

REPORT ON THE RECOVERY OF THE SCHOOLS IN THE GREATER NEW ORLEANS AREA

by the

**Book Ministry Partnership: The Lisa Mains Saley Foundation, Inc.,
Good Shepherd UCC, MACUCC partner congregations**

The situation here is fluid and constantly changing. In the beginning, after Katrina as schools re-opened we (Lisa Mains Saley Foundation) started working to bring Comfort and Joy to the children through parties, books and activities. We have continued to follow the schools as they open and are closely connected to all the public and charter schools in the greater New Orleans area.

The flow went something like this which followed the path of ability to physically return and function:

Jefferson Parish was our starting point because of accessibility. This is where we live just west of Orleans Parish where the children were returning slowly to gutted homes and trailers ---all of these schools are back up and functioning AND have taken on many extra students who are still unable to return home and many Hispanic children migrating here with their families.

Then the Mississippi Gulf Coast through Bay St. Louis---we were there by Thanksgiving---there are now three schools for the youngest children---everyone is in a temporary facility---Pearlington, Waveland and Bay St. Louis---after the youngest grades, the children are combined in schools by grades through high school.

At the same time very few children were back in Orleans and St Bernard Parishes, however, Thanksgiving week a Unified School opened in Chalmette just east of Orleans in St Bernard Parish. We brought donated P E equipment and had a welcome back hurrah. The children are partially back in the high school building now, however, they continue to function as one school. It's an amazing story in focus, dedication and love. Every structure in that parish was heavily damaged or washed away.

In Orleans Parish any children returning were initially transported across the Mississippi River to a Charter School and then schools set up to service all students returning. It did not flood across the river. Over the rest of last school year other schools in Orleans Parish opened slowly as needed. I think the last school opened in April of last school year and we did an event for those kids also.

The school situation –

is terribly complicated but I will attempt to explain a little of what has happened and why. Before the storm many of the schools were failing the children. As a result, the state took over the administration of those schools, which left the Orleans Parish School Board with seven schools to administer. Now, here comes Katrina! Hence, when the children returned they had to be in neighborhoods where the schools could operate. Also, as the children returned, entities were formed to administer and provide education - thus the Algiers School District was formed with many other charter entities to follow. The University of New Orleans formed one such district for Pre-K through High School. They are using some repaired buildings, temporary buildings on site, and temporary locations across town. I think there are now four schools open under the Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB). The buildings are in the same condition. Some of the charters are operating out of O P S B buildings or at sites wherever they can physically operate---churches, etc.

The Catholic Archdiocese had a very good school system here before the storm and has been able to do the same shifting of resources within their system to provide an education for not only their students, though a fewer number of students, but have been able to provide for some of the other children in need of a school to attend.

I think there are 53 “public schools” open in Orleans Parish this year. It has been an overwhelming and daunting task for everyone involved and I must say with great sadness many of the children are suffering the effects of the situation.

Pray for the children!!! We all need your prayers, but they need your assistance!!

We continue to operate in all of these areas and will into the future as long as there is such need. That is the gift---We are here---and we are connected--- and we care ---and we respond---wherever and whenever we can.

Carolyn Mains

For more information on all the possibilities of partnering with schools or donating books please contact: Sheila Allred – Coordinator sheallred@gmail.com

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