within a month by a
category 3 hurricane on the southwestern quadrant of Louisiana, this investigation will be
concerned with change that is unplanned and unwanted. How do climate, culture, and
community enable schools to respond to the sudden arrival of new students from devastated
areas of the Gulf Coast? How does the formal and informal structure of the school, largely the
result of the leadership practices of the principal, superintendent, or district policy influence the
way schools respond to sudden change? Did the school need changes to the formal structure to
accommodate the sudden arrival of displaced students and faculty? One year later, did those
changes, both formal and informal, still remain in place? Were the policies that already were
struggling with “normal” mobility of students sufficient to deal with the sudden flood of
displaced families that resulted from Katrina and Rita? This study will attempt to determine how
a district and several schools responded to the pressures and strains of new students arriving with
little or no warning.
CHAPTER 3

METHOD

The purpose of this single embedded case study is to examine a school district impacted by the arrival of large numbers of hurricane-displaced students to determine how the district administration and the schools responded to challenges of receiving, placing, and teaching thousands of displaced students. The case will comprise the school district and the embedded units of analysis will consist of the central office and each of several schools selected within the district that received displaced students. This chapter will contain four sections. The first section will describe the design used. Section two will describe the criteria for the sites identified for the study. Section three will describe the procedure for selecting units for the case study. Section four will describe the types of data collected for the study. A summary concludes the chapter.

Design

Research questions dealing with “how” and “why” types of questions focusing on contemporary events are appropriately answered with case study formats (Yin, 2008). This study will use an embedded single case design as described in Yin (2008). The primary unit of analysis is a school district located in a mid-sized city in South-central Louisiana. This district was selected because it received more displaced students who met the federal definition of homelessness than any other district in the state – other than the devastated districts near New Orleans whose populations shifted over a course of several months from flooded schools to schools in higher areas. Embedded units of analysis within this study included the central office administration and several schools in the district. Five schools were initially considered, but two schools did not have sufficient populations of displaced students in 2005 and were removed from the case. Schools that had displaced populations of at least 9% at some point during the year were included in the study.
One rationale for using an embedded case study was to try to understand how the district was able to absorb thousands of displaced students in a two week period and why some schools responded well to challenges and improved their School Performance Scores (SPS) while others did not. This district was selected because in the weeks following Hurricanes Katrina and Rita the district received more students than any other district in Louisiana except one of the devastated districts. By examining several schools in a single district, this study sought to identify commonalities and relationships that might avoid detection in a holistic case study. It also offered a greater chance to detect strategies to help maintain high levels of achievement in those schools.

As Stake (2006) mentions, the situation will have influence on the activity under study, but because the activities of schools and the school climates are largely shaped by the leadership and conditions present in the schools, more than one site is required to gain a general understanding of the effects of Katrina upon schools in the study area. For that reason, three schools within a single district were ultimately chosen.

Site Selection

Three schools comprised a group of schools whose administrators indicated a willingness to participate and had received large numbers of displaced students during the 2005-2006 school year. The initial choice of schools in the study sought to ensure a range of school circumstances and provide a rich source of data without making the project unmanageable. Another factor that was used in selecting schools was the School Performance Scores (SPS) of the schools. School Performance Scores are calculated using the results of standardized tests administered in March each year, the number of absences, and for grades eight through twelve, the number of drop-outs. Standardized test scores account for 90% of the SPS. This project examined schools that had a broad range of School Performance Scores in 2005-06 ranging from a gain of over nine points to
losses exceeding eighteen points. Schools selected for the study were PS-814, PS-813, and PS-802. The changes in the SPS highlighted an intriguing combination of the large influx of displaced students and either large improvements or declines in SPS. Table 3.1 indicates the general school demographics as represented by October 3, 2005. That date represents the official report from the district to the State Department of Education. The data were taken from the Pentamation database, a commercial database used by the district in the 2005 – 2006 school year.

Table 3.1. Selected Demographic and School Performance Scores for 2005-06 School Year.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>October 3, 2005</th>
<th>PS-802</th>
<th>PS-814</th>
<th>PS-813</th>
<th>District Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. of Students</td>
<td>450</td>
<td>699</td>
<td>1,031</td>
<td>52,518</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% African-Am.</td>
<td>81.77%</td>
<td>65.67%</td>
<td>58.29%</td>
<td>78.18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% At Risk</td>
<td>52.44%</td>
<td>49.21%</td>
<td>53.83%</td>
<td>59.57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Exceptionalities</td>
<td>10.44%</td>
<td>12.45%</td>
<td>10.67%</td>
<td>10.27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% ESL</td>
<td>1.11%</td>
<td>.87%</td>
<td>3.92%</td>
<td>2.81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Displaced</td>
<td>18.44%</td>
<td>13.88%</td>
<td>9.60%</td>
<td>12.34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPS Change ‘06</td>
<td>-11.2</td>
<td>+9.7</td>
<td>-16.0</td>
<td>+0.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Accountability scores for the study schools in the 2005-06 school year, published in the fall of 2006, varied from an increase of 9.7 points (PS-814) to a decline of 16.0 points (PS-813). The average for the district that year, calculated using the data from the same reports (Report # 10380) available on the State Department of Education website, was a gain of 0.2 (Louisiana Department of Education, 2007c). PS-814 Elementary improved a total of 9.7 points while hosting displaced students amounting to 13.88% of their population during the 2005 school year. PS-813 Middle suffered a decline of 16.0 points with a displaced student population amounting to about 9.6%. The percentages of displaced students at the schools were calculated by dividing the number of displaced students by the total school population as reported October 3, 2005.
The three schools in the study had demographics that were slightly lower than the general demographics of the district. Kerbow (1996) pointed out that families tend to settle in areas with the same socio-economic characteristics as the neighborhoods from which they originally came. Many families had no choice in where they were settled. Many of those families were settled in and still remained in the same trailer parks two years after the hurricanes. Other families settled in with relatives who lived in similar neighborhoods to those in which they had lived before the hurricanes. Most of the displaced students attending the study schools were not from FEMA trailer parks, but from large subsidized rent apartment complexes in the schools’ attendance zones.

Participant Selection

Selecting participants for this study was accomplished using purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling is preferred in this study because, as Strauss and Corbin (1990) suggest, certain subjects and participants can provide the most relevant data to the situation under study. Three individuals at the central office that I thought would be most useful as participants in this study were the superintendent, the chief academic Officer (CAO), and the director of technology (IT). The superintendent was selected as a primary source of information concerning the planning for and support of displaced students entering the school system. The superintendent was also able to provide names of other personnel involved in the planning and support of the displaced students. Using this snowballing method of sampling interviews were arranged with most of the executive leadership team members and several other individuals directly involved in the planning. Interviews were arranged with Executive and District Leadership Team members: the assistant/associate superintendents for instructional services (AS Area I – assistant superintendent of the elementary schools, AS Area II – middle schools), the director of equal educational opportunity (EEO), the director of human resources (HR), the director of child
welfare and attendance (CWA), the assistant superintendent for auxiliary services (SAS), and chief business operations officer (CBO). Other participants of the central office and school board staff included the school board vice president (BVP), the homeless liaison (HL), and the program analyst who was in charge of assigning students to the schools (PA). Schools selected for the study were schools that received large numbers of displaced students amounting to nine percent or more displaced population of students at some point during the 2005 – 2006 school year. Participants at the school level were principals, guidance counselors, teachers, and a librarian.

Before beginning the formal process, however, I contacted the district superintendent then school principals of the target pool of schools to determine their willingness to participate in the study. This step was necessitated by a district policy requiring approval from the University Institutional Review Board before considering granting permission to perform the study. A formal letter of introduction to the Superintendent preceded the first formal contact with the superintendent. This communication included information about the researcher, an overview of the project, the significance of the findings, contact information, and a formal request for permission to conduct the study. Once their cooperation was assured I began to schedule meetings and interviews that would be necessary to develop an understanding of the participant schools. Copies of the letters are included in Appendix C.

Upon making formal contact with the principals of the participating schools, I requested interviews with each principal, each school counselor, and two or three members of the faculty who were present in each of the schools during the 2005-2006 school year. Faculty members were selected upon the recommendation of the principals of the schools. Faculty members also had to agree to participate and could remove themselves from the study at any time. Participation in the project was inconsistent across the study schools in that one school had only one member of the faculty willing to participate while another school supplied six volunteers. Interviews with
the faculty members lasted about 20 – 30 minutes. Interviews with principals lasted between 50 and 90 minutes. Interviews with central office staff also lasted between 50 and 90 minutes.

All participants were asked to sign consent forms before being interviewed. The consent forms stated the general purpose of the study and advised the interviewees that participation was voluntary, that confidentiality would be preserved in the final write-up, and that the interviewees had the right to withdraw from the study at any point without fear of repercussions. A copy of the consent form is available in Appendix B.

The interviews were conducted on site by a team consisting of the lead researcher and two assistants. The assistants involved in the research were retired educators, each with over thirty years of experience in the field of education. One research assistant, a tenured Professor of English, recently retired from University of Louisiana at Lafayette; the other research assistant is a retired teacher and school administrator in St. Landry Parish, Louisiana.

Data Collection

Two main types of data were used in this study: email correspondence and interviews. Since two years had passed since the hurricanes, most of the hardcopy materials requested of central office personnel and principals were no longer available. The primary source of hardcopy information was archived emails from the three primary central office sources: the superintendent, the director of information technology, and the chief academic officer. To reduce the volume of material requested, emails addressed only to principals, Executive Leadership Team (ELT) members, and District Leadership Team (DLT) members as a group, from the superintendent, director of IT, and the chief academic officer were examined for the period from two days before the date of the hurricane to September 29, 2005 – the date of maximum displaced enrollment.
Interviews comprised the second major data source. Since the study is an embedded case study, interviews were requested with district officials: the superintendent and other personnel involved in the planning and execution of procedures to sign up, assign, and support the placement of displaced students. At the school level, interviews were requested of principals, guidance counselors, and teachers from each school. One librarian also volunteered to participate. The primary focus at the school level was the principal, with interviews of guidance counselors, the librarian, and faculty serving as triangulation.

Oral History

All interviews were conducted using an oral history methodology. The interviews consisted of a semi-structured format that allowed the interviewee much latitude in relating his or her experiences of the hurricane year while keeping the topic focused on the issues covered by the research questions. The oral history format is appropriate because two years had passed since the arrival of the hurricanes. Much detail was lost in the intervening months or years, but significant impressions and insights had time to form.

Oral history as a method has an ancient history, dating back to the works of Herodotus, generally acknowledged as the first true historian. Study of the great figures of history has been the most common approach; however, focusing on the average person has become increasingly common, as demonstrated by the Federal Writers’ Project, a part of the Works Progress Administration of the 1930s (Library of Congress, 1997). As Charlton (2006) explains, often “largely under- or even undocumented” people can reveal important themes (p. 4). In his discussion of the oral history as evidence, Grele (2006) expressed the tension between the traditional positivist historian’s position that historical documents like transcriptions of interviews are evidence, and the post-positivist understanding that the interviewer and the interviewee co-create a document. Grele states that “it was clear that oral histories were
documents of the here and now about the then and there, fusing past and present in a complex web of interpretation” (p. 58). It is interpretation which concerns me in this project. It is precisely because the issue of currency may give the reader pause as years have passed since the arrival of the hurricanes of 2005 that the oral history perspective is relevant.

Practitioners of oral history recognize that district administrators, and principals, staff, and faculty members of the schools impacted by the storms of 2005 will have had time to assimilate the emotions and memories of that frantic year and come to some understanding of what occurred. Rather than a formal interview process where the interviewer may be tempted to direct the interview, where the researcher’s intentions are uppermost (Clandinin and Connelly, 1994), in this study the interviews pose general questions, seek to clarify vague memories, expose and challenge contradictions, and evoke “assessments of what it all meant then and what it means now” (Shopes, 2002, p. 3), what Clandinin and Connelly (1994) suggests allows the participant’s intentions to be uppermost. Lett (n.d.) describes the emic perspective as focusing on “the intrinsic cultural distinctions that are meaningful to the members of a given society” (para. 2). In this project, it is important to understand the activities of administrators and faculties of the case study district and schools and how they described their activities during the hurricane year. Their assessments of what happened then and what it means now will tell us much of what they learned from the events of 2005 and after. It takes time for those assessments to form. Chamberlain (2006) reminds us that our memories and narratives are under constant reassessment and revision. “Lapses of memory have to be seen not as weaknesses in an oral account, but as evidence of the revisioning self” (p. 393).

Interview Protocol

This project ultimately will seek to understand the administrative responses of the district and several schools to the new populations – answering the following questions. 1. How did the
district plan for, place, and provide support to the displaced students? 2. How did the school leadership impact the integration of displaced students into the existing school culture? 3. What problems impeded district and school responses to hurricane-induced mobility? 4. Did any changes become institutionalized in the district or schools’ policies and procedures? All interviews were audio recorded. Interviews with key personnel – the superintendent, chief academic officer, and director of information technology in the Central Office, and principals of the selected schools were transcribed, and rechecked for accuracy. Recordings were saved in digital form and multiple copies preserved. Interviews with other central office members of the ELT, DLT, and counselors of the study schools were transcribed. Interviews with faculty and the librarian were summarized.

The interviews with the superintendent and other key district personnel occurred after formal contacts were made in late October 2007. Times and places of the interviews depended on the participants’ schedules, but all took place in the participant’s office or a quiet conference room nearby. The interviews took up between an hour and an hour and a half with additional time later for member checking and follow-up questions or to follow up on leads revealed in the initial interviews. Central office interviews were conducted in November and December and concluded in January of 2008. Follow-up interviews were conducted late in the spring and summer of 2008 as participants could schedule time to meet. Some questions were very specific in nature and were answered in brief emails. The interviews from the central office focused on the planning for the arrival of the displaced students, what problems occurred and how they were solved, and whether any changes had to be made in procedures or policies of the district. Questions were also asked about issues of student mobility before and since the storms, leadership, and what was learned from the experiences of 2005.
Building principals were contacted for initial meetings shortly after receiving formal approval from the district, to answer any questions about the project, and to set up convenient times to conduct interviews. Interviews at the schools occurred in late November, 2007, ending in early December. Most interviews with the principals lasted over an hour and occurred in their offices or nearby quiet spaces. Principal interviews were transcribed and checked against the original recordings for accuracy. The interviews with principals focused on questions about the planning and placement of the students in the schools, known and unexpected issues that arose as students began to arrive in the schools, how the school integrated the new students into the culture of the school, what issues of discipline arose, how the school planned for and how the students performed on the standardized testing that year. Other questions dealt with mobility issues before and after the hurricane year, whether any changes were made to school policies, and what reflections the principals had about their leadership style and what they lessons they had learned from the experiences of that year.

The counselors, librarian, and faculty members were interviewed starting in November, 2007. Interviews were conducted in the schools at times most convenient to the participants, depending on their duty schedules, or after school hours as was most convenient for the teachers and principals. The interviews with teachers and librarian were conducted in classrooms, teachers’ lounges, or the school library. Faculty interview durations depended on the amount of time participants had available, but generally lasted between 20 and 30 minutes. Participants were provided with pseudonyms when they were quoted, otherwise their comments were summarized. Interviewees were asked if they would be available for a follow-up interview after the initial analysis was concluded in the event that clarification or more detail was be needed, as well as to afford the interviewee the opportunity to correct any errors or confirm the meanings initially ascribed to the data. This member-checking by the participants served to reinforce the
credibility of the project. Member checking was concluded by the summer of 2008. Questions posed of the counselors paralleled those of the principals, but also included their specific functions as guidance counselors, their assigned activities that year, and what type of leadership they observed in their principals that year. Teachers were asked about their teaching routines, style, classroom discipline, and any changes they had to make to accommodate the displaced students in their classes. They were asked about the leadership style of their principals and whether they had learned or changed anything that persisted into the following year.

The researcher and two research assistants conducted on-site interviews with faculty members to shorten the duration and lessen the disruption of normal school activities. Interviews with the faculty members and the counselors were conducted the same day that the principals or the following day when there was not sufficient time to interview everyone.

After the initial rounds of interviews in 2007, it became clear that many other members of the central office were deeply involved in the planning for the arrival of displaced students and the support of those students. Interviews were expanded to include other members of the Executive and some District Leadership Team members, focusing particularly on individuals whose names were specifically mentioned in planning process. In the end I interviewed 16 individuals from the central office. I withheld their names from this report.

**Review of Documents**

District communications by email from the superintendent, chief academic officer, and director of information technology addressed to school principals, ELT, and DLT were requested for the days immediately before and for the entire month following the landfall of Hurricane Katrina. The initial purpose for the emails was to serve as triangulation for the information gained in the interviews. Triangulation of data sources provides a more consistent picture (Yin, 2008), especially when looking at the cases where individuals in the school context will be more
knowledgeable of what is happening at the school than the researcher. Since it would be impossible for me to understand everything in the limited time context of this study it was important that first and subsequent impressions gained from the participants were confirmed. Stake (2006) suggests three or more confirmations of each major impression to insure fidelity to the context. Information from these documents was used to shape some of the questions for the interviews and to pinpoint which central office personnel would be most valuable to interview. As the interviews progressed, it became necessary to construct a descriptive chronology of the events of September 2005 because many of the memories of the participants were confused, contradictory, and muddied by the passage of time and subsequent events. The emails were used to construct the chronology and it is provided in Appendix D.

Comments on the increased discipline problems made by several participants led me to visit the office of child welfare and attendance where I requested and examined the expulsion records of the study schools. This occurred in the spring of 2008. Cursory examination of the records helped corroborate the comments of several principals, counselors, and faculty members and also shed light on what part displaced students played in school disturbances.

Identification

Participants and schools in the study were identified by pseudonyms, even though many of the participants were well known figures in the district at the time. Schools were identified by identification numbers rather than their names.

Pilot Study

I conducted a pilot study in order to sharpen data collection procedures, test the appropriateness of a written survey, the interview protocols and guiding topics, and ensure that the research assistants helping with the interviews gained the necessary familiarity with the interview questions and equipment. Interviews were conducted with three principals, two
guidance counselors, a director of curriculum, and seven faculty members of three schools in the district and in surrounding districts. After the interviews, each participant was asked to comment on the clarity of the questions and the conduct of the interview. These interviews were recorded and reviewed; procedures for later interviews were refined to improve the questions, presentation, and follow-up procedures of the main study. The written survey was piloted in two schools, and volunteer faculty members agreed to discuss the instrument after completing the survey. The pilot study was conducted as the 2007-08 school year began. Schools involved included a small private school and one public school from each of three nearby school districts.

As a result of the pilot study I discovered that a survey intended for faculty members in the selected schools designed to reveal elements of school climate, culture, and evidence of principal leadership did not yield much useful data. Discussions with the participants revealed several flaws in the survey that failed to identify the desired characteristics of climate and leadership. The universal reaction from all the post survey interviews led me to reconsider the usefulness of the survey as a tool, and instead I incorporated several items into the interview guiding questions to tease out some characteristics of climate, culture, and leadership from the principals, counselors, and faculty in the study schools.

Analysis
Starting in November 2007 officials at the central office, principals, counselors, and faculty members of the selected participating schools were interviewed. Following preliminary examination of the interviews, unanswered questions remained and a second round of new interviews was initiated late in the spring of 2008 in an effort to answer the questions and include other individuals who played an important part in the planning and placement of students during the hurricane year. Interviews were recorded using digital recorders and lapel microphones, saved to several separate storage devices as secure backups, and the interviews of principals and
most central office personnel were transcribed. Interviews with some staff members occurred late in the spring of 2008 and were summarized because the interviews were conducted to answer very specific questions that arose from the analysis of the earlier interviews. Several interview transcriptions had to be checked against the original recordings when errors in transcription were discovered that threatened the accuracy of the analysis. Reviewing the transcripts took many weeks before analysis could begin with confidence that the data were accurate.

Before analysis of individuals could be started an accurate chronology of the events in the district was necessary. Because so much time had passed since the hurricanes of 2005 memories had grown uncertain and participants were contradicting each other as to times and places. To avoid any more confusion I compiled the emails from the superintendent, chief academic officer, and director of technology batch-addressed to all members of the ELT and DLT, principals, and board members into one coherent sequence of events against which I could compare notes from the various participants.

The initial analysis of interviews was focused on the general answers to the research questions, attempting to identify the facts, by comparing facts revealed in each interview to interviews of other participants, and comparing statements against emails and the chronology. Some minor discrepancies surfaced during this initial review of the data. In some cases the discrepancies and contradictions were internal to the interview under examination and could have represented a deliberate effort to minimalize problems at the district office or school, deceive me about events, or, as I believe to be the more common reason, the participants were remembering events or connections that had at first eluded them, but, as the interview continued, old memories resurfaced. Most participants exhibited fuller, more detailed recall as the interviews progressed and memories began to firm up. Some instances of contradiction were also
detected when comparing responses of several participants from the individual schools or when comparing statements of participants at the central office. Because many of the participants were focused on their specific duties, many contradictions may represent a difference in perspective and not a deliberate effort to deceive me.

After the initial round of analysis revealed differences and contradictions in fact, and because some of the comments of principals and central office supervisors noted a surge in discipline issues, I examined the expulsion records from the study schools. Although the memories of serious discipline problems were vague, in general they were on target and revealed an increase of discipline problems over the previous year, a trend that actually increased the year following the hurricanes.

Clandinin and Connelly (1998) speak of the landscapes that encompass schools and the narratives that describe such landscapes. Knowing what happens at any school in this district must come from a variety of sources and must view the landscape from a variety of directions; like the elephant and blind men, there are many versions that must all be taken into account. There are many narratives that must be included in the description of this landscape. Each view carries with it messages of context and experience. However, no two narratives are alike, and in order to get a coherent view of the events at the various schools that comprised units of the case, I had to tease out common themes and attempt to make sense of them.

I began a second round of analysis attempting to identify specific themes that emerged from the data. In this round I read through the scripts of each participant several times, identifying answers to the research questions in the narrative and collecting the statements that addressed each question. Then, as statements, phrases, or individual words emerged from the interview text as significant I grouped and categorized, using emic descriptors when they emerged, otherwise assigning categories that seemed appropriate. The process then proceeded
into clustering of the statements and phrases that appeared to have something in common which I identified as a central theme for that cluster. In order to “see” the relationships I drew concept maps, clustering similar items together and connecting them to other themes. In the end, each school experience – each limited landscape in Clandinin and Connelly’s use of the term – revealed three to five major overarching themes. Responses of each participant from either the central office or any of the three study schools were compared to other interviews from participants associated at that particular site for confirming or disconfirming themes. Most of the information gained from the examination of the emergent themes confirmed the “story” of the participants with few, if any, major differences. Like the story of the blind men trying to describe the elephant, each participant viewed the “elephant” of Katrina from varying perspectives and although the general consensus was very similar, each saw a different aspect of that challenge. Discrepancies that crept in were minor and could be explained as lapses of memory, confusion as to the timeline, or focusing only their own part of the “elephant” through the lens of their own experiences without knowing what was going on across the hall at the central office or at another school down the street.

After examining each embedded unit of the case, writing up a description of that unit, and then considering how it all fit together, I wrote the case summary for the entire district. Then I turned my attention to themes that emerged from the analyses as being similar or dissimilar. There I noticed that, based on the focus and language used in the interviews, two different views of the “elephant” took vague shape. The similarities and differences are discussed at the end of the chapter.

The description of the central office unit of the case is described in Chapter 4. The description of the individual school units of the case are described in Chapter 5. The case
analysis of the entire district and the discussion of similarities and differences among the units of
the case is incorporated in Chapter 6.

Summary

This project used naturalistic, single case embedded design to study how hurricanes
Katrina and Rita impacted schools in the east-central region of Louisiana. Central office
personnel and several schools that received large numbers of Katrina refugees were examined to
determine how they responded to the influx of students and whether they maintained their scores
or lessened the harmful impact of hurricane-induced mobility on their school accountability
ratings. Data were acquired from each school and the central office including archived emails
and interviews with superintendent, and other key personnel in the central office, principals,
counselors, and teachers. Interviewee selection was a purposeful sampling of administrators and
other school personnel using a snowballing methodology. Principals and the superintendent were
contacted and from their recommendations additional participants were selected based on their
positions, activities, and degree of contact with displaced children or their role in planning and
overseeing operations designed to get students into schools and providing support for the schools
that received the students. Themes and categories were developed through the analysis of the
interviews and document analysis that revealed conditions present in the district and schools that
fostered – or failed to foster – academic excellence.
CHAPTER 4
RESULTS: CENTRAL OFFICE UNIT

In this chapter the focus will be on the examination of the central office unit of the case. The research questions posed in this study covered four main questions: How did the district plan for, place, and provide support for displaced students? What problems impeded district and school responses to hurricane-induced mobility? What, if any, changes became institutionalized in the district policies and procedures? To answer those questions I interviewed the superintendent and many members of the central office staff to attempt to understand how the district rose to the challenge of educating thousands of displaced children. The schools were selected for inclusion in the project based on the size of their displaced populations and school performance scores for the 2005-2006 school year.

In the central office summary below and for each of the study schools the research questions will be addressed in order: Planning, placement, support, problems, and the changes or accommodations impelled by the arrival of displaced students. In Chapter Five unit summaries of each of the study schools will be reported. An overall case summary will follow in Chapter Six noting commonalities and differences among the schools and the central office.

Central Office Unit Summary

Primary interviewees from the central office were the superintendent, chief academic officer (CAO), and information systems director (IT); others interviewed from the central office included each of the assistant/associate superintendents (AS Area I – assistant superintendent of the elementary schools, AS Area II – middle schools), the director of equal educational opportunity (EEO), the school board vice president (BVP), the homeless liaison (HL), a program analyst who was in charge of assigning students to the schools (PA), the director of human resources (HR), the director of child welfare and attendance (CWA), the assistant
superintendent for auxiliary services (SAS), and chief business operations officer (CBO). Additional information is gleaned from emails acquired from the central office, specifically batch emails sent to all principals, board members, executive and district leadership team members, and staff from the superintendent, chief academic officer, and director of technology covering the dates August 27, 2005 through September 29, 2005.

Central Office Chronology, August 26 – 31, 2005

Most members of the central office were aware of the magnitude of the threat that hurricanes posed to the school system after suffered the effects of Hurricane Andrew which struck Louisiana as a Category 3 storm on the 26th of August, 1992. Although that storm did not strike the district directly, the effects of the hurricane caused serious physical damage to the school system and the city. There were many in the school system that had some experience to direct the planning for the hurricanes of 2005. The BVP recalled the school system had had to replace the roofs of several of the campuses and buildings after Hurricane Andrew and thought that the system would be in good shape to weather the arrival of Hurricane Katrina.

