

New Orleans Kids Partnership Overview Brief for the Grad Nation Action Forum September 2009

Collaborative Overview

Statement of Purpose

The New Orleans Kids Partnership (NOKP) believes that children and youth are the most valuable assets in our community. We are a voluntary collaboration of those who serve, support, engage and empower children and youth in the greater New Orleans area. Working in collaboration with our community, organizations and families, we develop, share, coordinate and leverage resources so that all children and youth reach their optimal potential.

Structure and Governance

The United Way for the Greater New Orleans Area is the convener of the New Orleans Kids Partnership and as such provides staff support and acts as the fiscal agent for the NOKP. Membership is open to all organizations and individuals, and currently there are 30 member organizations in the NOKP. The NOKP Council is made up of member agencies. Strategic direction, support and guidance are offered by the Steering Committee, which consists of multi-sector stakeholders that champion the work and effort of the New Orleans Kids Partnership. There is also a voluntary Chair and a Co-Chair within the Council who work with both the NOKP staff and the Steering Committee. Within the Council, there are active Working Groups, working to achieve the outlined goals of the partnership.

All members have access to the NOKP listserv and receive Weekly Updates that provide the latest NOKP news, as well as community information on events, meetings and resources available. Members also have access to the NOKP extranet, which houses important NOKP documents such as meeting agendas and notes and project specific information.

The NOKP Council meets monthly; these meetings serve as a space for: networking, connections, decision making and directing the work of the partnership. NOKP Working Groups meet as needed and define their schedules based on goals, benchmarks and leadership schedules. Some of the Working Groups include strategic planning and governance, evaluation, communication and advocacy.

About Our Work

The NOKP strategic goals are:

1. With a unified voice, NOKP champions the mission and vision of the collaborative and serves as an influential expert and resource of knowledge, responsiveness and effectiveness throughout the region.
2. NOKP effectively coordinates and integrates resources and strengthens the capacity of its members to ensure quality practices.
3. With a focus on community, children and families, NOKP will develop and implement successful practices of collaboration and integration.
4. With a commitment to proven results, NOKP will demonstrate impact through deliberate evaluation practices.

5. In the spirit of collaboration, NOKP will leverage its collective power to sustain the collaborative and ensure its relevance.

NOKP provides wrap-around supports at designated schools, sites and community hubs for children ages 0-19, with particular focus on youth ages 4-14 for the first year. The NOKP began coordinating wrap-around supports to the Martin Luther King, Jr. Elementary School in the 9th Ward. Today services are collectively provided at 72 public schools across four parishes in the Greater New Orleans area. In-depth coordination and multiple-partner work is occurring at 4 school sites.

The focus areas for our work include:

- Partnership cohesion and cooperation
- Integration with the schools
- Increasing community partnerships
- Improving student attendance rates and behavioral referrals
- Improving academic outcomes
- Introducing and exposing youth to the worlds of civic engagement, service, career paths and internships
- Providing support to families to meet basic needs

Supports and services provided by NOKP members include academic support programs, mentoring and tutoring, community service and service-learning opportunities, spring and summer camps, food programs, mental health services, career exploration, play programs, arts and enrichment, afterschool programming, career exposure and more. Based on the NOKP *Range of Services Survey* that was distributed this past spring, over the past year NOKP partners reached an estimated 20,000 school-aged youth in the Greater New Orleans Area, with an average of 5,648,126 contact hours (which is the equivalent of six weeks spent with each child). Additionally, 835 volunteers were engaged in NOKP partner programs, contributing 152,388 hours of volunteer time.

Upcoming priority action areas of NOKP have been identified (but not fully approved) by the group as the following:

1. Improved evaluation of overall efforts and youth outcomes
2. Increased *active* participation of multiple stakeholders and other youth development providers
3. Advocacy for public funding, quality measurement and consistent evaluation tools
4. Establishment of review mechanisms for quality youth-development practices

Resources Needed to Bring Our Work to Scale

- Staff
 - On-site coaching for coordinated and integrated work among diverse community resource and educational partners
 - Comprehensive evaluation of outcomes for youth
 - Direct-service work with youth at sites across the city
 - Coordinators at community and school sites
 - Associate Director or AmeriCorps VISTA member to manage the administrative work of the collaborative (grant reporting, meeting preparation and follow-up, etc)

- Volunteers
 - Long-term volunteers to serve: 1-3 year commitments as tutors for academic support; mentors for high school students in internships; mentors for high school students preparing for college; mentors for middle and high school students needing life support and life skills
 - Volunteers to also serve on the Steering Committee for NOKP work
- Informational Resources
 - Website maintenance, webhost, web domain cost, online survey costs, online extranet for communication
 - Communication packets for external and internal audiences
 - Platform development for advocacy efforts
- Other Resources
 - Quality peer review mechanisms (for self and group evaluation)
 - Transportation for youth development providers and families
 - Improved building conditions for schools and youth providers