“We knew it was going to be big here” the superintendent stated. It was the superintendent’s responsibility to make the determination of whether or not and for how long to close the schools. Some of the schools in the school system were designated as shelters. Although it was technically possible to open schools while being used as a shelter, it was not likely that the schools would open with displaced families there. The CAO did not recall any specific conversations or meetings about the hurricane on the Friday before, but mentioned that the director of facilities would be directly involved in damage assessments and helping determine which schools would be able to re-open. The SAS remembered meeting with her staff on Friday the 26th of August to verify contact numbers and begin plans for an evaluation of the facilities, particularly the food storage areas and freezers, if needed, as soon as the storm passed.
The IT director sent emails to principals about the efforts to secure the network system by getting equipment off of the floor, unplugging everything, and warning of the likely disruption of network and telephone systems from the impending storm. Shortly after that he forwarded to the district leadership team (DLT) a list of emergency phone numbers and web addresses submitted to him by the public information officer. The superintendent, although out of town early that weekend on a personal trip, had assigned two employees, including facilities director, to attend meetings of the office of emergency preparedness (OEP). As early as Saturday midday they knew that the district would be receiving some significant effects from the storm, at that time spinning up to category five strength in the Gulf of Mexico. The time frame for the main effects of the storm was correctly identified as late Sunday night and early Monday morning.

Communications between the superintendent and IT director continued through the weekend both by email and cell phone. Sunday, as the storm approached, the superintendent was constantly updated by various staff members, and was reminding the staff and principals that at least four of the schools in the system had been designated, or were on standby, as emergency shelters as of 11 AM Sunday while the storm was still 19 hours from landfall. At that point the superintendent advised school personnel that the schools would be closed two days and, after the passage of the storm, as soon as it was safe to do so, damage assessments would be made by the director of facilities and site administrators. An hour later, around noon on Sunday, a list of hurricane tips was distributed to administrators and staff. The CAO recalled that everyone “hunkered down” and waited out the storm.

The superintendent began monitoring the situation as early as 3:30 AM on the morning of the 29th of August. The decision to close the schools due to storms is made very early in the morning to allow communications with the news agencies before the early morning programs on radio and television. Most participants noted that closing school Monday, the day the hurricane
struck, was expected and that reopening would depend on damage assessments and availability of power.

As soon as the worst effects of the storm had passed, full time personnel from auxiliary services began to assess damage and determine the condition of the various buildings in the school system. Power was out in large areas of the city, but school board personnel were already in the process of transporting food from cafeterias without power to warehouses that still had power. ARAMARK, the company contracted to maintain the schools, and the facilities crews were inspecting buildings for leaks or damage. Food service was already trying to locate new vendors to replace the former food vendors who were from the New Orleans area and were no longer responding to efforts to contact them. The operations side of the district was in feverish activity from late Monday and into Tuesday before the other district officers began to plan meetings the following day, Wednesday August 31st.

The superintendent remembered the days immediately after the storm as being filled with “meetings after meetings after meetings.” The superintendent sent out an email to the DLT, principals, and board members late Monday night, August 29th, urging site administrators to go out and inspect for damage. Tuesday was largely taken up in damage assessments. No school board meetings had been planned yet. Power was out throughout most of the city and the central office was without power except for the IT department which had battery backup systems and its own gas-driven emergency generator. The network, telephones, and email in that part of the building were operational. The CAO recalled lots of communications that day. Email was out unless the recipient was lucky to have had power restored early. Landline telephones were working because land lines are independently powered by the telephone company (which had its own battery backup and generators). Cell phone service was spotty and overwhelmed by the increased volume of calls from New Orleans area displaced families as well as the heavy volume
of local callers. At that point, the extent of the flooding in New Orleans had not yet become fully appreciated. In the superintendent’s email the evening of the 29th, the superintendent noted that a meeting would be held at the office on Tuesday the 30th, to assess the extent of damage and consider reopening the schools. No mention was made yet of any impact of the children of Katrina on the school system. At this point I will leave the chronology and address the research questions in order. Because the first research question had three parts I will describe each element of the question separately.

Planning

The academic side of the district began to address the problems posed by the hurricane and its aftermath Wednesday, August 31st. The superintendent and other staff members arrived at the central office to find the building dark and locked except for the IT department. The first meeting of the executive leadership team (ELT) was moved to an elementary school nearby because they had electrical power. The atmosphere at the meeting was variously described as somber, emotional, and somewhat chaotic, but the participants quickly rallied and began problem solving; assessing the current situation, identifying problems, and then focusing on finding solutions to those issues. Preliminary decisions had to be made, but information was needed before any decisions could be reached. The homeless liaison advised the assembled staff that hurricane-displaced students fell under the definition of homeless children under the Stuart B. McKinney-Vento Act, the Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program (1987, 1990) and specific requirements had to be met according to federal law. Under the McKinney-Vento Act a child is classified as homeless if they (a) shared housing with other families because of economic hardship or loss of housing, (b) lived in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camp grounds because of lack of alternative housing, (c) were using areas not normally designated as a nighttime residence such as park benches, (d) or who were living in cars, abandoned buildings,
or other public spaces. Such children were entitled to free transportation, free lunch and breakfast, and admission into the school regardless of the lack of documents required of all other non-homeless students (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). After a briefing on the Stewart B. McKinney-Vento Act (1987) the ELT and as many of the DLT members as could be found began to plan for the expected arrival of displaced students into the school system. From the start the district focused on accountability and documentation: Who was in charge of what, and how was everything going to be documented? The basic form used to enroll students was a one page form from the homeless office. The director of child welfare and attendance recalled being told that the first printing would produce 5,000 copies and she remembered thinking they would never need that many. Eventually the district received over 11,000 completed or partially completed forms.

Before leaving the elementary school that day the superintendent met with the media and assured the people of the city that the district was preparing a plan to register displaced children into the school system. Thursday, September 1st, the meeting site was changed from the elementary school to a conference room at the “Station” for an emergency school board meeting. The “Station” became the temporary central office headquarters. The ELT, DLT, and most principals were in attendance as the school board met and voted emergency powers so the superintendent could conduct school business without calling additional board meetings; the one major stipulation was that the board leadership be kept informed about decisions being made. This proved to be decisive in reducing the workload. The CAO noted that by reducing the amount of work dedicated to preparing for board meetings, the district staff effectively freed up half of their productive time to devote to handling the problems at hand.

The first step in the process was to develop procedures to handle a large influx of students, develop forms to document what was done, and identify legal or procedural roadblocks
and correct them. The Stewart B. McKinney-Vento Act drove the solution to the problem of developing procedures; the law is explicit in what can and cannot be done in serving homeless populations (1987). Forms were developed for transfers, transportation, and school assignment; all were printed on colored paper to help identify the level of school and speed the sorting process. Federal and state mandates had to be examined and any obstacles to the process of registering and placing thousands of new students had to be removed. The district’s legal counsel helped to identify and clear obstacles with the various state and federal authorities. One of the most important issues was consulting the federal district judge overseeing the resolution of a long-standing desegregation case. Strict guidelines and enrollment caps were in place limiting the number of students who could attend the various schools in the district and those caps had to be relaxed if the district was going to be able to absorb displaced students from hurricane-stricken areas without at the same time violating the provisions of the Stewart B. McKinney-Vento Act (1987).

Meetings were held two or three times a day in that first week after the hurricane in order to develop and fine-tune procedures for enrolling students into the system. The superintendent insisted on having a plan in place and specific individuals with designated duties. While the superintendent was constantly in meetings with the various departments in the city and the OEP, the central office staff worked on identifying problems and developing solutions. The CAO described the daily routine that settled into place after about a week as starting with a morning meeting to review the previous day’s decisions, then after a day of work an afternoon meeting reviewed what had been accomplished, identified what was not working, and considered adjustments. At the end of those long days, the CAO would return to his office to summarize what had been identified as problems, what issues were still under consideration, and what decisions had been made. These summaries were then sent to all ELT and DLT staff, school
board members, and principals in what later came to be called “Midnight Missives.” By the Saturday after the hurricane the district had established a rough outline of the procedures that would need to be followed to enroll students, had identified the main obstacles to reopening the schools, had located new sources of supply and support for the daily operations of the district, and had already begun to register new students. The district had begun to transport displaced families from the several schools in the district then being used by the Red Cross to larger shelters at the convention center downtown and scattered across the city. The schools needed to be repaired, provided power, and supplied with the materials and furniture to accommodate new students. “We did a lot of work within the first 24 to 48 hours, making decisions and setting up processes,” the CAO recalled. Registration started as early as Thursday for people who could get to the central office and at the “Station” to register their children. Teams of central office personnel were pulled together, briefed, and sent to the various shelters around the city to encourage families to sign up their children, as well as get a general feel for how many students the district should plan to educate. Transportation had to be arranged to carry students from the shelters to the schools. The CAO took up residence at the “Station” for the three or four days leading up to Labor Day. Many of the “midnight missives” were actually transmitted as late as nine or ten PM. According to the CAO, one of the most significant decisions made early on was whether to disperse the displaced students or to concentrate them in a few places. The human resources director recalled that several options were considered, but the initial option of dispersal was chosen. Dispersal or concentration was debated before the full extent of the numbers of displaced students was actually known. Both options had problems: dispersal would mean greater problems with transportation; issues like restructuring routes, extended drive times, and finding drivers and buses would present significant problems; on the other hand, concentration would alleviate some of the transportation issues, but would violate specific provisions of the
Stewart B. McKinney-Vento Act (1987) and could cripple the district with high rental, construction, and equipment costs to convert large empty buildings into learning spaces. The child welfare and attendance and the homeless offices were “vitally involved” in the planning because of their intimate working knowledge of the Act and its requirements. The district ultimately settled on a mixed response, reopening two schools specifically for displaced students and dispersing the remaining. The CAO noted that the two schools housed only about 10% of the displaced students.

As the planning progressed schools were slowly being brought back online with electrical service. The district had fared well considering the devastation a hundred miles to the east because it was on the lee side of the storm and missed the worst winds and rain. Trees were felled by the wind, broken limbs knocked out power across the city and some minor flooding and roof damage was reported. The media was constantly updated with the plans for the reopening of the schools and with registration plans. The superintendent also made use of the telephone notification system to inform the parents of school plans. Because power was spotty, some principals and DLT members did not get the earliest messages; many took it upon themselves to contact the central office when and as they could. Chain of command was used to disseminate decisions and procedures to be followed upon reopening the schools. ELT members made decisions and informed the principals through the assistant superintendents. Phone calls, personal contacts, and emails, went out to principals who then instructed their staffs as to the procedures to be followed.

The superintendent was in constant touch with the OEP because the school system in the city was the largest employer. “Once I opened school,” the superintendent stated, “that was 6,000 people on the street again; and 600 buses” – and over 48,000 students. Streets had to be cleared; signal lights had to be repaired; power had to be reconnected to the schools – all of which would
restore a “sense of normalcy” back to the city. PS-816 Middle School and PS-8124 Elementary School (school designations changed) were already in the process of being converted for other uses and had to be returned to service as elementary schools. Whatever had been done in the conversion process was swiftly reversed and the spaces made useful for instruction again. The work was completed by contractors working “24 – 7;” some of the time was donated by the workers to get the schools ready in time for the displaced children. Also, the schools had to be equipped, supplied with the proper materials and furniture, reconnected to telephone and data services, and staffed. The two schools would house displaced students from shelters; they were staffed with displaced teachers and administrators. This technical violation of the Stewart B. McKinney-Vento Act (1987) – concentrating some students rather than dispersing them to schools that they would otherwise have attended – was forced by the circumstances and conditions in the district, but was also considered an appropriate course of action in that the faculty and staff, being displaced, would provide a stronger empathetic connection to the children because the staff would have had the same experiences as the children.

Teams continued to visit the shelters and enrollment forms began to flow back to the central office. Personnel were assigned to handle calls and donations from concerned people, schools and school districts across the nation, and from outside of the country. The director of equal educational opportunities was assigned the task of keeping the records and contacts of donations and requests to help, a task that grew enormous very quickly. Warehouse space had to be reserved for the literally tons of materials sent to the school system and personnel worked hours loading and unloading materials. Responding to the requests to help was a major chore that took up much time with as many as 400 emails arriving daily from across the nation and employees were often staying as late as nine or ten O’clock at night trying to reply. The director of EEO was also part of the approximately 20 staff members who visited the large shelters
downtown to encourage people to sign up their children. This group assisted in helping displaced families locate and be reunited with family members who had been separated while being transported and was responsible in part for reuniting over 100 families with lost family members, many of them small children who had been separated while being transported, or who were sent to different shelters.

The emotional impact began to tell as staff members would lose control of their emotions and have breakdowns while driving to or from work, or when confronted by an irate parent over a decision that had been made. There was great pressure to get the schools open the day after Labor Day to reestablish some kind of “normalcy.” As the applications for enrollment began to mount, staff members were called to the central office to key data into the database. A program analyst (PA) had the task of assigning the students to schools that had capacity to take new students. The registration was centralized at first, but quickly spread out across the entire district and parents were encouraged to bring their children to the nearest school to fill out enrollment forms. The forms were then collected and taken to the central office to the data entry personnel to key the information into the system. A significant feature of the “Midnight Missives” was the updated count of enrolled and assigned students. The data were compiled into spreadsheets and were attached to emails to all principals, DLT, and ELT members. The updates would go out several times a day in the first two weeks, settling into a routine of an AM update and a PM update disseminated by the IT Director.

By Labor Day evening all schools had been reconnected to the power grid and were ready to re-open. Displaced students would not begin arriving until the following week in order to give the school assignment PA time to ascertain which schools could begin taking in new students, time to get a broad idea of the numbers for the purpose of ordering sufficient food and supplies, and time to arrange for uniforms and other clothing for the new students, most of whom
had only the clothes they had packed or were wearing when they left the hurricane-devastated areas.

Placement

In the first several days the district designed and distributed several protocols for enrolling the displaced students. There were templates for telephone contacts with parents, routing request forms designed to help with transportation, school uniform request forms, and enrollment protocols to account for the lack of documentation that plagued registration efforts. There was also a “Frequently Asked Questions” document to be shared with all enrolling families.

Already mentioned was the strategic plan for dispersing students across the entire district. The CAO was adamant about several points concerning the strategic plan: the timing of the arrival of students, the decision to disperse the students, and the effects of that decision.

Displaced families arrived in the city in two distinct waves. The first wave began to arrive two days before the storm arrived; families drove themselves out fully expecting to return a few days later. The CAO recalled that researchers from the University of Louisiana at Lafayette requested and received data on the first several thousand applicants and discovered that the demographics of the families were essentially no different from the demographics of local city natives. The second wave arrived almost a week later and represented people who could not, or would not, leave the New Orleans area before the storm. The first wave quickly found living accommodations and settled in for the several months it took to drain and start restoring services to New Orleans and its environs. The second wave did not have the financial resources to purchase or rent accommodations and had to live in shelters or FEMA trailers. They had little, if any, choice in where they settled. They arrived by bus at a shelter and many departed soon after for other shelters, shelters in other cities, or shelters out of state. Regardless of whether the
demographics of the second group were different from that of the first wave, their later arrival and reluctance to be separated from their children meant that many enrolled later, in some cases, months later.

A second point made by the CAO was that Houston, Texas, which ultimately received about 20,000 displaced students and their families, chose to concentrate large numbers of displaced students in relatively few of the schools nearest the shelters and that decision led to immediate resistance from the local school communities. The CAO noted that this district chose to spread students across as many schools as were convenient to the shelters without straining the bussing capacity of the district. This had both positive and negative impacts on the system. The pain of taking in so many students was spread across most schools in the system; unfortunately, dispersal also meant that not only did the displaced students suffer disruption, but to some degree, almost all local children had to suffer some disruption and make their own adjustments as relatives moved in and shared living spaces with them. The CAO insisted that in spite of the disruptiveness caused by the arrival and constant shifting, the decision to disperse was “the right thing to do.”

Initially the enrollment centers included the instructional resource center next door to the central office and the “Station.” The plan quickly grew to include teams to enroll as many students as possible from shelters and was broadened to include all schools in the district. Emails from the IT Department requested updated information on any new shelters, or changes to existing shelters, so that school board personnel would be able to reach every family and every student. Families were encouraged to enroll at the nearest school to their current address. An email alerted the central office to the rumor that data entry personnel would be paid at a reduced rate. This was quickly corrected by the superintendent. Workers would be paid the appropriate scale for overtime. Most of the workers worked a full day at their normal jobs then reported to
the central office to continue data entry until nine PM. Daily reports tracked the growth of the applications. On the first day back to school for local students, September 5th, the district had already accumulated enrollment forms for about 3,200 students. By the following Monday, September 12th, the day displaced students began reporting to their assigned schools, the rough enrollment count had risen to over 6,500 students. The superintendent commented that the district had enrolled another entire district in a matter of two weeks. The school board vice president, commenting at the October 20, 2005 school board meeting, stated that the feat was even more remarkable; the average district size in the United States was under 3,000 students, he noted; this district had enrolled the equivalent of two school districts in about two weeks.

Support

A third part of the research question concerns the support that the schools and the school system received in their efforts to provide what the displaced families and students needed. Much of the support that arrived was unsolicited. The director of EEO was assigned the task of keeping records and responding to inquiries and donations. The task quickly became overwhelming as hundreds of calls and emails poured into the school system. The superintendent recalled that the phones were “ringing in here like it was the White House; it never stopped, with people calling to offer help.” Individuals, schools, school districts, schools from out of state and some from out of the country offered money, materials, – every conceivable thing that could be of use – and a lot that could not be used. So much was coming in or being offered that the district had to post instructions on its web site about where to send materials, clothing, uniforms, books, and money. Some contributions were useful and accepted such as construction materials and monetary donations, but others like clothing, food, old computer equipment and outdated or unapproved text books were not accepted. When useful materials were offered the district was happy to pay the shipping. Some districts rented trucks and delivered the materials directly.
School board members and administrators drove through the night to deliver materials from distant states. One memorable occasion the donors left North Carolina the day before Hurricane Rita struck and arrived to find the city once again feeling the effects of a category 3 storm system and undergoing power disruptions, but made the delivery anyway. A U-Haul truck from a district in Pennsylvania arrived the day after Hurricane Rita, having been delayed in Mississippi by the arrival of that hurricane.

A second major source of support for the district, after a series of meetings between FEMA and the superintendent and staff, came in the form of fully stocked portable classrooms as requested by the superintendent. Construction began shortly before the Christmas break. This continued through December and January with the first classroom ribbon cutting ceremony being held at PS-802 January 17, 2006. Ultimately, FEMA provided 78 fully equipped classrooms on 30 school campuses. What was unique about that arrangement was that FEMA and the Army Corps of Engineers transported or built many of the temporary buildings on the campuses. The usual procedure was for schools to build the classrooms then for FEMA to reimburse the schools for their construction costs. The superintendent did not want to go that route because of prior experiences with the slow rate of reimbursements from FEMA. Given the prior experiences that the superintendent had had with FEMA, the urgent need for classroom space, and the uncertainty of what other financial burdens would appear, the superintendent was firm in a desire to get FEMA to build the classrooms. The district was fortunate in that no other large districts were in the position to advance their own plan to build capacity; the district, in effect, helped write the plan that FEMA used.

A third aspect of the support that the district provided to the displaced families involved the lengths that the various administrators and schools went through to provide what families needed. Already mentioned above was the assistance provided in reuniting families separated by
the exodus from the New Orleans area. Assistance was also provided on an ongoing basis by teams of staff headed in general by the directors of the child welfare and attendance and homeless liaison offices. Staff members were regular visitors to the shelters across the city and later to the large FEMA trailer parks trying to identify families that had not yet registered their children in the school system. The teams returned frequently and maintained direct contacts with people living in the trailer parks because families continued to come and go in large numbers. As the students began to attend the various schools it became clear that some families did not want to release their children into the care of the school system. Many families needed additional assurances, as did some of the children, and in the first weeks the school system allowed parents to accompany their children to the schools on the bus to be reassured of the safety of the campuses. Some parents preferred to keep their children close by and utilize makeshift schools there in the shelters, but the district made a strong effort to encourage the students to attend the public schools. The children, and their parents, needed “a little bit more security” in the beginning. Special needs were identified and appropriate assistance was provided. By the end of September the CAO reported in his “Midnight Missive” that the school had processed 8,976 applications to enroll and had assigned 6,821 students to schools. The superintendent urged schools to be ready to provide students with uniforms; “they may come to school one day without a uniform; by the second day they should have it.” “Students will not look displaced,” the superintendent insisted.

Problems

Problems faced by the district in implementing its programs fell into several major categories: Physical space and materials problems, staffing problems, legal and procedural issues, mobility issues, discipline and a variety of lesser miscellaneous issues. Each of these will be covered in more detail.
The immediate problem that the district faced was damage assessment and repair of storm damage. This was the main concern of the first day after the passage of the hurricane. Most schools were without power for the first several days. In that respect the district fared well and by reopening day, September 6th, all schools were open to receive their regular students. Registration continued for displaced students through the weekends and week of September 3rd through 12th. It was increasing apparent as time passed that the district would have to absorb thousands of new students as the situation in the New Orleans region became better known. The extensive flooding of the city meant that the children would not be missing school for a few days but rather weeks or months. As the director of CWA noted, the initial printing of 5,000 homeless applications was far short of the actual number that was needed. As the number of applications swelled, the district had to locate materials, desks, and classroom space to accommodate the new students. The district contacted other school districts across the state and across the country for surplus desks, textbooks, and other materials. Initially three schools had been identified as shelters used by the Red Cross to temporarily house displaced families. When it was apparent that the displaced families would not be returning because of the extensive flooding, the superintendent closed the shelters in the schools and contacted the mayor and other key community leaders to transport the families to shelters in other locations. This freed up space at the schools, but did not improve the growing shortage of classroom space. Class size limits across the district were relaxed and the average class size grew between three and four students per class; this was still under the state’s maximum limits, but was a noticeable increase. Every grade level experienced increases in class size, but the district managed to hold the numbers below the state maximum.

Some of the issues about locating materials were solved sooner than most expected as donations began to flood into the district from other states, and some from other countries. The
flood of materials became a problem in turn as the district had to allocate warehouse space and personnel to handle the influx. Much of the material was useful, much was not. That posed a problem for the district in that it took time and personnel to sort through the donated materials and separate what could be used from what was not useful. Some of the materials arrived within days of the hurricane; shipments continued to arrive as Hurricane Rita came ashore along the Louisiana-Texas border about three weeks later. Clothing and food were offered, all of which had to be turned away. The district forwarded much of that aid to charities like St. Vincent de Paul. Monetary donations were also being offered to the district and the various schools. Although the Director of EEO was responsible for acknowledging and keeping track of donations the superintendent recognized that donations and contributions were also going directly to schools and asked principals to acknowledge each donation that they received. The donations tracked by the central office were possibly the smallest portion of what was donated to schools, principals, and teachers directly as cash or gifts and were not reported to the central office.

Locating materials and furniture was not the largest problem the district faced; there was also a shortage of classrooms, faculty, and staff. As soon as teachers from New Orleans realized that the city would not be reopening the schools any time soon they began to apply with the district to work. Lists of applicants were assembled and incorporated in spreadsheets provided to principals. By March of 2006 the district had hired 314 additional employees, 269 of which were teachers. Of the 314 new employees, 286 were hired between Katrina’s landfall and the arrival of the displaced students in the schools. Another related issue was one of finding place in the school to house new classes. Some schools were forced to utilize gyms and auditoriums as additional learning spaces. As the CAO explained, when a class size grows over the maximum, a new teacher is needed, and that means finding space, furniture, materials, and text books. Ultimately,
the space problem was partially alleviated by the construction or delivery, by FEMA, of 78 new classrooms.

By far, the most serious and persistent problem faced by the district in the weeks after the hurricane was locating more buses and drivers. As the student numbers mounted, the district had to provide new routes to the two reopened schools and additional routes from shelters and trailer parks to the other schools in the district. The superintendent recalled being interviewed by CNN and making a plea for drivers. The HR director also recalled making the rounds of morning news programs. Although the district had some spare buses, most of those were older and not always fully road worthy; but the worst problem was the lack of experienced drivers. The superintendent contacted the Orleans Parish superintendent for information about their bus drivers assuming that there would be many drivers willing to relocate and work for the district. They received none. The district had to accommodate an increase of almost 6,800 newly enrolled students with a bus fleet that had been adjusting to a downsizing district that was losing students to newly created and neighboring school districts. In the years before the hurricane two small school districts were created in the parish, taking with them almost four thousand students. To compensate for the lack of drivers the district considered and eventually opened a third tier for 23 bus routes. The third tier used the buses that delivered students to schools set to start classes at 7:00 or 7:30, turned around and picked up students who would attend schools that started their classes at 8:00 or 8:30, then start a third route for schools opening at 9:00 or 9:30. Thirteen new buses were eventually added, buses were leased, and almost all of the school routes were lengthened. The HR director noted that most of the new drivers had to have additional training before starting work. Many had been driving trucks or long haul rigs, but were not accustomed to carrying 40 or 60 children who needed to be watched while at the same time watching the road. Night training
was initiated to certify the drivers quickly. Where buses were unavailable, parents were asked to bring their own children to school.

Legal and procedural issues posed by the arrival of so many students had to be resolved. The district was at the time still under the jurisdiction of the federal district court as part of the desegregation case that had been litigated since the 1970’s. Schools had enrollment caps and district lines had been drawn for the purpose of balancing students along ethnic lines. These enrollment caps had to be removed in order to accommodate the new students. The district legal counsel was tasked with the job of identifying all legal roadblocks to increasing class sizes and placement of displaced students. Within days of the hurricane the district court had removed the enrollment caps. The district also had to overlook the attendance zone boundaries as schools started to fill up and space could no longer be found for children within the attendance zone. Buses sometimes passed up schools within that attendance zone and brought students to the next school with space, sometimes passing two schools before unloading. This would continue to be an issue as families left shelters or found other accommodations, putting the bus fleet under more strain trying to keep up with the shifting population.

Another issue that proved to be problematic was the absence of documentation. Students registering in the district are usually required to provide birth certificates, immunization records, transcripts, and proof of residence documents. Most displaced families had none of those documents. The Stewart B. McKinney-Vento Act (1987) requires schools to accept homeless students without any of the usual documentation. The lack of documentation posed a problem to the district in that they had no way of knowing in which grade to place the students, what services to provide, or how to accommodate any special needs unless the parents informed them. The issue was partially resolved when the State Department of Education provided historical academic data to the district, but the data were incomplete in that it did not cover every child, or
lacked the most recent information. The district, like the individual schools receiving the students, had to accept the word of the parents, some of whom were not sure, or even aware of what services had been provided to the children. Some of the caregivers were grandparents or other relatives who had no knowledge of the accommodations to which the children were entitled. The opportunity to deceive the district was not lost on some parents who misrepresented the grade level of their children. Some of the staff registering the children recognized the attempted deception by the look on the children’s faces. One staff member recalled warning parents that they could check the state database about their child’s prior placement even though, at the time, the information was not yet available.

A related issue was the students who had not attended school in their former districts and had little or no interest in attending schools in a new district. There are no specific numbers available for absent students. School principals were instructed to attempt to determine how many students were definitely not planning to attend their schools (designated “No Shows”) so their reserved seats could be reassigned. Students who had been registered, but who were not attending were kept on the rolls because, considering the problems with transportation, they may not have been able to physically get to the schools. “No Shows” was the label applied to students whose guardians specifically stated that the children would not attend the school.

There were great difficulties in locating parents who could not be contacted after originally enrolling their children. Families had moved on to shelters out of state, had found relatives willing to take them in, had moved to different school attendance zones, or simply chose to keep their children out of school. From emailed reports in mid-September the numbers were mounting. Of the roughly 5,500 students enrolled, only about half were “warm bodies” – physically attending – and only 350 were confirmed “No Shows.”
A minor issue in that it was not mentioned often, but one which the superintendent considered important was the attempt to buffer the schools from the constant intrusions by news media and later by academic researchers interested in studying the effects of the hurricanes on the students and their families. Such buffering is common in that the superintendent and principals are vitally interested in keeping their schools on as normal a routine as possible. Constant requests to interview students, family members, and teachers, if accepted, would have disrupted the school routine and exacerbated the lost instructional time that all the schools were facing. “We had to protect the kids from the media,” the superintendent noted, “it was just a disruption to the [school] day.” Multiple sources at the central office used the phrase “normalcy” as a desired outcome of the effort to get schools back open. Constant interruptions prevented a sense of “normalcy;” and, in reference to the media, there were also concerns about the reportage of school incidents. “Sometimes the media gets it mixed up a little bit,” the superintendent noted; it was a common sentiment among many of the staff interviewed in the district as well.

Matters of discipline more often than not violated the sense of normalcy in ways that had little to do with any clash of cultures between displaced and local students. Examination of the expulsion records of the study schools were revealing. Of the 110 students who faced expulsion hearings from the study schools only six were displaced students (5.45% of the total hearings). One student was an elementary student, the rest were middle school children. The most common infraction was disobedience/or disrespect although there was great variety in the infractions that led to the expulsion hearings. There were only two major breaches of peace in the district, one a fight during a pick-up basketball game in May of 2006, the other a more serious incident, brawls between displaced students and local students that lasted two days in September of 2006. The great majority of expulsion offenses concerned local or neighborhood issues, or, as the CAO noted, “universal” issues like “talking to each other’s girlfriends or boyfriends.”
A consistent problem that confronted the district was the constant, relentless mobility of students. This issue had much to do with the shifting of families to and from shelters, or in the chaotic early weeks of the crisis, the struggle to locate missing or separated family members, find relatives who had room to take in displaced families, or the shuffling from shelter to trailer park that marked the entire fall of 2005. The superintendent insisted on tracking the displaced students so the district could recover any reimbursable expenses. Several factors combined to make tracking of students problematic. In the earliest days, when families were being transported from refugee centers in the New Orleans area to shelters in the city, many families came into the centers, registered with the Red Cross, filled out applications to enroll their children in district schools, and then were shifted to different shelters, shelters in other cities, or shelters out of state. The applications were collected and processed, but lacking current telephone numbers or up-to-date addresses, many of the families could not be contacted again. For some time they were still counted as enrolled. The district PA – the district school assignment officer – assigned the children to schools and then it became the schools’ responsibility to contact the families to complete the registration process. Thousands of students may have fallen in that category of having enrolled but not registered; for weeks there was no way to know for certain what happened to most of them. Other families remained in the shelters for weeks before finding more permanent housing in the city. Their children were enrolled, assigned, and many were transported to the schools where some semblance of a “normal” routine could begin. Some families filled out applications, but may have never intended to allow their children to leave the shelter out of fear of separation or fear of the unknown quality of the schools to which their children had been assigned. Another problem of registration was the impatience of some families who wanted their children in school, but because the central office was processing hundreds of applications a day, or because of outdated contact information, they
were not immediately informed of the school assignment. Many of those families went to another school and applied again, creating a duplicate record that was not always immediately recognized as a duplicate.

There was no way to know for certain how many children of school age lived in the district and were not attending school at all. “We were sending a bus to where they were and they weren’t getting on it,” the IT Director stated. The superintendent echoed the sentiment. The superintendent knew that many students in the district were not attending school, “I see them at different times during the day,” adding that it was difficult to plan for “the number of parents who did not hurry to put their children in school.” The superintendent spent hours at shelters talking with parents, assuring them of the safety of the schools, and the need to get the students into a normal routine.

A minor issue that was problematic of the program to enroll and educate the displaced students was the resentment of local students for all the attention that the displaced students received. “Students that were here before…thought they were the forgotten kids,” the superintendent stated. The attitude was “what about us, we’ve had to adjust also.” As the year progressed, the strain on staff, faculties, and students mounted and resentment began to appear more often in behavior and even voiced in occasional comments among over-stressed faculty or staff.

Another casualty of the storms of 2005 was the lost instructional time in the district. Hurricane Katrina cost the district five instructional days with at least one other day lost to Hurricane Rita; a total that does not, on the surface, appear to be great, but the effects of the turmoil of enrolling, dropping, and adding, or simply not attending school for weeks or even months was worrisome. The district was attempting to start new programs as the year opened and the storms cost the district anywhere between 60 and 90 days in which to implement the new
programs. Two major district-wide initiatives were planned that year. One initiative was a state mandated program called the comprehensive curriculum, an effort to get all instructors teaching the same subject to be within a few days of each other in the timing of their lessons. This was a response to the acknowledged mobility issue that plagued the system before the storms. If every teacher of a particular subject was within a few days of each other, then students who transferred to different schools in the district would not be as far ahead or behind their classmates when they entered their new classes. The strategic accountability plan was also in the implementation phase as the storms struck. This plan had three overarching objectives: to increase student achievement; to promote safe, caring, and service-oriented schools; and to improve communication and community engagement. It was this initiative that the CAO felt had been most seriously delayed. The storms, he noted, “had set us back a good year.” By the time things had started to settle into a routine in the district several members of the central office attended a two day retreat with their partners in the Stupski Foundation to plan ways to get back on track with the initiative. The Stupski Foundation is a California-based organization that works with superintendents and their executive teams in urban school districts to improve school districts holistically (Stupski and Stupski, n.d.). Unfortunately, there was little time left to implement the plan because students in Louisiana undergo their iLEAP and LEAP testing in mid-March. Instead of focusing on the initiative since August of 2005, the district could return to the plan only in the spring and had, at best, two and a half months rather than the expected seven months to implement the program. The CAO noted that there had been none of the anticipated improvement that year.

Accommodations and Changes

This question concerned any changes made by the district in response to the crisis. Several differences in procedure emerged as the district began to feel the effects of large
numbers of registrants for school that September. These changes generally fall into three general areas of concern: School board level actions, state and federal actions, and school level actions.

The first of the three areas was the decision made by the school board to vote extraordinary powers to the superintendent. This action alone made it possible for the district to react to events quickly and effectively without returning to the school board for permission to proceed. Events were moving very rapidly in the first weeks and the superintendent had to make a series of decisions that ordinarily require school board approval. In particular, two schools had to be opened that had earlier been closed and were under renovation when the storm hit New Orleans. Suppliers had to be located to replace the vendors who had been based in the New Orleans region. Decisions had to be made concerning class size and locating space and staff for the schools that would be receiving large numbers of displaced students. All of these decisions needed to be planned, implemented, and evaluated on the fly and waiting for school board meetings for approval was not an efficient option. The school board met Thursday, September 1, 2005 to vote extraordinary powers to the superintendent. For the following 30 days the superintendent could act as long as she kept the school board leadership apprised of what was happening. The board vice president recalled that the extraordinary powers were renewed at least once. The emergency powers expired November 20, 2005.

A second area of change was in the area of satisfying state and federal guidelines concerning the desegregation case that at the time was still under federal court supervision. Schools had enrollment caps in place at the time, and although most schools were under the caps at the start of the year, some schools, because of planned, and court authorized, changes to attendance zone or repurposing schools to magnet status, were at or over the limits significantly. PS-813 Middle was already greatly above the limit because the district was building a new middle school and was positioning itself to adjust attendance zones the following year.
Regardless of the status of the schools in August, by September, with thousands of children in shelters or living with friends and relatives, the schools would have to find accommodations for those above and beyond the established limits. Within a week the attendance caps were removed and the district was free to make what changes were needed. The normal registration requirements of documentation concerning age verification, immunization records, residency requirements, and proof of grade level and services were waived for any child deemed homeless under Stewart B. McKinney-Vento Act (1987). The district had to accept the parent’s word for all of the usual information. The state had to grant waivers “automatically” due to the requirements of federal law. “You don’t know what grades these kids were in and so there was some testing and there was just some trust, too,” stated the superintendent. The CAO’s recollections were in agreement, adding “you have to take what they say and act on it…[but, some] people misrepresented what grade [their children] were in.”

Schools also had to make changes to basic operating procedures as the displaced students began to arrive. School times in a few schools had to be changed to accommodate the changes in transportation service because of the shortage of buses and drivers. For several schools in the district a third tier of routes was created to make more efficient use of the buses they had. Class size limits were relaxed that year as schools filled the few gaps in their enrollment and the numbers continued to mount. The CAO noted that the district had to increase the average class size from the pre-hurricane ratio toward the state’s maximum. In this case for grades K – 3, the minimum was increased from 26 – 1 toward the state ratio of 28 – 1; for grades 4 – 5 the district ratio rose from 27 – 1 toward the state ratio of 35 – 1; for grades 6 – 12 the ratio rose from 29 – 1 toward the state maximum of 35 – 1. The actual numbers in the classes were held below the state maximums, and varied from school to school and from week to week. Students were bused from their address of record to the closest school with space, sometimes violating the attendance zone
boundaries. This shifted somewhat in the spring of 2006 as shelters began to close and families found other residences, and as FEMA classrooms became available. The attendance zones did not shift that year, but some families were allowed to request transfers to schools closer to their new addresses as classroom space came available. McKenny-Vento (1987) requires districts to allow students to remain in the school in which they first register, but with cooperation of, and at the request of, the parents, students can be transferred to other schools – in this case, schools with space closer to their new residences. Many parents took advantage of those transfer opportunities, shifting their children once again.

No new administrative structures were created to handle the crisis. One ad-hoc committee was formed to plan with FEMA for the purpose of authorizing and placement of temporary classrooms to ease the overcrowding that was developing in many of the schools in the city. The committee had to project where most of the displaced students would eventually settle and request classrooms for the most likely affected schools. By November 2005 the sites had been chosen and new classroom construction or delivery of trailers was underway.

One final accommodation to the usual procedures in the district was a special waiver granted to students of Ben Franklin Magnet School in New Orleans. A group of parents approached the district administration with a request to keep their students together at one of the magnet high schools in the city. This request was not unusual - many parents attempted to get their children into the district’s magnet programs, but as a general rule, magnet programs are strictly limited in size and were generally always at full capacity. This particular group of parents was accommodated in their request after a meeting with the superintendent. The children had been identified as gifted, deserved the services, and one of the magnet schools that provided those services had the room.
No permanent changes were incorporated in the operational procedures of the district. All of the operations that occurred during the hurricane year fit within the current operational structure. Some staff members took on additional, temporary duties for a few months. Members of the ELT took on some additional responsibilities in their general area of expertise, but those functions gradually transitioned back into normal operations as the influx of students began to subside and many of the families began to move back to New Orleans and the other affected areas. None of the interviewees could cite any permanent differences in procedures or policy in the district, noting that the structures already in place were sufficient to accomplish what needed to be done.

All interviewees were asked if there were any recommendations that they could make to improve procedures in the event of another similar crisis. In this area there were suggestions from all interviewees. The superintendent noted that they should be adjusting their emergency plans in all the schools to account for sudden increases in student population. Improved documentation was also mentioned as the superintendent looked back on the hurricane year and noted sadly that they had few, if any, photographs or other forms of documentation to show what the district accomplished in the fall of 2005. The CAO added that there should be a standing plan to meet immediately after an event like Katrina at a secure, powered site to begin planning for recovery efforts. He felt that a whole day had been lost [the Tuesday after the hurricane] when the district could have gotten “one more day ahead of the curve.”

Additionally, in reference to data on district students, a centralized data warehouse that would hold all data on all students in the district would help schools identify the needs of the students and could be accessible to any administrator or teacher who needed to know about their students. The superintendent also noted that a statewide database would facilitate student registration and new employee hiring. The homeless liaison also had a broader vision of a
statewide database holding all the identifying information on each child. The IT director spoke of constructing a disaster recovery site that would serve as a back-up data repository updated daily and which could function in a limited fashion as a network center if the main computer center went down. He expressed the concern that if the district lost the main computer center it would lose data on all of the students, accounting, bookkeeping, payroll, and HR capability. The district would be seriously crippled.

Another recommendation from the child welfare and attendance director was to have the IT department equip an emergency site with computers and equipment in a facility large enough to handle large crowds. This “one stop shop” would have school staff sitting at tables to take applications, answer any questions, submit the application, and inform the parents at that time to which school their child would be assigned, which bus would be running, and where and when uniforms would be available. In addition, staff members and other professionals could be there to take care of all the other needs that the parents may have – medical, psychological, physical – all located in the same center. The AS I, who first arrived in the district as the crisis was unfolding, recommended updating the emergency plans because the district was in close proximity to major cities near the coast and was in harm’s way, but also suggested counseling services ready not only for the students and parents, but also for faculty and staff.

There is also evidence of what did not change. In particular two points were mentioned by the superintendent: testing and discipline. Maintaining standards were mentioned by others at the central office and some faculty members as well. The superintendent made the decision not to suspend LEAP and iLEAP testing that year, even though the state later gave them the option. “[We] did not know at what level many of our new students came to us,” the superintendent noted, “…the concern was: How effective would our testing be?” But the district gave the tests and informed teachers and students that the LEAP would count. That decision was not popular,
and the state later decided to allow the system to calculate the accountability scores with and without the displaced students and count the better of the two scores. That year the scores were mixed with some schools including the displaced scores in the calculations and others not.

Discipline was another area that remained consistent. “We did not lower our standards of discipline,” the superintendent stated, “…we kept the same rules we have of zero tolerance…. When you have the large numbers of students you have to maintain…as tight a control in the discipline as possible, because you had more students in the class.” The district did suffer through an increase in discipline problems. There were more kids, and “so, kids may have kind of acted out a little bit more than they normally would have.” In one of the study schools there were more discipline issues that year as expressed through an increased number of expulsion hearings that year, at the middle school level. Comparisons of the expulsion records across the years before and after the hurricane reveal that in 2005-06 the schools in the study had approximately twice the expulsion hearings than the year before, a trend that actually increased the year after the hurricanes, increasing from a combined 56 hearings in 2004-05 to 110 the 2005-06 year, and 127 in the 2006-07 year.
CHAPTER 5

RESULTS: SCHOOL UNITS

Interviews were conducted at the three participating school sites. The interviews focused on the research questions: How did the school plan for, place, and support displaced students? How did the leadership of the principal impact the integration of the displaced students into the culture of the school? What problems impeded the schools’ responses to hurricane-induced mobility? What, if any, changes became institutionalized in the school’s policies and practices? School principals were willing to give up time to describe their memories with most interviews lasting over an hour during school hours. The central office provided printed reports of the school’s demographics during the period of hurricane-induced displacement. Five specific dates were selected for examination because those dates reflected school populations at important points in the school year: August 11th, (opening day); August 26th, (the Friday before the Hurricane Katrina); October 3rd, (the date that districts report school demographics to the State Department of Education); January 3, 2006, (the first day of the second semester); and May 10th, (the last reporting date for the year). Each date offers an important snapshot of what was happening in each school through the course of that year.

Another general note for the schools below is the apparent anomalous changes in at-risk rates as the year progressed. Students identified as homeless are automatically provided free lunch status, but as the year progressed the district began to examine the actual status of the families. In addition, evaluations of free and reduced lunch status are only reported twice a year, at midyear and at the end of the year. That may explain the large changes in the percentages reported below as students identified as having free or reduced lunch status are described as being “At Risk.” Additionally, because the schools were still under federal supervision in a long-running desegregation case, each school was limited to a maximum number of students. This
number, identified as a consent decree cap, is used to calculate the number of seats available in the school in the 2005-2006 school year. It is the “Seats Available” figure that is provided in the school level tables below.

**PS-802 Elementary School**

Interviews were conducted at PS-802 Elementary December 6, 2007. The lead investigator interviewed the principal, the investigating team members interviewed several faculty members at the school and the school librarian. The school counselor was no longer at the school and could not be interviewed. Although only two complete recordings of the interviews were obtained due to recorder problems, the team took notes and the responses included in this summary are based in part on the written notes and the complete recordings that were obtained. PS-802 is a small elementary school in an upper middle class neighborhood along a tree-lined boulevard. At that point in the city several attendance zones converge and several schools are lined up along the boulevard within a mile and a half of each other. The walls of the hallways are covered with pictures, awards, student art, and colorful bulletin boards. Interviews of the faculty were conducted in a large, well-equipped library. The team was greeted promptly at the door by a courteous clerk, and the interviews began immediately. Principal Coryn was cordial and appeared comfortable with the interview, providing a frank and succinct assessment of the hurricane year with little evidence of confusion, though she did admit that not all of the memories were altogether pleasant. The interview took place in her office. Faculty interviews were conducted in the school library.

School demographics were taken from reports generated by the central office and some of the information is summarized in Table 4.1 below.

PS-802 opened the school year on August 11th, with 353 students and room for only ten more students as established in the consent decree caps. Of that number 284 were classified as
black students and 69 were non-black (the only ethnic designations identified in the report). As reported in Table 4.1 above, this corresponds to a percentage black population of 80.5%; the district-wide average was 76.4%. Free and reduced price lunches at the school – a common measure of poverty and identified here as at-risk – amounted to 65.7%, slightly below the district poverty rate of 68.5%.

Table 4.1 Demographic Snapshots of the School Year 2005-2006 – PS-802

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PS-802 Elementary</th>
<th>11-Aug</th>
<th>26-Aug</th>
<th>3-Oct</th>
<th>3-Jan</th>
<th>10-May</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>353</td>
<td>355</td>
<td>450</td>
<td>427</td>
<td>425</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Black</td>
<td>80.45%</td>
<td>80.28%</td>
<td>81.78%</td>
<td>81.26%</td>
<td>83.06%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% At-Risk</td>
<td>65.72%</td>
<td>63.38%</td>
<td>52.44%</td>
<td>78.92%</td>
<td>76.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seats Available</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>-87</td>
<td>-64</td>
<td>-62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Displaced</td>
<td>18.44%</td>
<td>12.89%</td>
<td></td>
<td>12.22%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobility</td>
<td>36.89%</td>
<td>65.56%</td>
<td></td>
<td>91.78%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. a Percentages calculated for % Displaced and % Mobility were derived by dividing the number of displaced and the number of adds plus drops by the school population as of October 3 numbers submitted to the State DOE. b Displaced data was not available for schools on the last day of class. The value provided was taken from a report generated using data from April 4, 2006.

By October 3rd, 95 students had arrived at the school, an 18% increase in under a month. The at-risk rate changed from 63.4% to 52.4%. Mobility for the school increased dramatically. By January the school had a 69% rate of mobility. By the end of the school year, the mobility rate was 97% and at-risk rate had settled at 76%. The population of the school was 425 by the last day of school, 72 students more than the initial student count.

Planning

Planning for the influx of students started with a general meeting of principals and secretaries the Wednesday after the hurricane struck New Orleans. Communications between the
central office and the principals initially were by telephone. Planning for the arrival of the children then moved to the individual campuses where the principals would instruct their staffs and faculties of the overall plan and any modifications that would be necessary for the particular campuses. The PS-802 Elementary staff members were advised by faculty meetings, memos, and one-on-one meetings with the principal. The principal met initially with some of her “key teachers” to begin the planning process. “Lots of planning” took place to find the necessary materials and prepare for the displaced students who would be arriving a week later. She described her approach as collaborative, usually involving discussions with teachers and planning through problems in group sessions. She knew that she had room for some additional students and eventually got about 100 new students, but materials for the students were needed. Teachers began to put together packages for the new children, drawing on left-over resources from an earlier grant, locating PS-802 Tee-shirts, and any uniforms that they could find. PS-802 children were recruited to act as “welcomers” and were paired up with new arrivals to help them learn the campus, locate the lunchroom and library, and meet their new classmates.

Placement

As the first students arrived they and their parents were brought to the library and presented with their packages and told to put on their PS-802 Tee-shirts right away so they would not stand out. The packages also included gift cards so the parents could purchase anything they needed. The gift cards were suggested by the Assistant Superintendent for Area I (Elementary Schools). As the school librarian noted: “Once you’re here, you’re [a PS-802] student.” Parents were invited to participate in school activities through several events built into the school calendar. The principal noted that parents, as a general rule, appeared to welcome the invitation to join in school activities by attending the Thanksgiving lunch, Christmas Program, Mother’s Day Tea, and Book Fair. Such school functions were attended by a large number of
the displaced families. The school was located in an attendance zone that was generally occupied by working poor families. Many parents held two or three jobs, therefore, could not normally attend many school functions. Displaced parents seemed determined to help their children achieve “normalcy” as quickly as possible, and having the time and desire to do so, attended many of the functions in large numbers.

Support

Support for the displaced families and students came from many directions. Within the school the staff assembled the welcoming kits that included school essentials, school tee-shirts, uniforms, and long pants. Some teachers and the school counselor went shopping for whatever materials the students lacked and assembled everything into the kits. The principal recalled an evening when she felt that some stability had arrived at the school and the displaced families at the school were invited to attend a gathering. On this evening more donations were distributed, and parents were given the opportunity to show their appreciation in a video that the school made. Parents were given the opportunity to say thank you, but most “didn’t know who to tell thank you to.” The resulting video was burned to DVD and sent to donors so they would know that their effort to help the displaced families was appreciated.

I CARE, described as providing “prevention education to students in the areas of alcohol, tobacco, other drugs, violence, crisis response and management” (ICARE, n.d.), provided counseling services to the students with visits two times a week, or more often when called. These services were made available to students when faculty or staff noticed unusual stress or reactions. The support was needed, as many faculty and staff noticed the emotional problems in some of the students.

Students at PS-802 pitched in to help the new students. In addition to the “welcomers,” students in the classrooms paired with the new students to help show them the ropes. Since no
special classes were created for the displaced students, they found themselves mixed in with the regular classes, sometimes four or five to a class. Students in those classes sat with them to help get them “on track” and “up to speed.” They were told they were PS-802 students and the same high expectations for behavior and achievement was expected of the new students. Students at the school tried to teach the new students “the way we do things at PS-802.” The students and teachers were sensitive to the new students and tried to relate to them and make them feel welcome. Teachers and staff were also under much stress in their own personal lives. Some faculty members had spouses involved in operations in New Orleans that continued for long hours through the fall of 2005; some in law enforcement, others helping restore electrical power. Many had family living with them who were displaced by the storms.

Support also came from FEMA when new trailers were moved onto the campus. Donations poured into the school from around the state as well as from across the nation. The volume of materials coming in was “overwhelming,” and, as the principal related, kept arriving even during Hurricane Rita. A truck loaded with donations from a school in North Carolina was personally driven down to PS-802 and arrived the day Hurricane Rita made landfall. Principal Coryn directed the truck to the school and helped unload as power started to fail in parts of the city. The principal treated the driver, a principal from North Carolina, and her daughter, who helped drive the truck, to supper while the outer bands of the storm raged across the city. The truck had been loaded with toys and athletic equipment for the students at PS-802. Letters and gifts arrived from as far away as Taiwan, with an offer to begin pen-pal relationships with students at the school. One “gift” that was not distributed was an air pistol that resembled an automatic weapon. Principal Coryn marveled at the thoughtfulness of the Taiwanese children, but wondered what they thought American children liked to do for fun.
Leadership

Several comments in the discussion pointed to a comfortable working relationship between the principal, the faculty, and the school community. The principal mentioned meetings at the school with her staff to plan for the arrival of the new students and the initiative taken by several of the staff members to find resources and clothing for the new children. Additionally, Principal Coryn described her style as collaborative, involving her staff and faculty in decision-making at the school; suggest a high level of compassion and a comfort zone of shared responsibility frequently cited in research as transformative, and as conducive to building school community. Expectations were high for discipline and academic achievement, in spite of the rash of discipline issues that appeared early on in the fall of 2005. Communications with the faculty were open and productive. Communications were open also with the parents, but circumstances in that year were such that most of the year and next were taken up in mourning for what was lost. Faculty and staff had to deal with the long term effects of the grief and unresolved anger. “It was real hard to deal with and try to constantly be supportive” in the face of parental anger over academic problems or discipline issues.

On the positive side, the school made use of what tools they had to teach to the children. Principal Coryn used data analysis to understand the weaknesses and strengths of the students within in the school and how to address those weaknesses. Participation in school activities was open to all parents, but because of the high poverty in the area many parents were working and could not attend school functions; displaced families were not working could attend academic, social, and sports functions at the school.

Any faults that appeared were associated with inexperience. Principal Coryn noted that 2005 was her first year as principal at PS-802. The biggest weakness that emerged from our interview was her attempt to relieve the pressure on her faculty by taking on much of the burden
of handling the donations and gifts that deluged the school after the hurricane. Rather than call around and seek help from the PTO and local churches, she tried to take on the task herself. “I was a fairly new principal…and I probably would now reach out and say ‘we’ve got to get some help so let’s get some people in here, I can’t do all this.’”

Problems

The volume of donations and requests to help proved to be a mixed blessing at PS-802. No one was expecting the overwhelming volume and was generally lacking the space to store the materials sent to the school. The school was located in an area populated by many working poor, the principal did not want to ask too much of the local parents in helping sort out the materials. This proved to be, in retrospect, a problem. “We just didn’t have a lot of help…it was just overwhelming keeping up with the donations.” Parents were having a hard time and struggling financially, she “didn’t want to create any…antagonism or…animosity” by involving local parents in distributing the donations to displaced families. Teachers were just so “exhausted with huge classes” and “kids constantly coming and going, coming and going” that she felt she had to try to handle things herself. Although there were local churches – one directly across the street from the school – she did not call them for help, though help would most likely have been happily granted.