Questions & Challenges for Consideration

1. How do you engage and include a decentralized school system in overall strategies to increase graduation rates, awareness of proven programs, etc?
2. What are some of the best tactics for linking the real work, issues and proven-solutions at the ground level with policy level discussions and public funding decisions at the municipal, state and federal level? Often there appears to be two different languages spoken and professionals in both arenas don't seem to understand one another and/or the work of each respective entity. How do we build a common language around both education and youth development?
3. New Orleans is experiencing one of the largest urban education reforms in the history of the public school movement in the United States. We often spend much time (too much) explaining the decentralized system, school takeovers, charter school components, measurement results (School Performance Scores, Louisiana Educational Assessment Programs, etc) and funding structures for these efforts. How do you best explain to non-educational professionals, funders, civic leaders and other professionals outside of these areas of expertise about the changes, in a way that everyone can understand (and so that we don't have to spend hours on the phone).
4. How do you engage the civic and business community (adults) with long-term commitments for youth success (i.e., tutoring/mentoring), especially for a large, city-wide effort (scale!) rather than pockets of involvement?
5. How do you blend local efforts and initiatives with national goals and strategies in a way that acknowledges nationally recognized best-practices but also continues the great foundation at a local level (and also preserves local identity/credit)?
6. Group dynamics can be tricky – what are some of the best strategies for orienting and incorporating new members, without stalling the progress of the original group or taking too much staff time to bring people up to speed?

7. How do you build trust among diverse partners but not spend too much time placating squeaky wheels?
8. How do you ensure process is honored, but allow pressure to come to group conclusions in a reasonable timeframe?
9. How do you best engage and hold accountable community volunteers (nonprofit partners, civic leaders, etc) that offer to lead a specific effort, activity or task? What should/could be proactive back-up plans when there is no follow-through?
10. What are the best community strategies for explicitly linking and connecting work across all youth age spectrums (0-21) and acknowledging all of the leaders and entities operating across age ranges and issue ranges?

Appendix A: New Orleans Kids Partnership Member List

Convener: Julia McNabb, United Way of the Greater New Orleans Area

Chair: Paulette Carter, Children’s Bureau of New Orleans

Co-Chair: Erika McConduit, Urban League of Greater New Orleans

Member Organizations

Agenda for Children
Big Brothers Big Sisters of Southeast Louisiana
Boys and Girls Club of Southeastern Louisiana
Children’s Bureau Inc
Children’s Defense Fund
City Year Louisiana
Communities In Schools New Orleans
Council on Alcohol and Drug Abuse (CADA)
Cowen Institute for Public Education Initiatives
Each One Save One
Global Green USA
GPOA Foundation
Greater New Orleans Afterschool Partnership
Greater New Orleans Nonprofit Knowledge Works
Hands On New Orleans
Institute for Mental Hygiene
Interfaith Works
Kids Rethink New Orleans Schools (Rethinkers)
Kids smART
Lagniappe Academies
Louisiana American Academy of Pediatrics
Louisiana Children’s Museum
Louisiana Department of Social Services, Office of Community Service
Louisiana Endowment for Humanities – PRIME TIME
Louisiana Public Health Institute – School Health Connection
LSU AgCenter
Mercy Family Center
New Orleans Outreach
Operation Reach
Recovery School District
Save Our Schools New Orleans
Second Harvest of Greater New Orleans and Arcadiana
Sports4Kids
Start the Adventure in Reading (STAIR)
St. Bernard Public Schools
Teaching Responsible Earth Education
teachNOLA
Urban League of Greater New Orleans
United Way for the Greater New Orleans Area
Young Leadership Council

Appendix B: Demographics & Statistics, New Orleans Public Schools

- There are 89 public schools currently open in New Orleansⁱ, serving approximately 35,976 students.ⁱⁱ These schools are a mix of traditional public schools and public charter schools, operating in a decentralized system of schools but fiscally accountable to the authority of the Recovery School District and Orleans Parish School Board.
- The majority of public school students in Orleans Parish attend charter schools (charters make up 57% of public schools in Orleans)ⁱⁱⁱ
- 81% of public school students in Orleans Parish qualify for free or reduced lunch in Orleans Parish^{iv}
- The average School Performance Score (an analysis of all student performance at one school) for the entire New Orleans public school area was 87.2 for the 2007-2008 school year (out of 200 possible points, with 100 being the “average” or every student is performing at basic level). Although this is low, it is a considerably higher than past years and outpaced the performance of other school districts within the state.^v

ⁱ Cowen Institute for Public Education Initiatives. http://www.tulane.edu/cowen_institute/

ⁱⁱ Louisiana Department of Education, School Enrollment figures for February 2009. <http://www.doe.state.la.us>

ⁱⁱⁱ Cowen Institute for Public Education Initiatives

^{iv} Louisiana Department of Education, School Information System

^v EducateNow! Analysis of School Performance Scores for New Orleans public schools. <http://educatenow.net>