Teachers had to deal with classes that had grown larger than they were accustomed to teaching. Teachers also had to face the daily frustrations resulting from constant mobility; the head count in the classrooms changed almost daily; “if it didn’t,” noted a third grade teacher, “it was amazing!” Some classes grew by as much as a third, notably the second and third grades. The special education class grew from six to fifteen. Many of the children had not been in school for weeks. In January, some 10 to 12 more students arrived; they had not been in school since the hurricane struck in August. We “didn’t have a large population of kids in the 4th grade;” the
principal stated, “the kids that came and went in the 4th grade caused problems for…our existing kids…we knew we lost instruction with them.” The “problems” were not discipline issues, rather it was that the students were far behind their peers academically and the teachers were worried about what effect that would have on their testing. When testing time arrived, most of the displaced 3rd graders scored unsatisfactory on the iLEAP. Third grade test scores plummeted. In contrast, 85% of the local PS-802 kids did very well, but not enough to counter the effects of testing the students who had missed so much school. Teachers recalled that the students coming in seemed to be focusing on things elsewhere and not on school.

The constant turnover of students that year created disruptions everyday in which teachers would have to stop, introduce the new students, and “show them the ropes.” This activity continued from the beginning of the school year through the fall and spring semesters. While walking down the hall on May 1st, only a few weeks before the end of school, the principal still heard teachers explaining to students “Okay, now, here’s the rules of the classroom.” The hurricanes played a larger part in the affairs of the school than just sending nearly a hundred students in September. School demographics changed that year and after. The large apartment complexes in the attendance zone began to house more poor families who attended the school; and as the poverty rose, mobility rose. “The last two years, it has been horrible,” Coryn stated, and that is why “[our] test scores don’t really mean anything.”

District-wide mobility rates were reported at 46%; “I sincerely doubt that,” the principal stated. Some schools in the district have mobility rates of 100% or more. The most stable schools in the district still have mobility rates of 40% - 50%. During the 2005-2006 school year at PS-802 the mobility rate was 97%; by the end of the year, out of a final population of 425 students, 253 students had entered the school and 160 had dropped from the school. Only 10 of the 60 students in the 5th grade started at PS-802 and still remained there through the end of the year.
Emotionally, the toll of the hurricane year was very heavy. Some students reported that they had many relatives living in their apartments and houses. One parent described living in a house with 70 relatives and friends. Children were stressed with family, crowded living conditions, attending new schools (for the displaced) or attending a much more crowded school (for the local children). The stress was felt in several ways, both by the children and later by the parents. Discipline issues described in the interviews arose at two separate times at the school. Although the school had few fights before the hurricane, after Katrina local students had more discipline problems after the arrival of the displaced children. Interviewees speculated that local parents, fearful of the influence of displaced children from New Orleans, urged their children to stand up for themselves and not be pushed around. The kids “were very defensive,” Coryn noted. Many of the students and faculty were unsure of how the displaced children would react when they arrived. Later, the displaced children began to show signs of stress and especially their parents began to show the stress. They took “their anger out on us.” Every little incident became a major battle it seemed;

they blew it all out of proportion…everything that we called them about…it was our fault, and what were we doing to their child? They had no problems before they came here, now they had all kinds of problems!

The school had one counselor and I CARE sent counselors on a regular basis, but the school “didn’t have a whole lot of support system” in place in the beginning, and the students were brittle emotionally. There were many instances of children crying – “fall on the floor crying.” They lacked what the principal described as emotional resiliency.

Accommodations and changes

When asked if any changes were made because of the hurricane, several points were noted: other than changes in registration, dress codes were relaxed because of the shortage of available uniforms, and the overcrowded conditions forced the school to add new classes. In the
latter case, a new class was created for one of the grades and a new, inexperienced teacher was placed in a classroom with local children because, in the view of the principal, if the teacher did not know the system yet, at least the children were familiar with the system. Unfortunately, the new teacher left at spring break and the children had to be shifted and spread across the other classes in that grade. That unfortunate circumstance only added to the mobility within the school that year, in part prompting incidents that the principal described earlier, still struggling to establish a routine and class rules in May. At some points in the year, even the uniform codes were overlooked when students arrived in jeans rather than the school uniform. The reaction from the staff occasionally was one of “you know, go with it, [at least] he’s here!” Considering the overcrowded classroom conditions and the constant turnover there was nothing the school could do about the situation.

No permanent changes came about as a result of the hurricanes of 2005. No new administrative structures were put in place, no new policies. When the deluge of students slowed, “normalcy” of a sort returned. Lessons learned from the experience were not administrative lessons; but personal reflections and observations looking back on a difficult year. A third grade teacher noted that they needed to review procedures more, the librarian wished for more time to arrange and issue materials and books, and more flexible scheduling to handle the overload that she faced as book coordinator. The principal reflected on her choice not to get more people involved in the handling of the volume of donations and to help around the school. She also marveled at the desire among strangers to “cut to the chase and impact kids” rather than go through charitable agencies. We need to “get back to people – to – people.” In terms of the displaced parents, it was gratifying to see people “overwhelmed with loss…pull themselves up by the…bootstraps…and march on…for the kids’ sake.”
What made the school able to take the stresses of constant changing classes and turmoil was the comfortable relationship between the principal and the staff at the school. “[Working together to solve problems] was not anything new to us;” the shared leadership relieved some of the leadership stress. Everyone bore part of the burden.

PS-814 Elementary School

PS-814 Elementary School did not have many faculty or staff members present in the school at the time of the hurricane who volunteered to be interviewed. The principal, Ms. Anderson and one faculty member, who had just returned to the school from Alaska, were the only interviewees from the school. The school counselor agreed to be interviewed, but was a displaced teacher from a New Orleans Magnet school who had spent the hurricane year at PS-8124 Elementary and could not be included in this study. Ms. Anderson and faculty member Ms. Heath were interviewed November 16, 2007.

PS-814 is a typical sprawling elementary school with broad hallways, shiny tile floors, and walls covered in pictures of award-winning faculty and staff members, pictures and certificates of proud students, and a multitude of student artwork. A burbling fish pond greets the visitor at the front entrance of the school. The school is nestled in a quiet upper middle class labyrinthine neighborhood in which the unwary traveler could easily circle several times before exiting and once had a majority white student body, but in later years large rent-controlled apartment complexes were constructed or folded into the attendance zone to achieve an almost 55% African-American and 58% at-risk student body.

Demographic data were summarized from reports generated at the central office and are reported in Table 4.2 below.

PS-814 started the school year with a population that was over the consent decree caps and remained overcrowded through the year. The percentage of black students did not change
substantially through the year and remained below the district average. The number of at-risk students varied greatly between 49.2% and 71.1% through the year, but as explained above, was heavily influenced by the arrival of displaced students and twice-annual reporting of free/reduced lunch statistics. The school had a maximum displaced student percentage of 13.9%, a percentage that declined slowly as the year progressed. Mobility in the school was relatively high, starting at 41% in October and rising to 88.1% by April.

Table 4.2 Demographic Snapshots of the School Year 2005-2006 – PS-814

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>611</td>
<td>606</td>
<td>699</td>
<td>647</td>
<td>625</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Black</td>
<td>54.98%</td>
<td>63.37%</td>
<td>65.67%</td>
<td>67.39%</td>
<td>69.44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% At Risk</td>
<td>58.10%</td>
<td>58.42%</td>
<td>49.21%</td>
<td>71.10%</td>
<td>67.68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seats Available</td>
<td>-42</td>
<td>-37</td>
<td>-130</td>
<td>-78</td>
<td>-56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Displaced</td>
<td>13.88%&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>9.59%&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>7.58%&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Mobility</td>
<td>41.49%&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>67.38%&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>88.13%&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. <sup>a</sup> Percentages calculated for % Displaced and % Mobility were derived by dividing the number of displaced and the number of adds plus drops by the school population as of October 3 numbers submitted to the State DOE. <sup>b</sup> Displaced data was not available for schools on the last day of class. The value provided was taken from a report generated using data from April 4, 2006.

Planning

The principal, Ms. Anderson, noted that she planned for the arrival of the students with the assistance of some teachers and her secretaries in registering new students. Registration at the school was opened Saturday, September 3<sup>rd</sup>, with students arriving Monday, September 12<sup>th</sup>, ten days later. After being informed of the district’s plan, communications between the principal and the faculty consisted of advising the grade level chairman and each would in turn advise the
faculty of that grade level. Principal Anderson noted that grade level chairpersons met regularly in grade level meetings with the rest of their teams.

Placement

Over two hundred displaced students were registered into PS-814 Elementary School and placed into classes there. Families were asked if they were displaced by Hurricane Katrina or later, by Hurricane Rita. Members of the school staff and PTO officers assisted in the registration process. Students were administered diagnostic tests and placed in classes. Principal Anderson advised parents of the status of their children’s placement. She reported that families were “most appreciative.” Some were “surprised” by the low results of those placement tests, while other parents were not. Most communications between the principal and the faculty was informal or through grade level chairpersons though there was at least one meeting after school where they were warned that the problem of taking in more students was going to be a bigger issue than they had earlier believed. As the children and families began to arrive, Ms. Anderson noted the desperation of the parents and their relief at being accepted into a safe environment. Although the school could not immediately create more classroom space for the students, they could and did hire new teachers, some of them displaced teachers.

Support

Students at PS-814 were supported in several different ways. Initially, there was great support from the staff and the faculty of the school. Some had assisted in registering the new students, all made room in the classes for new students, all were sympathetic and empathized with the students. Ms. Anderson recalled “rally[ing] the troops” to get uniforms and materials. Although they were not trained as counselors, teachers at the school could listen to the students, although most of the students did not seem to want to talk about their experiences.
Another source of support for the school came from outside of the school system. Ms. Anderson recalled as they were signing up students that Saturday a young couple came in and offered her $100 in cash. Ms. Heath noted the blessing that year in the form of interns from Louisiana State University in the school who provided “extra hands,” and “extra help.” One student teacher in particular provided the support that one distraught child needed to get through the day; taking the child for walks before school and soothing her so the child could enter the classroom and be ready to learn.

Professional counseling and psychological assistance was provided to the school that year and the next as counselors were visiting the school twice a week. One psychologist, or certified counselor, in particular provided a “grandfatherly,” comforting presence as he held group sessions with displaced students weekly. Although some of the assistance was months in arriving, they remained a fixture at the school for the remainder of 2006 and into the 2006-07 school year. Professional assistance was readily available and teachers were encouraged to recommend students for counseling.

Another area of support at the school came from various forms of federal assistance. The school was eligible for grants for materials, and in that year the school became eligible for a grant that ultimately supplied them with Smart Boards and Elmo cameras. Later that year, FEMA provided a two-classroom trailer to relieve some of the overcrowding. The classrooms came fully equipped with all the materials for the teachers to begin work.

A common form of support at the school in the past was the presence of paid tutors for students in the school facing difficult LEAP tests. These tutors were generally available for fourth graders as they prepared for the high stakes tests in March of that school year. Other tutors were also provided after school in 2005-06 because the displaced students were often functioning below grade level. This assistance was appreciated by anxious parents. Ms. Anderson noted that
the efforts paid off in improved test scores that year, though she did note that the displaced
students at the school did not have to be and were not included in calculations. The test results
were significant indicators of the efforts of the school, however, because the school the following
year (2006-07) generally maintained their scores with the displaced student population included
in the calculations.

One final area of support, which also could be classified a problem, was the tremendous
volume of assistance in the form of school materials that soon began to arrive at the school.
“Crates of boxes” containing knapsacks, school materials, papers, pencils and other items began
to arrive in large numbers. This was a mixed blessing in that they had to find space to store it all.
There were boxes of materials in the halls of the school and that any student needing anything
had access to the largess.

Leadership

Several comments suggest a high degree of leadership and strong empathetic relationship
between the principal of the school and the staff and students. Several comments in the interview
pointed to an active leadership role of the principal, but also revealed a great deal of
volunteerism among the school community. Teachers and secretaries volunteered to help sign up
new students, local families gathered used uniforms and assisted in signing up the new students.
The school community did not need much encouragement when the principal “rallied the
troops.” The casual reference to the work done by the Parent-Teacher Organization in the
weekend open registration and the assistance in putting together of kits for the children suggest a
close working relationship and strong connection between the principal and school community
that is often urged by scholars of school community, but not often witnessed. Research
consistently suggests that good schools are led by principals that set high expectations, focus on
student achievement, and communicate effectively; those schools are more successful
(Leithwood, Begley, and Cousins, 1990). Such a school also tends to have low teacher turnover, and PS-814 evidenced that characteristic as well. In the interview, the principal admitted that in 2007-08 she had more turnover than ever before with three retirements and three faculty leaving to follow their husbands to new job postings.

The school was organized with grade level teams meeting weekly and cross curricular meetings to keep the faculty focused on problem solving and coordinating their activities. Grade level committees helped disseminate information and kept focused on the needs of the children. Another feature of this school’s connection with good teaching practices was the use of diagnostic and standardized test scores of the children and the parent-teacher conferences to inform and advise parents of their children’s academic status. Teachers’ lesson planning was directed by the results of the diagnostic tests and on-going formative evaluations. Expectations were clear: “We laid out the goods,” Ms. Anderson stated. The tone was no-nonsense; “you have what you have” and the school’s mission was to take “them as far as you can go.” Parents were told “we’re here for business. We’re not policemen; we are not wardens; we are here to teach. They are here to learn. If they don’t want to learn, they are not going to keep others from learning.” Urging the parents to work with the school as a team, Ms. Anderson stated, works “99% of the time.”

There was a lot of hard work and good teaching going on at PS-814. The School Performance Score for the 2005-06 school year increased 9.7 points, exceeding the goals for that year.

Problems

The research question regarding problems in serving the displaced student population that year includes several categories of issues at PS-814. On a purely personal level, there were physical issues of living in a city that was side-swiped by two deadly hurricanes within a month.
Dealing with much heavier traffic flow meant, for some, extra hours behind the wheel getting to and from school. Storm damage and power outages, common across the entire district, even though the school itself was not seriously affected, plagued many of the faculty with intermittent communications and power issues for days after the storms. Emotional issues centering on relatives who were caught in the turmoil in New Orleans or other storm ravaged areas were common issues among both faculty and staff, not just for the students. Some members of the school community had relatives who were displaced, missing, or crowded into their homes while waiting for some resolution to their housing circumstances. One PTO officer at PS-814 had 25 additional people in her home; the school secretary was hosting 12 family members. Ms. Heath, who was in her second year of DROP looking forward to retirement, realized that she could no longer afford to start her life over on only a retirement check.

At the school, the new students brought their own personal baggage with them. Ms. Anderson noted their demeanor as being that of robots and that 99% of the students were not problems. Some children were frightened, withdrawn, or quiet; some afraid to come into the classroom, or who cried daily. Ms. Heath noted the students who were not always ready to learn, who functioned below grade level, who had “educational deficits,” or whose problems had to be assuaged before the day’s lessons could begin. Discipline issues rose that year. The participants were reluctant to identify the issues as being storm related, calling them family issues instead.

Children came into the school needing a safe, stable environment. The principal repeatedly referred to creating a safe place, a stable environment, any kind of routine that would help the students feel secure. Unfortunately, not all students come from stable home environments. The school may have seemed “surreal” to some students. In spite of the efforts to create a safe harbor for the students, the turmoil surrounding the placement of students, the constant shifting from shelter to shelter, or leaving the city for other states then returning, meant
that the school did not return to any semblance of normality that entire year. Particularly chaotic were the first three weeks after Katrina when the head counts changed daily. For some of the children, the value of an education seemed to be very important – particularly to those who arrived at the school early on in September. For those who came in later, education did not seem to be as important to the students or their families. Those who arrived later, Ms. Heath stated, were more likely to be unruly; they had fallen out of a daily routine. Some had been “drawn from pillar to post.”

Some problems were also blessings in disguise as for faculty members that year there was precious little time to worry about their personal difficulties. There was no time to dwell on the past, Ms. Heath stated, that was a “blessing of being employed.” She, like all displaced teachers, was too busy keeping up with lessons, trying to learn the comprehensive curriculum, and trying to understand the goals and objectives of the district to have time to worry about their former homes and lives.

For the students, some blessings in disguise of failure involved the students who did not return to New Orleans or other storm stricken areas. Those who stayed “grew in leaps and bounds” the following year, progressing much farther the year after the hurricanes as things settled into more predictable routines. Many parents also noted the improvements and some even remarked that they were pleased to be in the new district. Ms. Anderson was pragmatic in viewing that year: In terms of the LEAP testing, “you have what you have.”

Another problem at the school was a decline in parent involvement. This could have been a combination of factors which could have been unrelated to the storm or its aftermath. Many of the students at the school came from addresses close to the school. The large apartment complex that sent over two hundred students to the school was over a mile away, but for parents with limited or no transportation, that may have seemed far to walk. For parents still at shelters in the
fall of 2005, it could have been many miles away and most of them had no transportation. On the positive side, when the school hosted a Family Pride Night at the school “hundreds attended.” In absolute numbers, PS-814 housed over 690 students, but the reality was that over 990 students entered the school, and two hundred or more left. Keeping accurate records and trying to teach to the child was a major effort.

Accommodations and Changes

The question concerning changes in the school policies or procedures yielded no data. No mention was made of any changes to the uniform codes, registration requirements, or any standard procedures at the school. The lack of notice included the interviewee from the staff. As Ms. Anderson noted “we carried on carrying on.”

The research question about lessons learned at PS-814 did yield some comments. As the result of the tremendous influx of students, the school was awarded a grant of over $27,000 to equip classrooms with Smart Boards and Elmo projectors. This allowed teachers to use different modalities and gave them the ability to teach children who were tactile or kinesthetic learners. Many students were not readers and the Smart Boards allowed teachers to approach treating reading deficits in ways heretofore impossible. The kids “came to life” with the new technologies.

Several recommendations concerning the events of the hurricane year included Ms. Anderson’s wish that a trained psychologist be posted at the school. She noted that not only the 122 displaced students still at the school, but the regular students “needed somebody…this once a week, or…two-a-weeks, just doesn’t cut it.” Ms. Heath commented that she found the students much more resilient than adults.

Issues at PS-814 are interesting in light of the fact that the school absorbed hundreds of students that year and still improved test scores over nine points. Even though displaced students
were not counted in the spring 2006 scores, the fact remained that all of the students, displaced and local, endured the turmoil of students coming and going, of handling the emotional rollercoaster that was everyday life in a crowded elementary school, of the crowded classroom conditions, of constantly changing faces in the halls and classrooms, of the stressful testing and anxious waiting for high stakes results that largely brand a school as adequate or inadequate. Remarkably, the following years’ results confirmed the test results of the spring of 2006.

PS-813 Middle School

PS-813 Middle School was visited in November of 2007, over the space of two days. Many interviewees in the initial visit were faculty members freed from their teaching duties for the interview by an assistant principal who sat in their classes. The principal, counselor, and some faculty of the school left for their assignments at a new middle school the year following the hurricanes and had to be located and interviewed later. Interviews were conducted with teachers Mr. Curtis, Mr. Winston, Ms. Deering, Ms. Jeffries, Mr. Reid, Ms. Denman, and Assistant Principal Ms. Teel. Principal Thatcher and Counselor Ms. Torries were interviewed later at their new positions.

PS-813 Middle School is located in a well established area of Baton Rouge. The demographics of the area had gradually changed with the growth of the area and the development of 640 units of rent-controlled apartments, the majority of which were occupied by lower middle class minority families; the composition of the school had gradually changed over the years to a mostly minority student body. The school had a large campus with broad hallways kept clean, with few pictures or examples of student art. Several chairs and a table were positioned opposite the door to the office just inside of the main entrance to the school. In spite of the somewhat Spartan appearance of the school, the faces in the office were friendly and the school staff greeted visitors quickly. There was a businesslike air of efficiency that almost
seemed brusque, but later as visitors and students left the secretaries were willing to chat informally about their jobs. Many of the staff in the office had recently arrived at the school because the former staff members had departed to join their principal at a new middle school that had opened up in 2006.

Demographic data were summarized from reports acquired from the central office and are presented in Table 4.3 below:

Table 4.3 Demographic Snapshots of the School Year 2005-2006 – PS-813

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PS-813 Middle</th>
<th>11-Aug, '05</th>
<th>26-Aug, '05</th>
<th>3-Oct, '05</th>
<th>3-Jan, '06</th>
<th>10-May, '06</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>933</td>
<td>921</td>
<td>1031</td>
<td>981</td>
<td>907</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Black</td>
<td>54.98%</td>
<td>56.68%</td>
<td>58.29%</td>
<td>60.24%</td>
<td>57.66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% At Risk</td>
<td>58.84%</td>
<td>59.07%</td>
<td>53.83%</td>
<td>66.06%</td>
<td>59.98%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seats Available</td>
<td>-133</td>
<td>-121</td>
<td>-231</td>
<td>-181</td>
<td>-107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Displaced</td>
<td>9.60%(^a)</td>
<td>8.73%(^a)</td>
<td>8.15%(^b)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Mobility</td>
<td>25.51%(^a)</td>
<td>48.79%(^a)</td>
<td>74.88%(^a)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. \(^a\) Percentages calculated for % Displaced and % Mobility were derived by dividing the number of displaced and the number of adds plus drops by the school population as of October 3 numbers submitted to the State DOE. \(^b\) Displaced data was not available for schools on the last day of class. The value provided was taken from a report generated using data from April 4, 2006.

The school was a large school with a high population already far above the consent decree caps as it started the school year. The school was overloaded in preparation for the opening of a new middle school the following year. Crowding was partly the result of zone shifts preparing to align the new attendance zones for the following year. After the storm passed the school began to receive displaced students immediately, and in the official numbers submitted to the state department of education in early October, the school reported a 9.6% displaced student population. Demographically, the percentage of black students increased temporarily from about
about 58% by year’s end. The number of at-risk students seemed to shift as the year progressed, but generally settled back at about 60% - within one percentage point of their starting point in August. The mobility rate at PS-813 Middle was high and was described as always high. By the end of the year the school’s mobility rate stood at about 75%.

Planning

The school, like other schools in the district, dismissed Friday, August 26th, with the principal admonishing both faculty and students to keep up with the news to learn when to return to school. After the storm passed, but particularly after witnessing the news from New Orleans, faculty, staff, and administration knew that this was no ordinary storm and aftermath. Power had failed over large parts of the city and PS-813 Middle was also without power. The day after the passage of the storm, Principal Thatcher traveled to the school to inspect damage and discovered that the gym was being used as a Red Cross shelter. Two days later families began to arrive at the school to register their children. The administration and staff were provided with registration forms and they were told to forward all forms to the central office for processing.

Communications were initially by telephone via the PACE messaging system, direct calls from the superintendent and the assistant superintendent for middle schools, and later mainly through the email system. Principals would receive notices from the central office and a spreadsheet with listings of students who had been processed and assigned to the school. Ms. Torres, the school counselor, also noted that early information was gained through the media, but once advised of the plans for sign-up, the school would follow the system put in place by the central office. Throughout the year the school and administrators tried to keep to the system and make it function. Before students began to arrive at the school Principal Thatcher proactively set up mock schedules in effort to make the registration and scheduling of displaced students go faster.
She, an assistant principal, and the school secretary attempted to prepare schedules for all the students thought to be arriving the following week. The effort proved partly successful because the shifting of families often led to many students attending schools in other parishes or out of state, and only some of the carefully planned schedules were used. Assistant Principal Teel recalled that before the hurricanes there was no plan for large numbers of students to arrive at the school, but after being informed in a faculty meeting of the district’s plan to register all displaced students, the school, its faculty and staff “just went with it” and utilized the system that was already in place. Several faculty members also recalled the meetings. Mr. Winston recalled being cautioned about how to speak to the children coming in; Ms. Denman recalled being warned that the children would be traumatized; and Ms. Deering commented that no one was prepared for what happened.

**Placement**

Placement of the students proceeded as with any new student arriving at the school with one exception in this case: All office personnel took a hand in helping register parents into the system and then registering the students into the school. If a counselor was busy the principal or an assistant principal entered the student information into the computer system. Secretaries helped greet parents and tried to make them feel comfortable at the school. The counselor, Ms. Torres, indicated that one factor that played into the registration process in addition to the normal questions was to be certain to determine if the family registering for the school had any concerns or needs that needed addressing. Such is not usually the case in registering children. In this instance, the staff of the school made it a point to determine what needs still were not yet addressed, made the process as easy as possible, waived all fees for items that would normally require a small fee, and generally “as a school” did whatever they could to make the incoming parents and students feel welcome. Ms. Torres also noted that the first meeting with students and
parents was crucial to develop relationships. Although there were no large assemblies or meetings with displaced families, the initial contact set the tone. Generally, the first meeting was sufficient to get the new students into the atmosphere and feel of the school. Materials were provided to the students, one counselor drove across town to secure a number of uniforms so the new students would not be immediately recognized as displaced for lack of uniforms, and in the words of Assistant Principal Teel, the students “came in and went to class and followed the rules, they made it easy for us.” Even faculty members took a hand in helping out; on their own planning time they came to the office and helped with uniforms, materials, meeting parents and taking them on tours of the school. They reported that the new students were well received and that everybody tried to help them.

Support

Helping the displaced students and supporting them in their troubles came naturally at PS-813 Middle School. Once the faculty and staff learned what their needs were, materials and assistance were found for the students. Community support was vigorous with loads of materials arriving in the district from numerous sources: church groups, civic groups, individuals, and even schools from other states. One California school adopted PS-813 Middle because one of the employees of PS-813 had attended that school as a child in California. Counselor Torres recalled receiving “tons and tons” of materials and paper.

In addition to the arrival of physical materials, the school received help from the St. Vincent de Paul Society for school uniforms, clothing, underwear, and other personal needs. Donations “all came in at one time.” If families needed information or school materials they got what they needed.

Counseling services were available through a variety of sources. The district’s I CARE program sent counselors to the school on a regular basis. School counselors, although very busy
scheduling and adding and dropping students, had to monitor and screen students for signs of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and referred students to counseling services provided to the children and their parents at no charge. Several outside agencies were part of that effort, some coming to the school on a routine basis, some receiving referrals outside of the school.

Routinely expected services at the school were not ignored as the school counselors also had to monitor Individual Educational Plans (IEPs) of incoming students when they were made aware of them. Such services are mandated and the school had no option but to provide any and all services to which the students were entitled. In some cases this was a problem, and that point will be discussed in more detail below. At this point, the problem was finding out who needed services, and that was determined at the time of registration.

Several faculty members contributed other pieces to the puzzle of how to support the new students as they settled in. Ms. Teel remembered counselors bringing in a State Trooper to address the students, later a faculty member from a local university also arrived to talk to the students. Other faculty members recalled the assistance of the peer buddies from the Student Council Club and football team who took the new students around and introduced them to teachers, coaches, and other students. Still others thoughtfully recalled their impromptu role as counselors in the classroom. When faced with students who were not at the same point educationally with their local students, some faculty assigned peer tutors and occasionally relaxed their usual classroom routines or expectations based on the apparent state of mind of some of the students. Other faculty recalled the supplies, uniforms, and lab fees that were waived for the displaced students.

Leadership

Several instances of the leadership qualities of the faculty and principal at the school were in evidence. Principal Thatcher and her staff worked pro-actively to prepare schedules for
the incoming displaced students. Visitors were greeted cordially and staff members and faculty stepped in and helped, clearly a sign that they were “buying in” to the process. Cooperation and coordination were in evidence as everyone participated in the welcoming of new families to the school, to knowing and supporting the goals of the school, and resisting parental efforts to change the standards of the class instruction and of the whole school.

“We ran school status quo,” Principal Thatcher stated, “we expected those students to follow the rules and regulations just like – like we had all students follow.” Expectations were clear and students were expected to follow the rules.

From the discussion about this school, which was conducted in a group session with the school counselor who served at PS-813 and a counselor who was at another school at that time, the general tone that comes across was one of a determination to preserve the status quo, maintain the rules and try to stay afloat as the students came and went. Managerial emphasis on stability preserved the school when everything else was in constant flux. “I did what I needed to do…[I had to] look at the big picture,” Thatcher stated, “you have to do what you have to do because it’s right.”

Problems

By the start of October the school had taken in about a hundred displaced students, a number that represents about 11% of the total school population. Such a large influx of students in a school that was already over a hundred students above the consent decree cap could easily lead to problems. The problems encountered by the school fell into several categories. The initial concern began with the start of the year since the school was over the consent decree cap. Principal Thatcher noted they were already crowded, a concern that could only grow as the hurricane-displaced students began to arrive at the school. Overcrowding in classrooms, shortage of teachers, lack of classroom space, more “floaters” – teachers without a classroom of their
own, and concomitantly, the lack of office space for the “floaters,” a lack of teaching materials and textbooks, all were problems that could be anticipated as the school readied to receive the new students. By the first week of October, the school had already received a hundred eighty-eight new students, of which 99 were identified as Katrina-displaced. The other students were Majority to Minority or School ofChoice transfers. That number was somewhat offset by the departure of 75 students. The student counts here do not indicate how many of them were Katrina displaced students. The shortages were real, but the problem already existed to some degree before August 28th. The school staff did what they could to solve the problems. Some of the problems were solved with the passage of time in various ways. Some students transferred out for a variety of reasons, others were shifted to other schools as their parents found more permanent accommodations, and materials began to flood in from donations around the state and the nation. Classrooms sets of books were shared to cover the lack of texts. A problem involving a shortage of calculators was solved when the school received a grant for new calculators.

A second major problem surfaced when the students began to arrive without records to indicate their grade placement in their former school, and the records regarding services that they were receiving in their former schools were also missing. Later, when some records arrived from the State Department of Education, the records were not in the same format as those used by the district’s counselors. The fear that counselors shared was that they would not be providing the services that the students deserved either due to the lack of records, or because parents “were not involved or they didn’t understand the type of services that they [the children] were receiving.” Secondarily, school counselors could not be sure that they were providing the appropriate services because the IEPs were written differently.

Another problem that manifested early in September and continued for months was the problem of dealing with parents who were shuffled from school to school; whose questions
school personnel could not answer; who did not understand the process of registration into the system; and for whom school personnel literally had no answers. Many of the interactions were characterized by frustration. Several interviewees from the school used the word “draining” to describe the interactions with parents. The Assistant Principal for Discipline, Ms. Teel did not recall any major issues involving discipline, a characterization that was contradicted by the casual reference to conflicts by the school counselor. The counselor and assistant principal both agreed that when problems occurred, they would “pull them [the students] in with their parents and settle the issues. The parents co-operated “100%,” noted Ms. Teel. Ms. Torres also noted that there were more conflicts that year because there were more students, dissociating Katrina-displaced students from increased discipline issues at the school. Examination of expulsion hearing records at the Child Welfare and Attendance Office revealed that PS-813 Middle had a total of 102 expulsion hearings that year, the plurality of which - 44 (43.1%) were for disrespect and similar related offenses. Fighting or other forms of violence accounted for 40 expulsions (39.2%). The total 102 expulsions, when compared to the October 3rd counts, represented 9.89% of the population. Of that number only five hearings (0.48%) involved Katrina-displaced students.

Distinguishing between normal mobility at the school and mobility induced by the hurricanes of 2005 was difficult. The district policy of Majority to Minority transfers and School of Choice transfers meant large numbers of students came and went early in the school year at PS-813. Ms. Torres commented that the school would never know what its population was. Ms. Teel noted also that when the school reopened after the hurricane, there was some unease in that they did not know how the Katrina displaced students would adjust to the new environment, but because of the empathy and maturity of the seventh and eighth graders that year, the new
students were welcomed and made to feel that they were PS-813 students, just like everyone else.

Testing at the school occurred in March. It is always a stressful time and many students normally get more tense and fearful as testing time approached. With the normal coming and going of students in any given year, the tensions wear on the students, particularly the eighth graders who knew they were facing high stakes testing in the spring or 2006. With the hurricanes that year, everyone interviewed expressed that they knew they would be getting students, some of whom were from low performing schools in the New Orleans district. The constant movement of students made it difficult for the faculty to know who was displaced or who was local; who was just moving to a new apartment or moving in with a grandmother.

Faculty members at the school recalled the incoming students as being “in shock,” “solemn,” massively depressed, “overwhelmed,” not well prepared for the level of work they were trying to do, or uncooperative. Other students were variously described as dazed, despondent, quiet, or withdrawn. Some refused to work, or as Mr. Winston noted: They had more serious things to worry about. Some faculty noted that there was some resentment between local students and the displaced students; other students were somewhat frustrated at the slower pace that year; some displaced students seemed to have a “low current” of anger with no one upon which to focus or release that anger. Some students, Ms. Denman noted, did not want to be accepted, they just wanted to go home. She did not see the “504” area code identification as a challenge, as most others and especially the press that year and the next viewed it. Rather, it was a means used by displaced students to maintain their own identity. They could not return to their former homes as though nothing had happened – though many dearly wished it. Anger, she noted was the first stage of grief. Mr. Jeffries noted that some parents attempted to get the school to lower their standards or change policy that year, unsuccessfully. Teachers at the school did not
want to bring their standards down to what some displaced parents wanted; rather, they wanted to raise all of the students to a higher standard. Faculty members themselves were under great stress because of their own personal struggles after the hurricanes. Some had family and friends living with them at home, some homes may have had ten or more relatives in the same house. Ms. Deering remarked that the school was “ill-prepared” for what happened that year. She also described one student in particular who was angry and seemed to go out of his way to “not fit in.”

Accommodations and Changes

Questions concerning administrative changes made because of the hurricanes yielded little data. Dress codes were relaxed somewhat, but the timely arrival of uniforms took care of that issue. Registration requirements were relaxed in light of the lack of records or documentation and requirements of McKinney-Vento. What was mentioned was what had not changed that year, the expected tightening of grading standards for the LEAP tests that year. The state decided to let the districts choose whether or not to toughen grading standards. The district kept the standards where they were the year before. As Ms. Torres also stated, there was a plan, they stuck to the plan and tried to keep the system intact. Only one member of the faculty noted specifically that he was tempted to alter his usual classroom routine because he recognized that some students’ state of mind was altered by circumstances. Classroom standards and expectations generally were not lowered and any exceptions to the usual routine were temporary.

The research question of whether any changes were institutionalized at the school did not yield any answers, but most of the interviewees did share personal lessons learned. Ms. Thatcher, the principal, noted that sometimes a person has to make a decision because it is the right thing to do, whether or not it was popular. Her comment sprang from an incident after Hurricane Rita passed leaving a serious mold problem that was not detected until the students began arriving at
the school. The students had to be sent home again until the school was cleaned. Criticism, rightly or wrongly blaming the principal for exposing the children to the mold, left Ms. Thatcher shaken, but with the lesson not to take criticism personally, especially after dealing with frustrated or angry parents struggling to find a safe place for their children. School Counselor Torres noted that she learned never to take things for granted and that the lesson she learned was to use the system in place, and strive to keep the system intact. Assistant Principal Teel was grateful and appreciative of what she had. Faculty members commented that the school needed more counselors or therapists to handle the emotional needs of the children, that sometimes flexibility in teaching methods was a good thing, and that teachers could adapt to just about anything.
CHAPTER 6
DISCUSSION

District Case Summary

This study of the administrative effects of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita started with the interviewing of principals, counselors, faculty, and selected central office personnel in November of 2007, two full years after the events occurred. Few differences could be identified in the experiences of the study schools and from the interviews of the central office personnel. The experience was remarkably similar across all of the interviews and most differences could be traced to blurring memories of events two years earlier or to differences in perspective.

Planning

Comparing schools across the district in relation to the research questions yielded a fair degree of consistency. Driven by the requirements of the Stewart B. McKinney-Vento Act (1987), the district had a legal obligation to take in all displaced students, enroll them into a school, and provide the students with transportation, and free lunch and breakfast. In addition to the legal requirements, most of the interviewees from the superintendent down the chain of command to principals, counselors and faculty members also mentioned the ethical view that doing so was the right thing. Although there was some concern that the school system could not handle the influx of thousands of students, the system did receive over 11,000 applications, enrolled and placed over 6,800 students into schools, and ultimately provided some degree of education to about 5,000 “warm bodies” who actually attended schools in the district on any given day. Based on school populations that year across the state, in two weeks the district added a student population that was larger than forty of the 68 school districts in the state. The board vice president stated in a school board meeting in October that the average district size in the nation was under 3,000 students, in which case, the district opened two school districts in two
weeks. Policy was devised at the central office because that was where the information could be found and the expertise resided to make the kinds of decisions that had to be made. Initially, the earliest decisions were driven by McKinney – Vento requirements while at the same time, decisions regarding the placement of the new students meant that new supplies had to be located, new vendors had to be found to replace defunct vendors from New Orleans, new faculty and staff had to be hired to handle the increase in student population, new drivers and buses were needed, and changes to the enrollment caps placed by the district court had to be approved by the district judge.

Placement

Placement of the students was problematic because of the Stewart B. McKinney-Vento Act (1987) that requires local educational authorities (LEAs) to provide transportation for students to a school that non-homeless students in the same attendance zone would attend. However, the shifting nature of the population in the Post-Katrina and Post-Rita weeks and months challenged the abilities of the transportation department. According to the law, if the student’s guardians move, the child must remain in the original school that he or she entered. In the event of a dispute, the student must be placed in the school which the student’s guardians had requested until the resolution of the dispute. As families moved from shelter to shelter or trailer park, they moved from attendance zone to attendance zone, but the children had to remain in the school that they first entered. This created difficulties with transportation efforts already stretched beyond their capacity. The district made every effort to accommodate the requests of the parents and guardians and as the population shifted the district began to allow transfers reflecting the new addresses, easing some of the burden on the transportation services.
School attendance zones were also routinely violated that year because as schools filled beyond capacity students had to be transported to the next available school. That meant, in some cases, that school buses passed several schools before dropping off the students. All of the interviewees in the schools noted the crowded nature of their campuses and the struggle to find room for the classes and students. This was also a concern of the school counselors who were charged with locating spaces for the iLEAP and LEAP testing in March of 2006. The crowding was somewhat lessened by the arrival of FEMA portable classrooms and trailers, but at that point the district had already absorbed over 6,500 new students and had already begun to lose some. Average class sizes increased that year from pre-hurricane levels but remained less than the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) authorized increases in class size for that year.

A third concern for placement of students was the registration process itself that complicated the efforts of the district to assign students to schools. Some enrollment forms were incomplete when submitted, requiring repeated attempts to contact the families for missing information. Some families registered their children then left the shelter, city, or the state for shelters elsewhere and did not notify the district. Others tired of waiting and registered their children again at a different location. It took time to sort through and identify students who would not be attending (“No Shows”) so those seats could be reassigned to another child.

A fourth issue of placement derives from the apparent reluctance of some families to let go of their children. Scarred by the trauma of separation that some families faced or witnessed in other families around them, some parents did not want to let their children out of their sight. Central office personnel spent much time trying to reassure parents of the safety of the schools; the superintendent spent hours at shelters trying to reassure parents. Eventually the superintendent decided to let parents accompany their children to the schools to see for
themselves how their children were being cared for. This reassured some, but in a few cases
created other problems – parents wanted to accompany their child to all the classes. On the other
side of the issue were the parents who did not let their children attend school at all, or who failed
to ensure that their children actually attended the school. Several interviewees related stories of
students who had dropped out of school before the hurricane and saw no need to attend school
after. Several interviewees at the central office, particularly the director of child welfare and
attendance, were also sensitive to the charge that not all displaced children were enrolled. Both
the superintendent and the CAO noted that the buses went to the shelters and trailer parks, but
not all children got on the buses. The superintendent commented that in trailer parks no children
were seen playing until after the buses unloaded, but that “as soon as the buses unloaded you
would see more kids playing that you had seen…getting off the bus.” Every effort was made to
contact and register all the children for school. “Many students did not get registered,” the
superintendent concluded, but “it was by the parents’ choice and not because we were turning
any students away.”

Support

Many examples of the support that displaced families and students received were found
in the interviews and in numerous emails. Two instances of support that surfaced incidentally
from interviews with counselors revolved around concerns about Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
(PTSD). One was the effort early in the fall to develop protocols to identify PTSD among the
students in the schools. Counselors across the district were brought together to develop
instruments that were then sent to all of the schools. Once the schools received the “kits” the
school counselors began using the kits at various points during the year to identify early signs of
PTSD among the students. Later, teachers and staff members were warned that they were also
likely to fall prey to stress and needed to be vigilant of the signs that accompany PTSD.
Support also came in the form of various grants for equipment and tutors for the schools. Several participants mentioned the grants that awarded schools with calculators; others mentioned smart boards and Elmo cameras. FEMA trailers and portable classrooms arrived or were constructed later in the fall and early spring to alleviate the crowded conditions at 30 schools. The largest and most surprising source of support was the generosity of hundreds or thousands of individuals, organizations, and schools both within the city and from other states and countries. Donations flooded into the district within a week of the hurricanes and continued for more than a month after. The speed and volume of assistance was stunning to principals, teachers, and district staff members who had to find ways to respond. Materials arrived in the district from as far away as the Bermuda, London, and Taiwan.

leadership

Although this particular research question was intended to address the leadership qualities of the principals in the study schools, it is appropriate to mention the leadership qualities observed in the key participants in the central office as well, particularly the leadership of the superintendent. The superintendent of the district did not arrive at that job through the usual route of academic practice: usually characterized by service as a principal and/or academic supervisor. This superintendent was elevated from the position of chief financial officer. That event necessitated the creation of the chief academic officer (CAO) position in the central office to provide the academic experience that the superintendent lacked. It was the experience of the financial side of the district that provided the superintendent the advantage that helped the district weather the crisis and deal with the exacting requirements of state and federal assistance, particularly FEMA. In addition, the superintendent exerted a firm, steadying influence in the hectic weeks after the hurricane. Many of the participants in this study made a point to praise the superintendent’s leadership. Several comments stand out as indicative of a strong administrator
firmly rooted in an ethic of care similar to that of Noddings (1992). The first: “Because everybody said ‘we can’t take any more kids, we can’t, we can’t.’ ‘Yes you can; we will; you have no choice’. And so every barrier that was almost a barrier, we had to figure how we would get over, around, or through it.” The question of why the district did things the way it did prompted the response: “First of all, it’s the law, but most importantly it’s the right thing to do.” The superintendent’s response called to mind echoes of Murphy (2002), who urged a return to older notions of education as being value-laden. Black (2007) reminded us of the actions taken by effective superintendents to improve student achievement, three of which were securing school board cooperation, monitoring progress, and securing resources, all of which were found in the actions of the superintendent.

The superintendent also insisted on process and procedure first, action second. The organization of the ELT and DLT proceeded from the premise that everyone must know what their job is and to whom they reported. Rather than create a new layer of bureaucracy, the superintendent appointed individuals to assume responsibility for receiving, coordinating, and responding to all offers of help coming into the district office.

Another important point was the superintendent’s insistence that all children would have a uniform – if not the first day, at least by the second day at school. Children would not be seen as displaced children in the schools, they would be seen as “our children.”

This concern was echoed by every participant interviewed, particularly the principals of the study schools. The principals of PS-802, PS-814, and PS-813 all expressed in their stories that the students entering their schools were “our kids” regardless of how they came to the school. Each was determined to maintain control of their schools, preserve an orderly learning environment, and protect their faculties from the chaos outside so the teachers could focus on
teaching. The manner in which each principal accomplished that was unique to the personality of the principals and each had a comfortable fit with their school.

PS-802 was a small but crowded school that year. The staff was involved in planning and problem-solving with the principal, had her confidence, and was buffered from the worst of the intrusions into the school. Her leadership was transformative in nature, both within her staff and in her efforts to include the families in her community in the social activities of the school, but the principal had taken on too much herself, and could not take more opportunities to involve the community around the school in helping sort through the donations arriving from other states and schools out of the country. She was concerned that dissention would result from seeing so much going to displaced families when the other families in the district were also impoverished. Transformative characteristics were visible in the school, but not to as great a degree as could have been possible.

PS-814 was a larger school, got a larger percentage of displaced students early in the fall of 2005, and found ways to include displaced students in their culture. The school was tightly organized into grade level committees and cross curricular committees that cooperatively planned using diagnostic and formative test results. The principal took advantage of every opportunity to involve the community in the activities of the school, utilizing the Parent-Teacher Organization in helping sign up displaced families and later during the subsequent registration process. The principal also took advantage of every opportunity to acquire the materials, calculators, and electronic equipment that could make a difference in instruction at the school. They applied for grants for tutoring for the students, regular tutors were hired using district and state, and grant funds and the school pushed hard to get the students ready for the testing in March. This school improved their test scores by over nine points, though the scores that year were calculated without the displaced students’ scores included. However, the following year,
when all students were counted in the calculations, and many of the displaced students were still in attendance, test scores dropped only 0.2 points.

The largest school examined was PS-813, a middle school that was considerably above their consent decree caps at the start of that year. Within weeks of Katrina the school was swamped by an additional hundred thirty displaced students. Discipline issues spiked with the crowded conditions early in the year and several times later during the late fall and spring. The principal worked hard to be proactive as plans were being formulated at the central office to send displaced students to the school and she and her staff were focused on maintenance of order as the students continued to arrive. Faculty were warned of anticipated problems and supported in their teaching, but there were no indications of collaborative efforts either between the administration and faculty or within the faculty.

In general, there appears to have been an interesting mix of techniques in play in the district, at the central office level and at the various study schools. As described earlier, transformative leadership practices usually involve characteristics like collaborative planning, concern for professional development, and providing clear vision and achievable goals as described in many research journals, particularly in the work of Leithwood, Begley, and Cousins (1990) and Hallinger and Heck (1996). These characteristics were clearly in evidence in the schools studied and at the central office. Where each fell on the continuum of transformative-transactional practice was largely dependent upon the character of the principal or central office participant and upon the contingency prevalent at that site. In general I found the principals much more transformative than not, and central office personnel somewhat less transformative than the principals. Temper that assessment with the knowledge that I did not spend a great amount of time in their offices or observing their day to day activities. What I did glean from interviews though suggests a tremendous concern for the care of the children and empathy for the staff and
school employees who bore the heaviest burden of direct contact with thousands of displaced families and children. Care for procedures and policies do not automatically make a principal or supervisor transactional; their attitude and actions proclaim their transformative nature. The complex nature of the interaction between principals and their faculties and staffs suggest that the leadership of the principals is contingent upon several factors, not the least of which is the situation, but also their understanding of whether their faculty and staff have mastered the necessary knowledge to be more participative or whether the principal needed to be more directive (Somech and Wenderow, 2006). The elementary schools also evidenced a positive climate of high expectations for their students and an atmosphere of collaborative, distributed leadership like that reported by Anderson (1982). Somech and Wenderow also noted that teacher expectations of their relationship with and the leadership style of the principal played a role in their performance. “Principals did not involve teachers in every decision”, particularly in the managerial domain in the school; instead, teachers may be expected to participate in the technical domain (2006, p. 764 – 765).

Problems

Problems included the obvious issues of space, materials, and personnel, but also include locating new suppliers, issues with the media, and the overwhelming flood of donations that caught the district completely by surprise. Lesser issues in the district were discipline issues, anger and other emotional issues both among the students, their parents, and the staff members, and also the possibility of resentment among local students and parents.

In addressing the expected problems of finding space and materials the district leaders and schools were forced to make an early assessment of what spaces and materials they had and what would be needed. The issue was recognized at the district level as early as the Wednesday after the hurricane and staff members began to work on the problems immediately. Warehouse
inventories were checked, principals were asked to evaluate what they had and what they could supply to other schools and all of that had to be done within a week of the hurricane’s passage. Shortages were expected and suppliers were contacted within days, but the surprising flood of donations and money alleviated some of the pressure to purchase new equipment.

Locating staff to help was also made easier by the flood of teachers and administrators from the stricken region who could not return home. Within days of the hurricane, the district began to get applications from teachers looking for work. Ultimately the district hired 314 new employees of which 269 were employed as teachers. Of that number, 286 were interviewed and hired just to be able to accommodate the arrival of the displaced students on September 12, 2005. Two schools were completely staffed, both teachers and administrators, by displaced personnel from the hurricane ravaged areas of Louisiana.

One serious and persistent problem that year was in staffing the transportation fleet. The superintendent had anticipated that many of the displaced employees of the New Orleans area would be bus drivers looking for work, but in fact no drivers from the region could be found. The district had to make do with the drivers they had, had to modify temporarily some of the normal training procedures for the new drivers – holding training sessions nightly to get drivers ready to start transporting children – and had to make use of buses that ordinarily would not have been used. Bus routes grew in mileage and time; new routes had to be created; students were crowded or arrived at their schools late. In addition to the new and longer routes, the district created a third tier of routes, delaying the start of classes at some schools by an hour so some of the buses could unload their charges and start their new routes. The situation prompted the superintendent and human resources director to make an appeal for drivers and buses on national and local news programs. This problem meant that until things stabilized some parents were asked to try to get their children to school on their own until buses could be found. Later, as families began to move
back towards New Orleans and the other devastated areas, or shifted to new housing accommodations, bus routes had to be re-evaluated and some routes were consolidated while other routes were added to alleviate overcrowding.

Discipline was also an issue, but not for the reason that most parents or members of the media were ready to cite. There was speculation among faculty and many administrators that children from New Orleans would come into the district and be a disruptive influence in the schools. Media reports frequently emphasized that the “225s” versus the “504s” angle in reporting any breaches of discipline that occurred. In the schools examined in this study, particularly the middle school, there was a noticeable increase in breaches of discipline, but when viewed specifically in terms of expulsions, the problem did not involve large numbers of displaced students. In the three study schools a total of 110 expulsion hearings resulted in 66 expulsions, the remainder had modified results or were not upheld. Of that number only six students were Katrina-displaced, one in an elementary school and five in the middle school (only 5.45% of the total hearings, and only 0.27% of the population of those schools). The great majority of incidents were local students dealing with local issues. Two of the Katrina-displaced students had their expulsion recommendations modified and remained in the school the rest of the year. There was very little bad news to report, even though, as many interviewees in the school system commented, the media were expecting problems. What problems existed in large measure were local turf issues, rivalries between neighborhoods, and traditional middle school issues. Teachers, counselors, principals as well as the central office personnel routinely noted that many incidents in the schools were more the result of media hype than the cause. Problems did not start on the campus – particularly the middle school campus until after a media report of a disturbance somewhere else. Sanderson (2003) noted the hostile attitude among some mobile students, but in the interviews and examinations of the expulsion records, no evidence of
hostility was found until a year later, and that occurred at the high school level. Expulsion records substantiate the lack of expulsion level issues between displaced students and local middle and elementary school students.

Emotional issues were foreseen by central office personnel early in the planning phase. Several in-services were held to bring supervisors and principals an awareness of what kinds of behaviors could be expected. Post Traumatic Stress Disorder was anticipated and staff members were told of what behaviors could be expected weeks and months later. Students exhibiting high levels of stress were referred to counselors or outside agencies at no charge. Staff members were also warned to “take care of the caregivers” – meaning that they were to be aware of the effects on themselves of the high levels of stress dealing with traumatized children, crowded school conditions, or the higher levels of stress in the city in general. Staff and teachers were not above the fray – many of them were hosting evacuee families and friends, some mentioning living in a house with many friends and relatives. Coffee shop sessions became occasions to de-stress, re-group, and go on. Such events were to some degree predictable. What took many by surprise was the unexpected manifestations of the stress: The student who burst into tears for no apparent reason and later confided that she was remembering her deceased grandfather, the child whose poems recalled the fear of dying on the roof of her flooded home and who watched as an alligator took her pet dog as she clambered aboard a rescue boat, or children who exhibited cases of “fall on the floor crying.” They lacked “emotional resiliency” and some of those behavior problems persisted two years later in those displaced children still at the schools in 2007. Some students seemed to be dour and unresponsive to the offered support of the schools; they simply wanted to go home.

Another facet of the problem was the concern that there would be a reaction against the displaced students by the local population, either in direct confrontations or resentment for all the
materials that displaced families were receiving through donations. Some principals assigned the problem of keeping track of donations to staff members, others, out of concern for their already overwhelmed faculty, tried to bear the load themselves. Neither solution proved entirely satisfactory. The volume of materials, requests to render aid, and cash donations quickly overwhelmed the district and many schools. Principals were told to acknowledge every donation. They and central office personnel spent hours addressing thank you notes and responding to emails.

Through the entire year, however, was the constant, unrelenting problem of the mobility of the students. The causes were complicated, but the results were predictable. Kerbow (1996) noted that constant moving can cause the child to lose as much as a year of instruction within six years. Black (2006) noted that constant mobility was linked to truancy and increased likelihood of dropping out of school. Additionally, in research on community effects and intergenerational closure reported by Hunt, Hirose-Hatae, and Doering (2000), Coleman (1985, 1987), and Carbonaro (1998), a close association between the school and its surrounding community are associated with improved school climates. Close associations with community were reported in PS-814 and to a lesser degree in PS-802, and it could be coincidental that PS-814 had a large gain in School Performance Scores that year while PS-802 declined significantly, or that PS-813, which had no obvious evidence of close involvement with its external community, suffered the greatest declines in SPS.

Accommodations and Changes

As noted earlier, Stewart B. McKinney-Vento Act (1987) largely set the limits of what the district could and could not do. Immediate changes to class sizes, school attendance caps, the timing of bus routes, the availability of text books and other materials, how soon students should be fed breakfast, who could attend what school – all of these were stressed immediately after the
displaced students began to arrive at their assigned schools. Stewart B. McKinney-Vento Act (1987) mandated that homeless students must be registered immediately regardless of any lacking documentation and must be fed, regardless of their income level. The district and study schools struggled to meet the needs of the students in their charge. Students were registered on the basis of whatever information their parents or guardians could supply. Immunizations had to be scheduled later that fall to make sure all students were up to date on their shots. Whether it was the increased length of the route or the increased traffic in the city, bus routes increased some 30% in terms of time. Some drivers demanded overtime pay. The district not only had to quickly find new suppliers for food services, but had to feed nearly 6,500 more students than they had two weeks earlier. Students could not always be fed within fifteen minutes of their arrival on campus, but they were fed. Not every student had a text book when they stepped onto campus, classes shared sets of books until more could be located and delivered.

No school visited in the study had a trained counselor dedicated to working with traumatized children; some schools had to make do with visits two or three times a week from outside agencies. Not every federal or state regulation was completely met in the first chaotic weeks after Katrina, but as several counselors and administrators stated, the children had their needs met. Class times were shifted to accommodate the third tier of bus routes, class sizes grew, teachers had to struggle to determine where the new students stood academically; then struggled to keep track of students who came and went throughout the year in their classrooms. Schools handed out policy manuals and handbooks and had to reorder new supplies as they exhausted a year’s worth of supplies in a matter of weeks. Some teachers felt they had to relax some of their standards to accommodate the fragile state of their students, others refused to give in to demanding parents. Dress codes were not officially relaxed, but on the rare occasion student dress code infractions were overlooked.
What was remarkable under the circumstances was what had not changed. For the most part the district managed to maintain its dress code, discipline, and academic standards throughout the year. Some parents demanded relaxation of standards, but teachers and administrators refused to budge on that matter. The firm stance led to tense moments and occasional threats of physical violence, but the counselors and teachers who bore the brunt of the bluster and threats were determined not to be bullied.

There were no permanent changes of importance to report. Throughout the project, comments about the plan, the program, all pointed to the confidence in the procedures established in the central office and followed by the schools. There were no major changes in school board policy – other than the brief emergency powers granted to the superintendent. There were no changes in the basic school district policy other than those required by Stewart B. McKinney-Vento Act (1987) or born of necessity because of circumstances in play at the time. Any deviations from policy reverted back to normal as things settled into a routine more akin to a normal school year. What few changes were noted were all on the school level changes, but no mention was made of how those changes would be passed along to other administrators at other schools in the district. In that respect there was no organizational learning occurring.

Different Views

Viewed from a slightly different perspective, the remarkable events of the 2005 – 06 school year had some curious differences. Based on the four main research questions, the summaries revealed not so much a difference in recollections or deceptions, but rather a difference in emphasis, clearly based on each participant’s area of responsibility and interest that fit together as pieces of a puzzle. As the director of child welfare and attendance noted, it’s “like the story of the people, the blind people feeling the elephant; everybody got a different taste of what an elephant is.” By reexamining comments in terms of who was interviewed and which
schools were studied, the responses settled into four distinct patterns: What was revealed only in elementary schools, what was revealed only in middle schools, what was revealed in central office interviews, and what themes were shared. The following comments should also be taken with the caveat that the comments that surfaced in the interviews may have been felt by all personnel interviewed, but were only voiced in interviews at elementary, central office or middle schools. Figure 6.1 represents the three broader units of the study and the various themes that emerged from each unit.

Figure 6.1 Emergent themes.

The units of analysis in this case study were the central office and each of three schools. However, many themes that emerged from the analysis grouped in three general broader units of analysis represented as three overlapping circles: elementary schools, middle schools, and the
central office. Some themes were specific to one unit – the elementary schools, the middle school, or the central office, but most themes were common to two or all three of the units. The Venn diagram in Figure 6.1 represents the overlapping themes visually. A brief description of the themes follows.

Elementary Schools

Two related issues that surfaced only in elementary school interviews were the almost year-long struggle to establish classroom routines and the collaborative nature of the planning among the faculty at the school. The level of collaboration within the schools, and within the grade level teams was as surprising to the new teachers as the level of emotional and classroom support from principal and the faculty. Several displaced teachers interviewed at the elementary schools complimented the way teachers worked together to plan and who provided a support system for new teachers. This was especially noted at PS-802 Elementary. At PS-802 the collaboration applied to interactions with the principal as teams of teachers typically were consulted for suggestions before major decisions were made.

Teaching the displaced children the structure – the routines – associated with attending school proved to be an elusive goal, particularly at PS-802. For many of the displaced students and their families, both faculty and administrators noted, structure was not something to which many had been accustomed in their former schools. Because of the continuous mobility elementary teachers spent an inordinate amount of time trying to re-establish basic classroom routines and procedures, a task that was essential to the maintenance of order, but which did not seem to settle in – especially at PS-802 – as late as May of 2006.

Middle Schools

One middle school theme in the study that did not surface in the elementary school interviews was a strong sense of striving to maintain control and discipline. The mobility of the
students constantly challenged the “system of things,” kept things stirred up, and may have contributed to the increased discipline issues that occurred at PS-813. As noted before, expulsion referrals spiked that year, almost than doubling the number of the previous year.

Central Office

The one main theme that emerges only from the interviews and the emails examined from the central office is the theme of accountability. Particularly in respect to the actions and statements of the superintendent, the plan had to be carefully thought through before being implemented. Order, a clear chain of command – the plan had to be in place before anything could be accomplished. Individuals were assigned specific duties and the hierarchy was clearly spelled out to relieve the superintendent of the need for constant oversight and allow her the freedom to attend to the myriad other meetings and communications with the OEP, the mayor’s office, and State Department of Education that conditions necessitated.

Commonalities

Considerable overlap of themes was found in the study of middle and elementary schools and with the central office. Common themes shared across the schools are discussed first, themes shared between the different schools and the central office are discussed next, and finally the commonalities found across the entire case.

Elementary and middle school faculty participants in the study noted the efforts displayed by the faculties and administrators in supporting their new hires, and also providing the support and peer bonding that the displaced students needed. Displaced faculty members were employed at each of the study schools and in each school there was at least one specific mention of the support and guidance provided to the new faculty members by the principal and within the faculties of the schools. The support was not just academic in nature, but was also emotional and empathetic. Students also received support from the schools and students in a variety of ways.
New students and their families were greeted by faculty and staff members when they registered; students were escorted their first day at the school by student “welcomers,” and were then paired with peer “buddies” who sat with and helped them learn the procedures of the classes, or who helped tutor the new students who were far behind their classmates.

Elementary schools were concerned with maintaining the dignity of the children and their families. This concern was also shared by several central office participants and clearly revealed in the insistence of both the superintendent and principals on keeping the children from appearing different when they arrived at their new schools. School “T’s” were handed out and donned immediately. School uniforms had to be provided to the children so that they could be properly attired on their first day to school – by the second day at the latest. Teachers made sure that children had materials, loaning the children spare boxes of crayons and other materials, for example, so the children would not be seen without. The concern for the dignity of the families was evident from the earliest communications with the families at the shelters, and persisted even in the face of increasingly hostile interactions later in the year.

The middle school shared with the central office an insistence on process and procedure. While the procedures had to be taught to the very young in elementary schools, middle schools were concerned with the maintenance of order and keeping to the system when interacting with older students and especially in the face of increasing discipline issues that plagued the schools that year and the next. When Ms. Teel mentioned that she and the school “just tried to keep the system of things intact,” she was speaking on more than one level. The processes and procedures that enabled the schools to absorb hundreds of new students in a matter of weeks challenged the system, but the policies and procedures in place were a source of stability, a familiarity in routines and duties, that seemed to provide a reassurance that everything was going to be all right in the end. In addition, when dealing with pre-teens and some students who were older than their
classmates, the system and structure worked to establish a consistency of routine that may have been lacking in the students’ personal lives.

Finally, three themes surfaced in every school and at the central office as the interviews progressed, and were reinforced in several emails sent to all principals, ELT, and DLT members. It was remarkable that from the faculty members struggling with large classes all the way up the chain of command to the superintendent, every participant in this study understood the need to establish as close to normal a routine as possible. The superintendent noted that the city needed to return to normal. Principals and counselors noted that parents needed “normalcy” for themselves and especially for their children, and that “normalcy” meant having children within in the safe, familiar boundaries of a school. Inclusion was a second theme that surfaced in almost every interview. In addition to the comforting feel of familiar halls, classrooms, and peers, every school responded to the superintendent’s insistence, reinforced by the CAO and assistant superintendents, that once the displaced students arrived at their assigned schools, they were “our students.” When they were in the halls, classrooms, and playgrounds, they were “[insert mascot]” just like anyone else. When there were discipline issues, it was not a case of “us” versus “them,” it was “our” problem. Finally, successful communications pervaded the entire case. In the central office communications described the meetings, email memos, and frequent contact with ELT, DLT, and principals keeping everyone informed of what was happening, what had been decided, and what was still to be considered. At the school level, communications meant the formal and informal contacts between the principals, their staffs, and their faculties; the constant efforts to “rally the troops” or praise them for their efforts especially in the crucial first months. In more general terms, communications between the district and the media in the early weeks and the utilization of the PACE telephone system served to keep families and the public informed.
A Model of Crisis Planning

Among the comments made in preparation of this proposal and when approaching principals for permission to conduct the study in their schools was the common implied question “How will we benefit from this project?” It is not an unreasonable question. Organizational research suggests that organizations “learn” from the experiences that challenge them (Argyris and Schon, 1996). How this “learning” is translated into improved practice and policy largely determines the success of those organizations to grow and adapt. One concrete way that an organization can exhibit its “learning” is to be found in a well conceived and up-to-date crisis plan. The district in this study had a crisis plan that was designed around the threats common to urban school districts including such threats as weather events like storms or tornadoes, events like students with weapons, or drive-by shootings, and even external issues that would require a shelter-in-place strategy such as crime near the school or strangers on campus. No mention is made of any event on the scale of the calamity that was the hurricanes of 2005; of how a district could absorb hundreds or thousands of new students displaced by such an event; or how the district or school is supposed to identify and respond to the need for materials, desks, faculty and staff members, and medical or psychological support for traumatized children or their families.

Planning for a crisis is an exercise in hope in that the planning that takes place is always based on past experience and the hope that the next crisis will be similar. Unfortunately, no two crises are the same. At best we can analyze what happened, what worked, and what went wrong then attempt to take that into account when planning for the next event. What follows is a brief list of current practices in place and recommendations suggested by the participants of the study. The list will be followed by more detailed explanations of the salient points.

- Maintain a budget surplus of at least 10%
- Maintain current contact information on all department heads and employees
• Conduct a pre-event planning meeting in all departments to clarify plans and update contact information

• Create a secure, powered backup/mirror site for IT department capable of operating at a minimal level all the critical operations of the district

• Backup all data to two off-site data storage providers out of state.

• Hold a post-event meeting to begin planning responses to the crisis

• Initiate an immediate post-event evaluation of facilities and personnel

• Maintain contact with multiple vendors in event of loss of service providers

• Negotiate pre-approval payment agreements in event a new provider is needed suddenly

• Provide multiple forms of communications for personnel including electronic, land line, cellular, and text messaging

• Grant emergency powers to superintendent when warranted by circumstances

• Daily meetings of crisis leadership teams and daily reports to all stakeholders

• Establish an state level on-line database on all children and employees

• Plan a site for centralized registration of students with on-line resources

• Establish closer coordination between HR and state and federal databases to facilitate background screening of new hires

• Prepare a flexible training schedule to certify new hires quickly

• Establish a program of mentors at the school level to assist in integrating and supporting new faculty and staff into the culture of the school

• Daily “Warm Body Counts” to document actual student enrollment and track mobile students
Central office personnel ready to assist with task of acknowledging and responding to offers of assistance or donations

Deliberate efforts to provide visual and hardcopy documentation of events in the district to assist in public relations efforts in support of the district and to facilitate after-event evaluation of district effectiveness in responding to the crisis

Crisis communications plans exist for many other organizations and go beyond the above items particularly in the area of establishing clear lines of communications with media and stakeholders, pre-plan some basic responses, and establish a clear set of guidelines in order to respond effectively in the middle of events that are ordinarily chaotic. An example of such a crisis plan is available at the Louisiana State University website. One notable feature of the plan is the comment that echoes the attitudes found in this district and each of the study schools: do the right thing (Louisiana State University, 2007).

The following pages describe each of the points mentioned above in more detail. Some of the comments were specifically suggested as recommendations to improve the way the district responded to the hurricanes of 2005.

Financial planners, among them popular radio talk-show host and author Dave Ramsey, urge their clients to set aside an emergency fund and also to have in savings an amount equal to three to six months of expenses for emergencies (2003). It is unrealistic to expect a public school district the size of this district to maintain an emergency fund balance equal to a quarter of the annual budget of over $300 million. However, within reason, a healthy budget surplus amounting to about 10% would go a long way to helping absorb unexpected expenses like those that hit the district in September of 2005. This sort of planning involves strict adherence to a budget and tight control of spending, both characteristics of the district that year.
It is always a good policy to have current contact information on all district employees as of the start of the school year, especially for central office personnel involved with the executive and district leadership teams and the heads of each of the departments in the district. In any sort of emergency these groups and their staff would need to be in communication with each other immediately to begin planning responses to emergencies. In addition, there were specific individuals that needed secure forms of communication for the immediate responses to the crisis, not the least of which were district employees responsible for maintenance, food service, transportation, human resources, technology, and the chief academic officer, in addition to the superintendent. In the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Katrina communications were unreliable for several days. Power outages disabled many electronic forms of communications including electronic phones and email throughout the city. Cell phones were unreliable because cell towers were damaged or overwhelmed by the high volume of calls, but remarkably, text messaging was fairly reliable. The district must recognize and make use of the unique nature of text messaging as an alternative in its overall communications plan. It is also important that current contact information be available to all department heads, and principals so that an immediate assessment of the availability and safety of all employees be available. It may seem superfluous, but departmental meetings before the arrival of any foreseeable problem would allow the departments to coordinate plans and update contact information. There were no departmental meetings mentioned on the academic side of the central office and it took up to three days to get in contact with all the district leadership team members and many of the principals; on the other hand, auxiliary services, food service, and maintenance departments met the Friday before the storm to update their contact information and make plans. They went into action as the storm swept past, examining power status of the kitchens and arranging for refrigerated trucks to transport perishables from unpowered schools.
A backup system for data and a secure, powered command center must be established in the event of serious disruption to power and communications. Planning and foresight helped the district recover quickly from the loss of power. Several vital areas of the system were still powered and available for use after the passage of the storm, not the least of which was the warehouse and storage facilities for food service and the IT department. The technology director indicated that the district was planning to construct a back-up site that would perform daily backups of all vital systems in the event of a disruption to the main computing center. Although the main computing center had backup systems already in place, a mirror site would be able to keep the district minimally running in the event of a serious problem at the main computing center. In addition, daily backups are sent to two offsite electronic storage facilities out of state, but different departments used different storage sites in 2005, a problem that had been recognized since the storms. Given sufficient electrical capacity, an alternative command center with power, communications, and cooling/heating would help school board personnel keep the district running until repairs could be completed at the central office or any other departments across the city.

After the passage of a storm or other catastrophic event department heads and principals must immediately reestablish communications with the central office. Once the main departments have checked in, principals and department heads need to assess the safety and availability of their own staffs. If communications are available, phone trees should be utilized to assess the conditions and well-being of all school board and school employees. Alert messages must be sent out via email, text messaging, and the PACE messaging system requiring all personnel to check in to their immediate supervisors.

Facilities must be inspected for loss of power and damage before secondary issues like mold or water intrusion can complicate repairs. While the physical plant is being assessed,
inventories must be checked in the event that materials need to be replaced. A comprehensive
inventory of the district took almost three days to complete after the passage of Hurricane
Katrina. Food stores had to be secured from school sites that had lost power. Fortunately the
warehouse for storing perishables was next to an electrical substation that did not lose power
during Katrina. That circumstance may have been more serendipitous than planned. Districts
must assess facilities or sites with power requirements in mind in addition to security or easy
access – or have sufficient power backup or generation systems in place.

Districts need to have multiple vendors available in the event that one vendor is closed by
catastrophic events. The district found itself needing food not only for its 48,000 local students,
but also for potentially an additional 6,800 students, but their distributors were flooded in the
New Orleans area. Because of its size, there are few vendors who can supply the entire needs of
a large district. New vendors had to be able to supply food for an entire district of over 50,000
students. Backup lists of vendors capable of supplying the needs of the district must be
maintained with any requirements like pre-approval for purchasing taken care of in advance. If
practical, the request for proposal should include pre-approval agreements from any bidders so
that, in the event that one supplier becomes unable to fulfill their obligations, the next available
bidder can step in and begin supplying materials quickly.

District leadership must meet immediately after the passage of the crisis at a secure site.
The academic side of the district failed to meet the day after the hurricane, partially due to the
extensive damage to electrical service and dangerous driving conditions, but they lost a day of
assessing, planning, and organizing. At least two sites must be designated for the first planning
meetings – a primary site and a secure backup site.

Clear lines of communication and authority must be established early in the crisis as the
nature of the problem becomes apparent. Everyone must know who is tasked and to whom to
report or from whom to get needed information. One strength of the Katrina experience frequently mentioned was the clear channels of communication and delegation of authority that prevented paralysis or overload on key personnel. The superintendent was constantly in meetings with city, state, and federal emergency agencies and could not be everywhere at once. But, having established clear lines of delegated authority, when issues surfaced team members knew to whom they needed direct questions or report findings. The CAO also commented that, given the nature of the problem, there are resources – individuals – with specialized knowledge that need to be available to share their expertise with the central office. After Katrina, the key individual was the homeless liaison who quickly focused the district’s efforts on meeting the exacting demands of McKinney – Vento (Stewart B. McKinney-Vento Act, 1987).

Delegation of authority may, if the crisis is severe, include a grant of extraordinary power to the superintendent by the school board. In the experience of Katrina the superintendent was granted emergency power to get past the worst of the crisis. As mentioned earlier, this allowed the school district to devote all of their time to solving problems rather than generating reports and formulating requests for board approval. It was fortunate that the board acted as it did because getting school board approval before attempting to replace the defunct vendors supplying food to the students may have meant serious shortages of supplies while 6,800 plus additional students needed to be fed.

Depending on the nature of the crisis, leadership team meetings must be held daily to update information and coordinate responses. Communications with team members, staff at the central office, principals, and the press is crucial. The nightly “Midnight Missives” provided a vital link between the leadership teams and the rest of the district. Updated data were transmitted by the technology director from the first week of the crisis and continued until matters settled into a routine. The “Midnight Missives” continued for nearly three weeks. These messages also
provided lists of registered students and their school assignments and were sent to each school in the district. As the lists changed, updates kept the principals aware so they could plan the materials, furniture, and textbook needs. Daily updates prepared the lunch personnel for the number of students for whom to prepare meals. The massive numbers of emails overwhelmed the system and required precious time to review, read, or discard.

A centralized system in which all students’ data are maintained and made available online to all appropriate personnel would reduce the numbers of emails and provide an on-demand source of data as needed. This recommendation was made by several individuals, and would contain all academic data, all special needs, and what accommodations had been provided for each child. Using a layered system of passwords, data would be available to teachers, administrators, and counselors depending on their position and need to know. Whereas some administrators spoke of this as a district-level database, the homeless coordinator and the superintendent saw this as a statewide system that would have been more valuable in the Katrina aftermath where the greatest deficits were in complete up-to-date information on children and potential hires from distant schools and districts; information that was not available in September of 2005.

Depending on the nature of the disaster, centralized registration of displaced applicants would have streamlined the process resulting in faster turnaround of the application process. The method used in the Katrina crisis reached thousands of families within days of their arrival, but the chaotic nature of the relocation also meant that some families registered multiple times at different shelters or trailer parks because they did not get prompt replies with school assignment information. As recommended by the director of child welfare and attendance, a “one stop shop” would include a facility large enough to accommodate hundreds of families. Inside, connected by computer networks directly accessing the district (or ultimately, the state) database, employees of
the school system would be able to assist families in inputting or verifying data using a simplified form similar to the homeless forms readily available at the homeless liaison office. Before leaving the table, the family member would be advised which school closest to their address had room for their children and which bus would take their children to school. Nearby tables could serve as stations to assist families with housing, food, clothing or other needs, or simply be there to answer questions or direct families to counseling, public assistance, or any other services appropriate to the circumstances.

Staffing and transportation were seriously challenged by the dislocations of Hurricane Katrina. Human resources had to locate sufficient faculty, staff, and administrators to open or expand schools to accommodate over 6,800 new students in less than two weeks. A database of retired, but willing, former employees should be maintained in the event that part or full-time staff become necessary. Human resources had to locate over three hundred employees, mostly faculty, to staff the schools through the 2005 – 06 school year, but most importantly, most of those employees were needed within two weeks. It was fortuitous that many employees of the school systems devastated by the hurricanes of 2005 were in the area and had applied to work. Many applicants lacked documentation at the time of their application so the district could not perform much needed background checks. A statewide register of certified personnel would have removed some of the uncertainty from the interview and employment process. Improved coordination with local and federal law enforcement agencies is also essential to prevent the employment of individuals with criminal records, and such coordination must be especially close in times of crisis when coordination is typically difficult and criminals may be tempted to use the chaos to their own advantage.

Human resources also expanded training and supervision of new hires in the period because the need for drivers and teachers was so great. Mentoring in the classroom and
appropriate training for employees new to educational settings is necessary and should be expanded in times of crisis. Mentoring of new teachers has been discussed in research as, among other issues, a way to prepare pre-service teachers and to improve the skills of newly employed teachers (Rushton, 2003; Whitehead, 1995; Zimpher & Rieger, 1988), mentoring should already be in place in any school district. Such master teachers or mentors would help ease the transition to entering the new school and school system, and provide a valuable support system to individuals who may be in the throes of their own personal crises.

Assigning students to new schools is not the end of the process for the school or the family. Students and their parents must also complete registration at the schools. Families that do not make timely registrations at the assigned schools stress the system and deny seats to children who fully intend to attend the school. Katrina exposed a serious problem in the system as seats were assigned to children who never arrived, or who arrived weeks or months later. Identifying “No Shows” and getting accurate “Warm Body Counts” was essential for the system to provide materials, food, and other essential services. The problem with identifying “No Shows” is that schools are already fully engaged in the business of teaching with little in the way of spare personnel to try to track down “No Shows.” To alleviate this problem schools need to maintain a list of local supporters, churches, or civic groups that can volunteer time to perform part time work at the school. Businesses and civic groups can be encouraged to “adopt a school” to provide such charitable services. Similar services may have been available to some schools after Hurricane Katrina, but not all schools had access to that type of assistance.

Charity and unexpected offers of assistance caught the district by surprise and is a tribute to the generous and compassionate nature of people across the nation and in Katrina’s instance, the world. Appropriate responses required a central agency to receive, categorize, and disseminate donations. In Katrina this was accomplished through the efforts of the business
operations office of the district, but also by an administrator who was assigned as chief contact person in accepting offers of help and materials. In addition to the larger offers directed to the central office schools were also deluged with materials shipped directly to the school and by individuals who stopped in person to offer donations of money or materials. Prompt acknowledgement of what was received was attempted, both as a matter of courtesy, but also by directive from the superintendent. One creative way to express gratitude occurred at PS-802 Elementary as an open house for the displaced families that was filmed to give the recipients an opportunity to express their gratitude, and when burned to DVD and sent to donors, provided audio-visual feedback to donors. Given sufficient interest, many schools could have made similar efforts. The public information office of the district could coordinate documentation of events both visually with still camera and video, and with maintenance of backup copies of correspondence to accomplish two purposes. One, it would document, for media sources, the accomplishments of the district under trying circumstances which will work to the district’s advantage by stimulating additional sympathy and support. Second, and more importantly, such documentation would provide the grist for a thorough examination of the actions and help identify areas of weakness in the system’s response to crisis.

Implications for Practice

Community

Greenfield, Sergiovani, and Furman – among others – wrote of the moral and ethical purposes of leadership, usually, but not always found in the person of the principal of the school. Evidence of those purposes exists within the study schools I observed and within the words of their interviews. The methods used at the different schools varied, but worked to the advantage of the school because of the personality of the principal and the particular mix of faculty and staff at the school. The principal of PS-814 had long experience in the school and a staff that – as
she expressed it – she would have wanted to teach her own children, working in close 
association, using data from diagnostic testing to direct their lesson planning to teach to the 
needs of the individual child. Murphy (2002) wrote of value laden activities in schools and 
principals who led from within a web of associations – faculty, staff, and community. All three 
elements appeared to be in place in PS-814. The climate of the school was no-nonsense, no frills, 
but very professional approach to teaching.

If the experience of PS-814 is indicative of the actions of the principal and her staff and 
faculty and not some coincidence or random combination of factors, the implications for other 
schools would seem to be fairly clear: Build a tight association with parents and the local 
community in the form of a PTO that helps plan and host numerous activities to involve as many 
parents as can be attracted to the school. Plan grade level meetings for every grade and 
encourage cross-curricular activities to build a tight-knit community of teachers who cannot fall 
back on that all-too-common isolation of the classroom that separates teachers and minimizes 
innovation and lasting change. Gooden (2000) warned that collaboration requires time to develop 
and a comfortable fit between the principal and staff at any given school. That requires stability 
fostered from the district level that does not shift principals after only a few years in any 
particular school, and also requires a stable faculty that is a fit for the school and community.

Staff members also spoke of the insulated societies that schools try to build; reminding 
students that “here” they do not need to fear violence, even if violence is present in their 
environment outside of school. Schools are supposed to be “safe” places. Schools are also 
supposed to reflect the shared values and common activities of their larger community. Urban 
schools suffer from constant demographic changes as families grow older, property values in 
“nice” neighborhoods eventually decline inviting poorer families to “move up” and move in. 
Changes in zoning encompass dissimilar and occasionally mutually hostile neighborhoods whose
children bring their parent’s biases into the school halls and playgrounds. Urban schools cannot always be communities in the sense that Bryk and Driscoll (1988), Raywid (1993), or Royal and Rossi (1997) describe; nor can they always model the kind of inclusive communities that Strike (1999, 2000, 2004) suggests is possible.

What is needed in schools that have students from divided communities is a connection through social services or some other community organization to bridge the perceived differences between neighborhoods and reduce the opportunities for strife or violence.

Mobility

In retrospect, the real lesson learned from this project was the discovery of the extent of the silent crisis of student mobility highlighted by the circumstances surrounding hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Apartment and housing agencies that offer “first month free” inducements to fill empty units with new tenants contribute to student mobility because impoverished families take advantage of the free month’s rent and move frequently, dragging their children from school to school. Katrina briefly ended that practice as refugees from storm-devastated areas seized any accommodations they could find and housing was simply no longer readily available. However, in the years since the hurricanes housing developments have blossomed again in the city each with hundreds of new units. The result is likely to be another wave of “first month free” housing inducements and more student mobility. As long as mobility continues, the weaknesses that we know exist (low test scores, students falling a full year behind within six years) will continue.

The director of IT mentioned efforts in the past to limit the effects of mobility, one of which was an attempt to communicate with developers and management of large housing units to limit the utilization of “first month free” inducements. Staying Put, a measure mentioned in Kerbow, Azcoitia, and Buell (2003) in the Chicago system, did not force students to leave schools when their parents left the attendance zone. The chief problem with an accommodation
of that nature in this district is the expense on transportation systems to bring children across the city. As the system struggled with the recent desegregation case, however, students were picked up by one bus from their neighborhood, brought to a central location in the city, and were switched to different buses going to specific schools. Research by Kerbow (1996) discovered that students who moved frequently tended to move between a few specific schools in similar socio-economic neighborhoods. If that is case, dividing the city into several regions and utilizing a central transfer point in each region may alleviate a significant portion of the mobility in the system resulting in extended contact between students and their teachers, and that should lead to improved learning opportunities for urban poor children.

Curriculum

The comprehensive curriculum, initiated that year was too recent an innovation for its effectiveness to be evaluated properly at the end of the 2005-2006 school year. One principal confided that she believed that it helped. For students within the district the initiative may have supplied some needed stability. Unfortunately, most of the new students who arrived in the system were from different districts and were not at all on the same academic “page” with their local peers. Several years have passed since the implementation of the comprehensive curriculum. The efficacy of that innovation should be formally evaluated.

Organizational Learning

The focus on this research effort was to detect the presence or absence of organizational learning resulting from the lessons of the hurricanes of 2005. Throughout the interviews in November, 2007 and follow-up interviews through the summer of 2008 no obvious examples of any permanent adjustments to policy or procedures surfaced. In that sense, there was little or no organizational learning. Argyris and Schön (1996) distinguish between the practitioner-advocate and the aloof researcher in the field of organizational learning literature. The one is immersed in
action and practical application while the other is aloof and scholarly, dealing with abstract issues like questioning whether organizations can learn. School districts in most respects are in neither camp. Issues that are on-going, everyday matters are handled mainly by rote, following procedures that are rarely changed, and almost never questioned. In this particular instance, no procedural changes resulted from the challenge of Katrina and Rita; school processes continued within the schools in which students followed the prescribed routines with few minor deviations. There is some evidence that within the individual classrooms there was more flexibility in handling the day to day crises that arose. Traumatized children found themselves in learning spaces that were at once familiar and yet alien. Teachers spoke of spending time discussing the Pre-Katrina lives of their displaced students, but most students were reluctant to dwell on those memories and soon the necessities of class work returned teachers and students back to learning their prescribed lessons.

At the school level there may have been minor changes that, because of their efficacy, persisted into the following years’ activities, but they do not appear to have been shared with other schools. There still appears to be the feeling that each school is unique and that innovations in one school would not transfer to other schools. The district may have a mechanism to promulgate successful innovation, but none was mentioned when that point was raised in the interview. There should be a mechanism whereby principals, particularly principals new to the position, can learn what amounts to best practices. It may be naïve to suggest a system of mentorships could go a long way to lessening the problems of first year principals, considering the demands that the position already place on principals.

At the district level there were no innovations or adjustments mentioned; no lessons learned encoded into policy for future years. Any lessons learned were individual revelations, settling in as another layer of personal reflections that may or may not influence future decisions,
but which, at any rate, would fade from organizational consciousness when the individual left the position they held in 2005. None of the interviewees mentioned any after-action debriefings, and only when prompted specifically, did one central office administrator recall the statement, made almost as an aside, that someone should write down what they had just done; but it never happened under the constant press of new problems. The HR director hoped that when she left her current position promotion from within would help some of the lessons learned in 2005 persist because it was her policy to keep everyone in the office aware of everything that was happening. Should someone from outside be hired to replace her, she expressed the hope that the experienced staff members in the office would provide the depth of experience that the new director would lack. In retrospect, however, much would depend on the quality of character of the new director and whether there was a willingness to learn from the staff.

Peter Senge (1990) noted that mental models of how things are done exist in organizations. In this district, the mental models that are shared in the central office are basic, broad images of what a district should be like, but there are subtle differences present that only an insider could fully appreciate. One participant noted that when people leave their egos outside of the meeting room great things could be accomplished. Upon reflection, I suspected that when they left the room, their egos – and agendas – were still outside waiting. There is nothing wrong with agendas and differences of opinion. In an organization the size of an urban school district there will – and should be – a broad diversity of thought and opinion. Such diversity ensures that any problems will be viewed from many sides and solutions can be developed from a broad, thoughtful perspective. The real danger for this, as in any school district, is that the holders of the “history” of the district will depart and take any lessons that they learned with them. Like the blind men trying to understand the “elephant” that was Katrina and Rita, each holder of a part of the history of that year had a unique perspective that, though not always in full agreement with
any of the others in that organization, was at least describing the same “elephant.” When enough of the leadership changes, the vision of this particular “elephant” will fade and vanish. At this writing, the CAO has already departed, as have several assistant superintendents. Others in the organization have been promoted or transferred to different posts; several of the participants in this study have retired or announced their impending retirement – in particular, the superintendent. For all the apparent strengths, the superintendent did not establish a routine of debriefing and preserving lessons learned.

Finally, in conducting this project I did not spend months or years in the school system and could not comment from experience on the nature of the culture that pervaded the district in 2005-2006. The district was in the final stages of ending a desegregation case that had persisted for over 40 years and cost the district thousands of students and their families who moved out of the city to neighboring districts, established and attended many private schools, or whose communities successfully separated from the district to establish small town school systems of their own. At this writing, a third district has successfully separated and reduced the student population by several thousand children. With the decline in population in New Orleans and its environs, this district has become the largest in the state outside of the New Orleans area and is still home to roughly a third of the displaced students from Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Hard work and local support have helped the study schools build and maintain positive school cultures. More hard work is needed to establish stronger connections between the schools and the school neighborhoods and families.

Recommendations for Future Research

There were many gaps in the study that could have been filled given more time and resources. Only three schools of the over ninety in the district were studied. Some schools, particularly schools that received large numbers of displaced students, opted not to participate for
various reasons. I did not push the principals for reasons, but did notice that there was some emotional baggage still present. Follow up interviews including many additional schools are needed to reinforce the above findings. Other districts also experienced large influxes and displacements of students. Their stories should also be sought and any lessons learned sought.

Several other areas of interest could be pursued specifically in the area of counseling. Several participants mentioned the role of the I CARE program in the district. It would be interesting to study the nature of assistance that was provided and whether anything else could have been done to improve the quality of mental health assistance provided to children, their families, and school personnel. One other feature of this study that did not receive much mention was the role of school counselors already on campus as the storms arrived; their roles at the schools appeared to be focused more on admissions and testing; they mentioned nothing about their role in matters of discipline or emotional crises. That aspect needs further examination.

Another interesting angle on the story of the storms of 2005 would be an oral history treatment of the lives of displaced families, particularly those who moved into the district and remained. Since the hurricanes some of the families have since watched their older children graduate from the district. Learning how families coped with difficulties and managed to get their children through school would be useful in developing more effective programs to help urban families who move frequently.
REFERENCES


http://www.solonline.org/organizational_overview/


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Student Mobility and Achievement. (2005, June). *District Administrator, 41*(6), 84.


APPENDIX A

GUIDING QUESTIONS
Interview Questions: Superintendent

Name ________________________________
Gender: _____
Years experience as superintendent: _____
Years experience in the district: _____
Years in Education: _____

Planning Phase:

1. Can you explain what you remember of the days immediately before the hurricane struck and when and how you began to plan for what you thought would happen to the district?

2. Who was included in planning for the arrival of the students? How did you communicate with your staff and the schools? What problems of communication occurred?

3. How many days were school(s) closed following the hurricanes?

Arrival and Integration Phase:

4. What do you recall happened as families began to arrive in the district and needed to be placed in schools? How did that proceed?

5. What problems did you anticipate? What problems appeared that you did not anticipate?

6. What sources of support did you have available to help accommodate the arrival of new students? What unexpected sources of support offered to help?

7. What issues or problems arose that required adjustments in policy or procedures in the district?

8. How effective were any emergency plans or procedures in helping cope with the arrival of displaced families and students? Were any changes needed to the emergency plans?

9. Were any new administrative structures/committees needed?

10. How did the district help new students and their parents fit into the culture of the schools?

11. What issues of discipline arose in the schools and how did the schools handle those issues?

12. Were there any particularly vulnerable groups within the school system that was impacted more by the arrival of so many displaced students? How did the district act to help those groups?
13. What did you think would be the largest problem when testing for the 2006 LEAP tests that year?

Retrospective:

14. After over a year, about what portion of the school population still consists of formerly displaced students?

15. What – if any – accommodations has the district had to make this year compared to 2005 year?

16. Are there still issues of displaced student mobility in the current year?

17. What problems have you found associated with student mobility in general in the district?

18. Has the school developed any means of dealing with problems associated with student mobility?

19. How would you describe your style of leadership? Do you feel that had an impact on how you responded to the challenge of 2005-06?

20. What did you learn from the experience of last year that you are applying to this year and for the future?

Closure:

- Summarize what was discussed.
- Review the purpose of the project
- Ask if there are any closing comments or if any important points were missed.
- Thanks and exit.
- Turn off recorder and switch off microphone.
- Length of recording: ______
- Time and Date __________
Interview Questions: Central Office Staff:

Name ________________________________
Gender: __________
District assignment in 2005 ____________________________________________
Years experience in that position: ______
Years experience in the district: _______
Years involved in Education: ______

Planning Phase:

1. Can you explain what you remember of the days immediately before the hurricanes struck and how you began to plan for what you thought would happen to the schools?

2. Who was included in planning for the arrival of displaced students? How did you communicate with the staff and schools? What problems of communications occurred?

3. What were the specific responsibilities of your department?

4. How many days was the school closed following the Hurricane? What happened during those days?

Arrival and Integration Phase:

5. What do you recall happened as families began to arrive in the district and needed to be placed in schools? How did that process proceed?

6. What problems did you anticipate? What problems appeared that you did not anticipate?

7. What sources of support did you have available to help accommodate the arrival of new students? What unexpected sources of support helped?

8. What issues or problems arose that required adjustments in policy or procedures in the district?

9. How effective were any emergency plans or procedures in helping cope with the arrival of displaced families and students?

10. Were any new structures/committees needed to handle the planning for the arrival of new students?

11. Were any particular schools within the district impacted more by the arrival of so many displaced students? What did the district do to help?
Retrospective:

12. What accommodations has the district made this year compared to the 2005 school year?

13. Are there still any issues of “displaced” student mobility this year? If so, what is the cause of continuing mobility?

14. What problems have you found associated with “normal” student mobility in the school?

15. Has the district developed any policies of dealing with problems associated with student mobility?

16. What did you learn from the experience of the 2005 school year that you are applying to this year and for the future?

Closure:

- Summarize what was discussed.
- Review the purpose of the project
- Ask if there are any closing comments or if any important points were missed.
- Thanks and exit.
- Turn off recorder and switch off microphone.
- Length of recording: ______
- Time and Date ____________
Interview Questions: Principals:

Check microphone and turn on recorder:

Name ________________________________
Gender: _____
Years experience as principal: _____
Years experience as assistant principal: _____
Years here at the current school: _____
Years in education: _____

Planning Phase:

1. Can you explain what you remember of the days immediately before the hurricanes struck and how you began to plan for what you thought would happen to the school?
2. Who was included in planning for the arrival of displaced students?
3. What plans were made to prepare for the storm and its aftermath?
4. How many days was the school closed following the hurricanes?

Arrival and Integration Phase:

1. What do you recall happened as families began to arrive in the district and needed to be placed in schools? How did that process proceed?
2. What problems did you anticipate? What problems appeared that you did not anticipate?
3. What sources of help did you have available to help accommodate the arrival of new students? What unexpected sources of support did you find?
4. What issues or problems arose that required adjustments in policy or procedures in the school?
5. How effective were the emergency plans or procedures in helping cope with the arrival of displaced families and students?
6. Were any new structures/committees needed to handle the planning for the new students?
7. How did the school help new students and their parents fit into the culture of the school?
8. What issues of discipline arose in the schools and how did the school handle those issues?
9. Could you tell if there was a particular group within the school that was impacted more by the arrival of so many displaced students? What did the school do to serve that population?

10. What did you think would be the largest problem when testing for the 2005 then the 2006 LEAP tests? What problems actually occurred?

Retrospective:

15. Two years later, what portion of the school population still consists of formerly displaced students?

16. What accommodations has the school made this year compared to the 2005 school year?

17. Are there any continuing issues of “displaced” student mobility this year? If so, what is the cause of continuing mobility?

18. What problems have you found associated with “normal” student mobility in the school?

19. Has the school developed any policies for dealing with student mobility?

20. How would you describe your style of leadership? Do you feel that had an impact on how you responded to the challenge of 2005-06?

21. What did you learn from the experience of the 2005 school year that you are applying to this year and for the future? Have you made any changes to school policy or procedures as a result?

Closure:

- Summarize what was discussed.
- Review the purpose of the project
- Ask if there are any closing comments or if any important points were missed.
- Thanks and exit.
- Turn off recorder and switch off microphone.
- Length of recording: ______
- Time and Date ___________
Interview Questions: Counselors

Check microphone and turn on recorder:

Name ________________________________  
Gender: _____  
Years experience as counselor: _____  
Years here at the current school: _____  
Total years in education: _____

Planning Phase:

1. Can you explain what you remember of the days immediately before the hurricanes struck and how you began to plan for what you thought would happen to the school?

2. Who was included in planning for the arrival of the students? What plans were made?

Arrival and Integration Phase:

3. What do you recall happened when families began to arrive in the district and needed to be placed in schools? How did that proceed? What was your role?

4. How many of the school population were displaced students in 2005-06?  
   As of: Oct. 3?  
     Jan 2?  
     Last day of school?

5. What issues or problems arose in the 2005 – 06 year that required your expertise?

6. How did the school help new students and their parents fit into the culture of the school?

7. What issues of discipline arose in the schools and how did the school handle those issues? What role did you play?

8. Could you tell if there was a particular group within the school that was impacted more by the arrival of so many displaced students? Why? What did you do to help that group?

9. What did you think would be the biggest problem with the 2005 or the 2006 LEAP tests? What problems actually developed?

Retrospective:

10. After a year, what portion of the school population still consists of formerly displaced students?
11. What accommodations has the school made this year compared to the 2005 school year?

12. Are there still issues of “displaced” student mobility this year?

13. What problems have you found associated with “normal” student mobility in the school?

14. Has the school developed any procedures for dealing with problems associated with student mobility?

15. How would you describe your principal’s style of leadership? How did the principal’s leadership style influence the way you responded to the challenge of 2005-06?

16. What did you learn from the experience of the 2005 school year that you are applying to this year and for the future? Have you made any specific changes to the way you do things now?

Closure:
- Summarize what was discussed.
- Review the purpose of the project
- Ask if there are any closing comments or if any important points were missed.
- Thanks and exit.
- Turn off recorder and switch off microphone.
- Length of recording: ______
- Time and Date __________
Interview Questions for Teachers:

Check microphone and turn on recorder

Name ________________________________
Gender: _____
Years experience as teacher: _____
Years here at the current school: _____
Highest degree held: _____
Courses in which certified: ___________________________________
Courses taught 2005-06 ___________________________________________
Courses teaching now (if different) _________________________________

Planning Phase:

1. Describe your thoughts as you saw the arrival of the hurricanes and how that might affect you and your work.

2. Were there any meetings or planning information about what to expect when new students would begin to arrive?

Arrival and Integration Phase:

3. What do you remember of the early weeks in September 2005? What happened in your classes?

4. How did your classroom routine change as a result of the arrival of the students displaced by the hurricanes?

5. What issues of discipline arose and how did you handle them?

6. How often did your classroom head-count change in the Fall of 2005? How did you deal with that?

7. At what point did you feel you were back to some kind of normal routine? What made you think so?

Reflection:

8. How would you describe your leadership style in the classroom? What impact did that have on the way you responded to the challenge of that year?

9. How would you describe the leadership style of your principal? What impact did that have on the how the school responded to the challenge of the hurricane year?

10. What could have been done in that year to improve the way the school coped with displaced students?
11. As a classroom teacher, what did you learn from the experience of the 2005 school year and are applying this year and for the future?

12. What, if any, changes were incorporated in school policies as a result of the hurricanes of 2005?

Closure:
- Summarize what was discussed.
- Review the purpose of the project
- Ask if there are any closing comments or if they felt any important points were missed.
- Thanks and exit.
- Turn off recorder and switch off microphone.
- Length of recording: ______
- Time and Date __________
APPENDIX B

CONSENT FORM
Participant Consent Form

Project title: Administrative Responses to Katrina-Induced Mobility
Performance Site: Selected Schools in East Baton Rouge Parish
Research Investigator: Christopher J. Fontenot, LSU (any questions may be addressed to Christopher J. Fontenot, M-F after – 5 PM, 225-936-2736) or Dr. S. Kim MacGregor at 225-578-2150

Purpose: Determine how the arrival of large numbers of displaced students affected District administration and how schools responded to the influx of students.

Inclusion Criteria: Schools, nine % or more of whose student population contained students displaced by Hurricanes Katrina or Rita at some point during the 2005 School year.

Exclusion Criteria: Schools which did not have nine % or more of its student population identified as students displaced by Hurricanes Katrina or Rita.

Number of subjects: Three or four individuals in each school (including Principal, Counselor, and teachers in the selected schools), District superintendent and key personnel at School Board office.

Description of the Study: Administrators, staff, and faculty members will be interviewed in order to understand what factors helped the schools to minimize the disruption or helped the schools improve in the face of the influx of students.

Benefits: By identifying what policies, procedures, or qualities of leadership that exist among the administration and staff have enabled schools to flourish under conditions of high student mobility, schools faced with similar problems may be able to respond better to mobility issues and prevent unnecessary declines in test scores.

Risks: The only study risk is the inadvertent release of sensitive information. Every effort will be made to maintain the confidentiality of the study records by containing all files in a secure location and by using pseudonyms of individuals interviewed unless authorized in writing.

Right to Refuse: Subjects may choose not to participate or may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or loss of any benefit to which they may otherwise be entitled.

Privacy: Although results of the study may be published, all names and any identifying information will be changed to protect the identity of the individuals and the schools involved. Subject identity will remain confidential unless disclosure is required by law.

This project has been explained to me and all my questions have been answered. If I have any additional questions I may call the research investigator. If I have questions about subjects’ rights or other concerns, I can contact Robert C. Matthews, Institutional Review Board, (225) 578-8692. I agree to participate in the study described above and acknowledge the investigator’s obligation to provide me with a signed copy of this consent form.

__________________________________________________        _______
Participant Signature:       Date
APPENDIX C

LETTERS TO PARTICIPANTS
Dear Superintendent,

The hurricanes of 2005 did more than damage schools in East Baton Rouge, they provided valuable lessons in how districts and schools cope with the influx of thousands of families and students into the system. Lessons learned will prove quite valuable to districts and schools throughout the Gulf Coast and in general to any school system that undergoes catastrophic change from natural or man-made causes. I am requesting permission to investigate how your district met the challenges of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita and what was learned from the process.

This investigation will take place this October-November. The purpose of the study is to investigate the effects of mobility on the district and schools to illuminate any successful coping strategies used by the district and schools to minimize the harmful effects of mobility. The project will involve interviews with the superintendent, key personnel in the central office, principals of selected schools, counselors, and some faculty in the schools. Every effort will be made to minimize disturbances to the schools.

Any personal information garnered will be held in strict confidence. Anything that could identify the parish, schools, or any individuals will be altered or removed to protect their confidentiality. All findings from this investigation will be shared with all parties involved.

You can contact Prof. MacGregor for more information regarding this project at the following address:

College of Education
Louisiana State University
111-H Peabody Hall
Baton Rouge, LA 70803
225-578-2150
smacgre@lsu.edu

Respectfully,

Christopher J. Fontenot
Principal
2330 Aspenwood Ave.
Baton Rouge, LA 70816

Dear Principal,

The hurricanes of 2005 did more than damage schools in East Baton Rouge. They provided valuable lesson in how districts and schools cope with the influx of thousands of families and students into the system. Lessons learned will prove quite valuable to districts and schools throughout the Gulf Coast and in general to any school system that undergoes catastrophic change from natural or manmade causes. I am requesting permission to investigate how your school met the challenges of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita and what was learned from the process.

This investigation will take place this fall. The purpose of the study is to investigate the effects of mobility on the schools and any successful coping strategies used by the schools to minimize the harmful effects of mobility. The project will involve interviews with the principal, school counselor, and some faculty in the schools. Every effort will be made to minimize disturbances to teaching schedules and the school.

All information garnered will be held in strict confidence. Anything that could identify the parish, school, or any individuals will be altered or removed to protect their confidentiality. All findings from this investigation will be shared with all parties involved.

You can contact Prof. MacGregor for more information regarding this project at the following address:

College of Education
Louisiana State University
111-H Peabody Hall
Baton Rouge, LA 70803
225-578-2150
smacgre@lsu.edu

Respectfully,

Christopher J. Fontenot
Christopher J. Fontenot  
15514 Riverdale Ave. E.  
Baton Rouge, LA 70816

October 27, 2007

Principal  
1225 Sharp Road  
Baton Rouge, LA 70815

Dear Principal,

The hurricanes of 2005 did more than damage schools in East Baton Rouge. They provided a valuable lesson in how districts and schools cope with the influx of thousands of families and students into the system. Lessons learned will prove quite valuable to districts and schools throughout the Gulf Coast and in general to any school system that undergoes catastrophic change from natural or manmade causes. I am requesting permission to investigate how your school met the challenges of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita and what was learned from the process.

This investigation will take place this fall. The purpose of the study is to investigate the effects of mobility on the schools and any successful coping strategies used by the schools to minimize the harmful effects of mobility. The project will involve interviews with the principal, school counselor, and some faculty in the schools. Every effort will be made to minimize disturbances to teaching schedules and the school.

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College of Education  
Louisiana State University  
111-H Peabody Hall  
Baton Rouge, LA 70803  
225-578-2150  
smacgre@lsu.edu

Respectfully,

Christopher J. Fontenot
October 27, 2007

Principal
15000 Harrell's Ferry Rd.
Baton Rouge, LA 70816

Dear Principal,

The hurricanes of 2005 did more than damage schools in East Baton Rouge. They provided a valuable lesson in how districts and schools cope with the influx of thousands of families and students into the system. Lessons learned will prove quite valuable to districts and schools throughout the Gulf Coast and in general to any school system that undergoes catastrophic change from natural or manmade causes. I am requesting permission to investigate how your school met the challenges of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita and what was learned from the process.

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College of Education
Louisiana State University
111-H Peabody Hall
Baton Rouge, LA 70803
225-578-2150
smacgre@lsu.edu

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This investigation will take place this fall. The purpose of the study is to investigate the effects of mobility on the schools and any successful coping strategies used by the schools to minimize the harmful effects of mobility. The project will involve interviews with the principal, school counselor, and some faculty in the schools. Every effort will be made to minimize disturbances to teaching schedules and the school.

All information garnered will be held in strict confidence. Anything that could identify the parish, school, or any individuals will be altered or removed to protect their confidentiality. All findings from this investigation will be shared with all parties involved.

You can contact Prof. MacGregor for more information regarding this project at the following address:

   College of Education  
   Louisiana State University  
   111-H Peabody Hall  
   Baton Rouge, LA 70803  
   225-578-2150  
   smacgre@lsu.edu

Respectfully,

Christopher J. Fontenot
APPENDIX D

CHRONOLOGY
Although the memories were vague and confused, most informants recalled a meeting of the District Leadership Team (DLT) the following day, Wednesday, August 31st, at the central office. The email was sent out in mid afternoon the 30th. By that point, the superintendent and other members of her staff were aware of the growing crisis in New Orleans. The levees had breached as early as 9 AM Monday the 29th, and throughout the day Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday water from Lake Ponchartrain and Lake Bourne continued to pour into the city until by September 1st, the levels within the city and the lakes equalized. Some areas of New Orleans were flooded to a depth of nearly 20 feet. The extent of the inundation was being understood as a long-term problem, not just a short term annoyance. The CAO recalled that the first impulse [by the mayor and OEP?] was to use public schools as shelters but that the superintendent was passionate in her efforts to convince the Mayor to move the displaced families to the River Center convention complex. School buses assisted in moving displaced families out of the several schools that had been opened as shelters. Sometime the day of the 30th the coordinator for the education for homeless children and youth program, recalled that she called the superintendent and explained that the guidelines of the Stewart B. McKinney-Vento Act (1987) required that all homeless children be enrolled in school without restrictions. She was invited to the meeting planned for Wednesday morning at the central office. According the Federal law, any family in inadequate living conditions – particularly the conditions present in shelters, churches, or temporary trailer parks– is considered a homeless family. Children of such families are required by law to be accepted in public schools and provided all the benefits, uniforms, books, meals, and services available to all the other school children.

School personnel were also encouraged to call each other because power was still out across town and the central office could not be sure that emails were reaching everyone. Payroll
checks were going out the next day, but the power situation required the payroll to be processed manually.

The superintendent moved the meeting Wednesday, August 31st, to a nearby school because they still had power. Members of the DLT included the chief academic officer; information technology officer (IT); the head of facilities; legal counsel; the superintendent; chief finance officer (CFO); head of instructional support services (ISS); human resources director (HR); director of equal educational opportunities (EEO), and assistant superintendent (AS I). Also at the meeting were homeless coordinator (HC), and head of child welfare and attendance (CWA). The CAO recalled the meeting as being “a bit chaotic” and very emotional, but they did a quick analysis of the situation and got down to work. Prompted by the superintendent and HC, the need to document and track everything drove the group to quickly get down to the work of preparing forms and procedures so that the district could report accurately what was being done in the event that some reimbursements would be forthcoming from state and federal sources. After the meeting the superintendent met with the press to share information about the coming plans to enroll all the children in the district displaced by the hurricane. Although the plans were not yet finalized, the press was told to spread the word that registration for new students would begin Thursday at the central office and at the “Station.” [the CAO recalled moving to the “Station” that afternoon.]

Thursday, September 1st, began with a meeting at the “Station” to continue planning for the arrival of what was assumed to be a few thousand children. Teams of central office personnel were assigned to the various shelters around the city to begin the process of registering new students and help the central office determine what the actual numbers would be. Later that day an emergency meeting of the school board voted the superintendent extraordinary powers to conduct business without formal board action. These powers extended for thirty days and were
renewed twice. The superintendent was in constant touch with the school board president and vice president, alerting them of her actions. The CAO recalled that it was a crucial and fortuitous action that helped the district act and react to changing conditions rapidly. A great deal of staff time was normally taken up in preparing reports and requests for the school board to approve before the school system could act. The CAO estimated that nearly half of staff time was occupied in those types of activities. With the superintendent granted emergency powers and needed only apprise the board leadership of her intentions, nearly half of the central office workday was freed to focus on other activities. It was “like giving 30 hours of your productivity time back [in a typical 60 hour week],” he stated. A great deal of productive time was spent in the first two days of planning, the Wednesday and Thursday after the hurricane. Staff members were briefed in the proper procedures required by the Stewart B. McKinney-Vento Act (1987) and reminded that many of the displaced families may have been traumatized by what happened in New Orleans. New suppliers were needed because the food service suppliers for the district had operated out of New Orleans. Those suppliers were no longer viable and the district had to locate new suppliers quickly. Fortunately, ARAMARK, a company contracted with the district for repairs and maintenance was contracted to supply food services as well. More food would be needed, more supplies, furniture, books, uniforms – more of everything would be needed.

After Thursday’s meetings registration continued at the central office. Registrations also were accepted in the schools in the district. Forms were provided to the schools and completed forms returned to the central office each evening. The forms were based on the one page homeless form utilized by the homeless office and were color coded according to elementary, middle, or high school level in order to assist staff in sorting Katrina children, and to distinguish them from local children. Some staff members went to homes to register children; others worked in teams and went to every shelter that they knew housed Katrina-displaced families.
Work proceeded to plan for the opening of the schools on the Tuesday following Labor Day, September 6th. Work was proceeding on converting a school that had been closed for into an elementary school. Another school slated for closure was also quickly restored and made operational. Both schools were to be used exclusively for displaced students; most of the children were bused from the convention center and other shelters. The schools were also staffed with displaced administrators and faculty who were thought to be the best prepared to deal with the sense of loss both students and staff would be feeling. The rest of the students would be assigned to the nearest schools to their current address.

Friday, September 2nd, was busy continuing the planning and enrollment of students. A letter from the state department of education (DOE) circulated around the offices and was carefully studied for any potential impact on the plans already in motion in the district. Enrollment continued with some schools planning to open on the Saturday to accommodate parents. Announcements went out via email to meet at one of the local magnet schools the following day, Saturday to get away from the large crowds at the central office. The last assistant superintendent (AS I) rejoined the executive leadership team (ELT), having been trapped in her Mississippi home by the storm. Other staff members came and went as they struggled with personal issues and recovery efforts from the storm.

On Sunday, September 4th, the Superintendent informed the school board and central office staff that the school buses had been returned to duty after having been commandeered by the governor to help transport displaced families from New Orleans. Fifty school buses had been on the road since Thursday and were released back to the district. Five schools were still without power as of Friday afternoon, but the district was planning to reopen Tuesday. There was some concern that parents would have to be asked to help transport their children, but with the return of the school buses there would be a sufficient number to reopen the schools. By Monday, Labor
Day, power had been restored to all campuses and the media was informed that schools would resume operations.

A major problem was developing that weekend as literally tons of materials were beginning to arrive in Baton Rouge and needed to be stored. By Tuesday, September 6th, word was circulating to forward deliveries to a warehouse for storage and later distribution. Other issues included the registration of new students. Word went out by noon on Tuesday that no schools were to register new students, but rather send the forms in to the central office. The procedure had been established at a principal’s meeting the Thursday before. Only parents requesting a “choice” enrollment and possessing the proper paperwork/letters could be directly enrolled by the schools. Registration forms were requested from all sites registering students and sent to the instructional resource center (IRC) next door to the central office. Future forms were to be sent to the director of CWA for processing. By this point many staff members of the school board were helping process the forms and entering the data into the system. These staff members worked all day on data processing, and many worked as late as 9 PM. Some administrators, including the director CWA, left their regular work assignments and after hours drove to the IRC to help screen the forms and make calls to applicants to locate missing information. As the registration process proceeded, alterations to the forms became necessary and the modifications were added. The ELT met daily in the afternoon to assess the progress of the registration and make changes as needed. Tuesday dragged on as the CAO appointed two “seconds” to assistant superintendents who were struggling with their own personal recovery issues. The IT director was repurposing some of the office space to accommodate several working teams including student assignment team. Later emails noted the apparent smoothness of the first day of school after the storm. By Tuesday, September 6th, the central office had received approximately 3,200 enrollment forms from the schools and data entry teams had already keyed in the data from 700
forms. At this point the CAO began what came to be called the “Midnight Missives.” These emailed notices were to continue for several weeks advising all principals, ELT and DLT, and school board members of activities each day, problems that arose, and decisions made by the ELT. Decisions had to be made regarding the sports programs that had been interrupted by the storms. Games would resume as scheduled (the state later resolved the issue of displaced player eligibility by allowing displaced students to participate in sports in the first school to which they were assigned and attended – subsequent transfers would then render them ineligible). Other issues to be resolved after the afternoon ELT meeting included designing registration packets for new students, verification forms for contacting parents still in shelters, a plan to get ICARE counselors into the schools, furniture needs, faculty shortages and the need for substitutes until enrollment numbers stabilized, and notifying principals as potential faculty were identified. At that point the biggest issue was keeping track of displaced families and keeping them separately identified from local students who were moving from one school to another. This issue was illustrative of the concern that the district would have to accurately track any displaced students in order to receive full reimbursement from state or federal sources.

By the afternoon of Wednesday, September 7th, the district had begun to feel the pressure of rising registrations and authorized principals to register any children at their own schools under the conditions that the student was a local student, that they already existed in the system database, that they were transferring from another attendance zone in the district or had a valid “choice” letter, or had an approved proof of residency from the hearing office. By 8:13 PM the “Midnight Missive” went out noting the arrival of more enrollment forms raising the total to about 4,000 of which 2,700 had been processed. Data entry teams continued to work until 9PM to input the data into the system. At that point 500 students had been assigned to schools with the goal of completing the assignments by the 12th of September. This was also the first notice that
announced the opening of PS-816 middle school as a K-8 facility. Issues still under consideration included an ICARE support plan, anticipated furniture shortages, anticipated need for new faculty to be hired as “substitutes” until student population stabilized, advising of principals as new faculty applications became available for interviews, and a decision to set a number (6000) when new facilities would need to be opened or split schedules would have to be implemented. Notice also went out to advise principals to prepare adequate numbers of new student handbooks, transportation forms, and brochures for parents. “The question is how many?” This indicates that there was still no firm handle on the total numbers expected to enter the school system.

One other issue of importance at this time was making adjustments to the pacing guides and curriculum to compensate for the week missed because of the storm. Unit tests would have to be rescheduled and the curriculum department was working to address concerns from teachers under the new conditions.

General update number 3 was posted at about 7 PM Thursday September 8th, noting the fairly smooth return of district students to schools. The school system was preparing for the arrival of the first displaced students into the schools planned for the following week. By the end of the day an additional 500 enrollment forms had arrived for processing. The total count of forms was about 4,500, of which 3,200 had been processed and about 1,100 had been assigned to schools. The plan was to have all students assigned and notified by the end of the day September 12th. The district announced again that PS-816 middle was repurposed as a K-8 school, and that three additional schools would be prepared as additional space. Principals were now told that they would have to contact the parents of students assigned to the schools (except for parents still in shelters). Forms and procedures were being developed to guide the schools in contacting their new students. Issues to be resolved included the need for furniture, teachers, and bus drivers to
transport students to the schools. Spreadsheets with students being assigned to schools would be provided to all the principals who were instructed to create teams in their schools for the purpose of contacting displaced parents. The district would have the telephone contact scripts ready the following day. There were also some general concerns about conflicting information provided to the data entry personnel about their compensation. The superintendent directed that overtime compensation would be paid appropriately. She also addressed the issue of enrolling students “independent of the process” established by the district; any such enrollments were “un-enrolled.” Shortly after 7 PM the IT director advised ELT members of the updated numbers: 4,027 input into the database and 1,627 assigned to schools. Two hours later the students input into the system numbered 4,325 and that 1,869 had been assigned.

By Friday, September 9th, IT director advised the ELT that PS-816 – now a K-8 elementary – would have functional phone lines by Monday, September 12th, in time for opening the school. Shortly after noon several forms were passed on to administrators. Tactics for attempting to contact parents were suggested, including the use of the reverse look-up feature of the Whitepages.com website and a reminder to update the district database with any valid numbers and addresses obtained. Enrollment counts by 8 PM Friday reached 5,650 forms of which 3,530 had been registered as students. At 9 PM the enrollment forms entered into the database had topped 5,850.

The CAO was advising principals in his fourth update that teams would be contacting parents at the larger shelters, but that currently there was no way to transport parents from smaller shelters to schools to register. PS-816 and PS-8124 (school designations changed) Elementary schools, repurposed to handle displaced students, constituted a third tier for the purposes of transportation because of the shortage of buses and drivers. Both would start at 9:30 in the morning and end school at 4:30. Two other schools had been identified as having space for
more students, but were being held in reserve until additional space was needed. Issues still being considered included the lack of furniture, the need for more teachers and staff, the need for more bus drivers, and the anticipated shortages in textbooks. An additional warning was also sent to principals to accept students with or without uniforms. Procedures for notification and registration for displaced families were reviewed. Transportation issues continued to plague the system as drivers were overwhelmed and no new drivers were forthcoming. Uniform orders were discussed and contact person from St. Vincent de Paul was identified. Again, staff members were reminded that students must be allowed to attend schools without uniforms until the uniforms could be secured. Updated lists of students registered and assigned were sent out daily, sometimes several times a day. Students not on the list were encouraged to get registered either at the homeless office or at the IRC. Parents were to be advised that if the student was on the list but not assigned yet, the assignment was coming; the parents did not need to register again.

Update five from the CAO went out shortly after 7:25 Monday September 12th. On this date the displaced students began to arrive at their assigned schools; PS-816 and PS-8124 opened as planned. Principals were warned to watch the next day for adjustments in the assignments and anticipated adjustments in the process. As of the close of school that day 6,525 forms had been processed and 4,455 students had been assigned. The system was discussing issues concerning shifting addresses, procedures to remove “No Shows” from the rosters to keep accurate numbers of students actually in school, issues about documentation to enroll students in the appropriate courses and accepting credits from prior school classes, and issues concerning the appropriate placement of Gifted and Talented (GT) students as well as Special Education (SpEd) students. Central office decisions for that day included notice to prepare PS-8127 (6 – 12) and PS-809 (6 – 12) to receive students. Schools were to continue to notify parents of the enrollment of their children in the schools. New forms would be disseminated the next day to allow changes in
enrollment. Katrina “no show” forms would be sent the following day to identify parents of students assigned to the schools, but who would not be attending the school. Students with verified Individual Education Plans (IEPs) as GT or SpEd would be assigned to appropriate schools; those schools would then contact the parents to register the students there and the former school would then drop the student from its attendance rolls. By Monday at 6 PM the number of students entered into the student database was 6,525 and 4,455 had been assigned to schools. That day the superintendent received a communication from the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) advising the superintendents that BESE would be meeting Tuesday, September 27th, to examine disaster issues. They wanted ideas about how the state BESE and the State Department of Education (State DOE) could assist the state superintendents in the disaster. Specifically requested were suggestions as to changes in testing policy, assistance in locating furniture and books; any perceived need for waivers, or something that could be addressed at the state or policy level to help the districts. As of September 12th, they could not “see the light at the end of the tunnel yet.” In a related issue, the superintendent requested clarification about enrolling students from private schools. State DOE policy in that area treated students from approved private schools the same as students from public schools. In the event that the student was enrolled in an unapproved private school or was home schooled, then the “receiving school should follow the policy in their Pupil Progression Plan…[This] usually involves some kind of testing.”

By Tuesday it had become clear that many students who had been enrolled would not actually be attending the schools. On September 13th, the central office was attaching a form to emails to the principals. This form, entitled “Katrina No Shows,” was to be completed so the school system could have an accurate count of students actually attending the schools. The principals were to complete the form for each student that was assigned to that school and whose
parents had been contacted but who stated that the child would not attend the school. The form was not intended to apply to students whose families had not yet been contacted, only families that could definitely state that the children would not be attending. Students wishing to change schools would use a different form. Principals were also warned that changes of school assignments would not be allowed until the district reached some level of stability. Principals were also told to prepare a “Warm Body Count” for assistant superintendents. The warm body count was designed to reveal the actual numbers of enrollees in the schools so the assignment teams would have a better idea of how many seats were actually available in the schools. By the end of the school day the district had entered 6,825 children into the database and assigned 5,228 students to schools. Later that day a list of new or unassigned students was disseminated. The various support arms of the district, food service, transportation, and human resources were still struggling to resolve the problems of supplying the district. One problem noted by the superintendent was the near impossibility of contacting many parents because of shifts in address or incomplete information on the enrollment forms.

Getting accurate numbers became the focus Wednesday, September 14th, with two separate warm body counts, one for Katrina displaced students, a separate count requested by the HR director to include all students in the school. An email from the superintendent suggests that many parents in shelters had yet to register their children. With the assistance of the American Red Cross, word continued to spread that students needed to be registered for schools “or their continued residency may be in jeopardy.” Warm body counts were collected and compiled by mid afternoon. The first set of numbers indicated that 7,518 applications had been entered into the database, 5,573 students had been assigned to schools. Confirmed “No Show” counts for the day were 237, but the warm body count was only 2,708 for the district, a very low number considering the 5,573 who had been enrolled and assigned. In his seventh update the CAO noted
that some of the challenges faced by the schools were emotional. By this point various
descriptions of the students were categorized as hurtful and needed to be avoided. Banned from
use in the schools were the terms “homeless kids,” “Katrina Kids,” “those New Orleans kids,”
and the like. Principals were urged to make the new students welcome and help the “indigenous”
students “live and learn together.” The CAO warned that tensions would likely build and school
leaders were expected to be proactive in preventing flair-ups between displaced students and
local students.

Update seven, September 15th, urged principals to continue to contact families of students
assigned to their schools or who had not yet been contacted and to turn in “No Show” forms of
students that had been contacted and who had confirmed they would not attend district schools.
There were many cases in which the parents had not yet been contacted and thus their children
were not yet attending the schools. Also included was a list of continuing activities at the central
office including discussions on how to keep track of displaced families that moved, how many
warm body counts would be needed, and how to handle requests for changes in school
assignment. Decisions reached by the central office included the selection of Monday, September
19th, as a day to start considering accepting requests for school reassignment, and the decision to
make another warm body count Friday, September 16th. Special issues mentioned included more
reminders to allow students to attend school even if not in uniform, and a reminder not to require
parents to use specific vendors for their uniform purchases. Principals were also urged to
reexamine their use of space in the schools to discern whether there were more efficient ways to
utilize the spaces they had.

Thursday, September 15th, continued with a reminder from IT director to continue to
submit Katrina “No Show” forms before noon each day. The superintendent thanked the staff for
their efforts under trying circumstances, but also noted that quality would not be sacrificed
because of the difficulties in the district. District officials were waiting for guidance from the state DOE on many matters and urged patience from the staff. The CAO reminded the principals of the coming warm body count the next day. Friday’s WBC would include a breakdown by grade level. At this point two incidents had occurred in one of the high schools in the city. The CAO noted that when incidents occurred, all students should be treated as district students, not singled out as displaced. Efforts continued to document all expenses so the district could be reimbursed for its extra expenses. Also, principals were urged to get into contact with all families of students assigned to their schools. As of Thursday, September 15th, the system had input data on 7,737 students, had assigned 6,008 to schools, had a WBC of only 2,808 students and had confirmed “No-Shows” numbering 350. One final reminder to the principals involved counting students who were physically enrolled at the school even if they were absent from the school. The IT Director sent daily updates of students who had applied but where not yet assigned to a school.

Early emails from the IT director on Friday, September 16th, reminded principals to submit their daily “No-Show” forms and not to drop the student from the database, that activity would be handled at the central office. Principals were also reminded not to enter students into the database when they arrived to enroll because they were already in the database. Update number nine from the CAO laid out the procedures for allowing students to transfer. The following week would mark the beginning of student transfers. Updated student counts as of 5:08 PM were a rough count of applications – 8,015; 6,310 students assigned to schools; a warm body count of 3,733; and a confirmed “No-Show” count of 500.

Monday, September 19th, marked the second full week in which displaced students were attending schools in the district. Monday morning rosters went out as usual from the IT department with a notification that teams from the central office would be visiting campuses to
study space and capacity issues for each campus. Lists of unassigned students also went out, and
an afternoon enrollment update was emailed after 5 PM. The CAO’s tenth update warned
principals about the district’s decision to start accepting transfer requests based on changes of
address. Rough counts of applications stood at 8,084, the assigned student count was 6,411, the
last warm body count stood at 3,733, and there were still 500 confirmed “No Shows.” Central
office issues for the day included adding more students to PS-8127 and PS-809, considering
questions to be forwarded to the Louisiana DOE, and partitioning spaces in gyms to create more
space. Decisions made in the last ELT meeting included allowing 20 more 9 – 12 grade students
to be admitted to PS-8127 and an additional 100 in grades 6 – 8. PS-809 would be prepared to
accept an additional 180 students in grades 9 – 12. Principals were asked to prepare questions for
the principals meeting the next day. Procedures were also outlined to make school transfers more
reliable, assigning specific individuals to receive transfer forms and evaluate the request before
passing the approval to the Program Analyst in charge of school assignments who would then
enter the new assignment into the database.

Warm body counts continued Tuesday, September 20th. Information forwarded by IT
director was disseminated to principals in the CAO’s update number 11. Few other items were
listed in the update beyond the latest numbers and an attachment detailing a reorganization of
administrative areas. There was some consideration of transferring two Pre-K classes from PS-
802 to a neighboring school to free up space for more K-5 seats. The latest counts indicated the
enrollments were at 8,304, assigned students numbered 6,470 with 4,301 warm bodies, and still
500 “No Shows.” No other meetings were held that day.

Routine emails of lists of enrolled and unassigned students went out Wednesday,
September 21st. No meetings were held Wednesday and the routine continued. Discussions
continued concerning the movement of Pre-K Classes from PS-802. PS-802 began to use the
auditorium for additional classroom space. Two additional classroom spaces were prepared at PS-8124.

Wednesday, September 21st, followed the routine of previous days. The IT director informed staff not to drop unconfirmed “No-Show” because of continuing transportation issues. Another warm body count was scheduled for Thursday, the 22nd of September. The CAO’s twelfth update corrected mistakes in the previous update. Principals were reminded to count as a student any student who physically enrolled and who attended the school at any time. Student counts reported 8,460 entered into the database; 6,806 students were assigned to schools; the warm body count stood at 4,201, and there were still 500 confirmed “No Shows.” Discussions continued about moving Pre-K classes and the central office formally decided to use the auditorium at PS-802 and two additional classrooms at PS-8124.

The superintendent notified board members on September 22nd, of her intention to request portable classrooms unless the district judge objected. This followed a message from the State Superintendent concerning a FEMA communication regarding information about temporary mobile classrooms. The CAO’s update number 13 mentioned meetings to plan strategically for the Katrina challenge by starting to “triage” the rolls to determine which students were attending, had withdrawn, had left the area, or who could not or refused to attend schools in the district. Dropping these students would free up assigned but unused seats for other students who were attending. Latest counts were an enrolled student count of 8,689, 6,821 assigned to schools, a warm body count of 4,548 and confirmed “No Shows” totaling 980. Drop codes to drop students were attached to the update and, in a special note at the bottom, the CAO announced the closure of the school system to avoid problems with any evacuations in preparation of Hurricane Rita. The system hoped to reopen Monday, September 26th.
After closing the system for the potential evacuation problems from Hurricane Rita, the superintendent noted that there was some discussion about sending lists of enrolled students to the state department and the districts the students originally came from so everyone would be aware of where the students were.

Hurricane Rita came ashore Saturday morning September 24th, along the Louisiana-Texas border. Winds from the storm knocked power out across central Louisiana again and caused problems throughout the city. The superintendent was in contact with ARAMARK and facilities personnel and by 10:30 PM Saturday was contacting staff with lists of schools and facilities that had no power. The IT director reported the central office was again without power Sunday, September 25th. The computing center in the central office was again operating on generator power while the rest of the building was dark.

Power issues kept the district closed Monday, September 26th, as power recovery efforts continued. As night fell Monday evening most power was restored to schools, but the central office, the IRC, and several other schools and administrative centers were still without power. Staff members were instructed to report to the “Station” Tuesday. An hour and a half later power to the central office was restored.

ARAMARK reported on damages sustained from Hurricane Rita shortly after 2 PM on the 26th of September. Damages to several schools, a warehouse, and an administrative center totaled just over $800,000. Schools were to reopen on the 27th. The CAO announced the need to enroll displaced families from Hurricane Rita as they began to settle in the area. The procedures already in place did not need to be changed, but staff members were told to ask if the entrant was a Katrina or a Rita-displaced student. Staff members were told to write Katrina or Rita at the top of the form so the enrollee could be properly identified. The homeless forms were sent to child
welfare and attendance and from there to the school assignment officer. Displaced student enrollment rosters were sent out morning and evening that day.

By nine PM September 27\textsuperscript{th}, the fourteenth update was sent to principals and staff. Several new challenges were identified that day. Although all schools were supposed to open that day some cases of mold appeared. The worst mold infestation was in PS-813 middle school. Thorough examination, cleaning, and retesting were ordered and school was expected to reopen Thursday, September 29\textsuperscript{th}. An administration building lost its roof and water damage in another school was discovered. Hurricane Rita–displaced students began arriving to sign up for school and required special handling to distinguish them from Katrina-displaced students. Schools also started the process of dropping students from their rosters, a change that would be reflected in the day’s counts. Drop procedures were attached to the update email and warned school personnel not to change the Katrina marker (Building 6000) on the school database forms.

Displaced student counts that day were: 8,754 enrolled, 6,655 assigned to schools, warm body count stood at 4,548, and 983 students were confirmed “No Shows.” The assigned count was lower than the previous count because schools had started dropping students. The CAO announced that the school board had been contacted by an out-of-state elementary PTA with a cash donation for textbooks. A request for pen pals for displaced elementary students was directed to the schools with the most displaced students in the system. Five elementary schools were identified and the contact information and mailing addresses were sent to school’s PTA representative.

Displaced rosters went out to school personnel morning and evening September 28\textsuperscript{th}. Update number 15 announced the reopening of PS-802 and another warm body count for the 29\textsuperscript{th}. Staff members were told to begin thinking of the short and long term changes in the school system and developing plans and cost estimates for a future planning meeting. Since the mold
issue surfaced the previous Tuesday a clarification was made in the procedures of how to assess and remediate mold problems in the schools. Enrollment counts as of 7 PM that day were: 8,754 enrolled, 6,655 assigned, 4,548 warm bodies, and 983 confirmed “No Shows.” The numbers had not changed and may have reflected the lack of a warm body count that day, or a transcription error.

Warm body counts were taken again Thursday, September 29th. Students were shifted from damaged schools until roof repairs were complete. The numbers for Thursday: 8,976 enrolled; 6,821 assigned, 4,926 warm bodies, and 983 “No Shows.”

Comment

From the emails it is apparent that things had started to settle into something of a routine by Tuesday, September 20th, when the attention at the central office began to focus on shifting students around to equalize space requirements. Decisions reported in the updates had begun to taper off to a few scattered issues and plans were in the process for identifying which students were simply not going to attend school so their seats could be reassigned to other displaced students. Plans were already underway to allow transfers to new schools based on residency changes. The system had absorbed over 8,000 new student applications and would eventually house over 5,000 new students. The district had turned the corner with respect to new enrollees, but the shifting of students did not subside for some time as the shelters began to close and trailer parks were opened to provide more permanent housing for displaced families.
Christopher Fontenot was born in Eunice, Louisiana, July, 1951. He is the son of John C. and Mary Berline Fontenot of Ville Platte, Louisiana. Christopher graduated from Sacred Heart High School in May, 1969, received a Bachelor of Arts degree in history from Louisiana State University in 1973, a Bachelor of Science degree in education from Louisiana State University in 1975, and a Master of Education degree from the University of Southwestern Louisiana in 1995.

Mr. Fontenot began his teaching career at St. John Parochial School in Plaquemines, Louisiana, in 1973, returned to Louisiana State University for secondary school certification in 1974. He returned to teaching at West Side Academy in Port Allen, Louisiana, in 1975 for a year and a half, Sacred Heart High School in Ville Platte, Louisiana, for twenty-three years, and The Runnels School in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, where he has been teaching since fall of 2000.

Mr. Fontenot has taught education courses at University of Southwestern Louisiana/University of Louisiana at Lafayette and American history courses at Louisiana State University at Eunice. He is currently serving as adjunct faculty teaching humanities, history, and general studies courses at the Baton Rouge campus of the University of Phoenix.

Mr. Fontenot’s varied and colorful past included having served as a research assistant to his father’s abstracting company since he was twelve; a DJ for his hometown radio station; a baseball, softball, basketball, and bowling coach; a choir director for his church; and a drama director whose musical plays showcased student talent at Sacred Heart High School and entertained hometown supporters for fifteen years.


Mr. Fontenot and his wife Debra have four children: Amber F. Guillory, Sgt. Rebecca F. Haas, Lauren P. Fontenot, Christopher G. Fontenot, and four grandchildren.