

# St. John the Baptist Parish Public Schools

## Louisiana

**Superintendent:** Michael Coburn

**Primary contact:** Ann LaBorde, executive director of personnel and legal services\*  
*6,717 students, K-12, suburban*

### District Description

The Mississippi River runs through the center of St. John the Baptist Parish Public Schools, between New Orleans and Baton Rouge in southern Louisiana. The district's geographic location was of particular significance in the late summer and fall of 2005 as Hurricane Katrina left its imprint on St. John Parish. The towns of Edgard, Garyville, LaPlace, Lucy, Mt. Airy, Reserve, and Wallace and the entire school district are still recovering from the effects of the storm and flooding that took place in the gulf. Although some buildings within the parish were damaged, the devastation that took place in New Orleans was not seen in St. John Parish. When the settlement of St. John was founded in the 18th century, the early settlers chose higher ground, which is why the present-day residents of St. John Parish did not have to flee Katrina.

Instead, hundreds of families who were flooded out of their homes elsewhere came to St. John to live. Some came for a short time, and some are still there. The displaced families came to live with relatives and friends, and filled all the hotels in the towns. The parish enrolled almost 1,800 additional students in the weeks following the flood, and a third of them continue to attend classes in St. John schools.

By the second week in September, St. John Parish schools had a 30% increase in enrollment due to the displaced students. The majority came from New Orleans, most of them African American and Latino and spanning all ages, from kindergarten through high school. Five months later, by the end of February 2006, all but 700 of these students had left the parish schools because their families had relocated to other places.

### Key Findings

- Approximately 1,800 displaced students were enrolled in St. John Parish in the fall of 2005 as a result of Hurricane Katrina; about 700 of these students remained in the St. John schools in February 2006. This situation created much disruption in the St. John schools, but additional teachers were found, space was provided, and parish schools did what they could to help students feel secure in their new environments. Although the federal government and the state of Louisiana are allowing flexibility in No Child Left Behind testing and accountability due to the hurricane, the district decided to test as usual and to count the students who remain in the parish as St. John students. But the district did not know, as of early March 2006, how the state will apply the scores of displaced students in adequate yearly progress determinations.

\* Other contacts for this case study include Wilbert Omond, assistant superintendent of curriculum; and Annette Jennings, curriculum coordinator.

- Although raising student achievement continues to be a goal at the St. John schools, district officials and school staffs recognize that many students had serious disruptions to their lives in the past months. The displaced students are still adjusting to their new schools and living conditions, and many do not know how long they will stay because their parents are looking for jobs. The local St. John students have also experienced many changes in their lives, such as sharing their homes with extended families and friends and coping with disruption to their classrooms as students enroll and leave.

## Overall Impact of NCLB

St. John Parish Public Schools have made many changes to improve academic achievement and meet the requirements of NCLB. The biggest change took place three years ago when the parish closed its middle schools and made the elementary schools K-8 schools. The district expected this to raise achievement, and it has, but not as fast as district officials had hoped. The district's poverty level was in the 70% range, and now it is about 80% with the addition of the new families, most of whom have lost all they had and are starting over. This economic dislocation brings even greater challenges to the parish.

Ann LaBorde, St. John's director of personnel and legal services, recognizes that NCLB accountability will continue to change achievement in a positive way. "But there are still concerns about the fairness of NCLB across the state and the measurement of results of accountability," she said.

## Adequate Yearly Progress and School Improvement

The Louisiana Department of Education uses a growth performance score to measure progress for the state's schools for state and federal accountability. Each school has a growth performance score each year with the intent that all schools reach 150 by 2009. The targets are determined by calculating growth in achievement from 1999, when the minimum score for schools was set at 45. According to LaBorde, each school's growth target was established by subtracting their 1999 score from 150. That balance was then divided by eight, the number of years left on the state's accountability plan for NCLB. That became the school's growth target for the next year. In 2004 one school, Garyville-Mt. Airy Elementary, did not make AYP because grade 8 students missed the AYP target for math proficiency. The school was given an "academic warning" from the Louisiana state accountability system. In 2005, the school made AYP in all areas and increased by 14 growth points overall, which was a substantial increase.

The subgroup of students with disabilities poses the greatest challenge for St. John because 20% of the district's students have been identified for special education. These students are making progress, but overall it is slow, according to LaBorde.

## Testing Issues

The LEAP (Louisiana Educational Assessment Program) test is given to all students in the state in grades 4 and 8 in English/language arts and math. In addition, all students in the alternate grades of 3, 5, 6, and 7 take the Iowa Test of Basic Skills for English and math. AYP is based on a composite of scores from the two tests, with the scores of 4th and 8th graders on LEAP counting for 60% and the others for 30%. Attendance and dropout rates count for the remaining 10%. AYP for high school students is based on scores on state language arts and math tests in grade 10, and science and social studies tests in grade 11. Students must pass both these tests to graduate from high school.

Although the state of Louisiana allowed districts to have flexibility in testing in 2006 due to the hurricane disruption, St. John Parish chose to follow its accustomed procedures. Testing will continue in 2006 as it has in the past. District officials are finding it difficult to know how the scores of the displaced students will be used in AYP determinations. “The students will not be counted as a separate subgroup,” said LaBorde. She said the district has been told that students who have been with St. John from October 1, 2005, to March 24, 2006, will be considered the district’s students and counted in the subgroups for which they meet the criteria. The students who were enrolled on October 1, 2005, but not enrolled on March 24, 2006, will not be counted in AYP determinations for the district’s schools.

## Impact of NCLB on Curriculum and Instruction

Although some of the changes planned for St. John schools in 2005-06 are on hold due to hurricane recovery efforts, St. John Parish has continued to make modifications in curriculum and instruction. Reading has been a major focus across the grades, and math is receiving a renewed emphasis. The district has implemented Accelerated Math and adopted a new math series. The entire curriculum in grade 7 has been reviewed, and changes have been made in structure as well as content.

Raising student achievement has continued to be a goal at the schools, but district staff recognizes that students have had to cope with serious disruptions to their lives. This is true not only for the displaced students, but for the local students as well, since many of them are sharing their homes with extended families and friends and have experienced disruption in their lives.

## Teacher Qualifications, Support, and Professional Development

### HIGHLY QUALIFIED TEACHERS

St. John Parish had to hire teachers to replace those who left due to the hurricane. Some teachers had spouses who worked in New Orleans, and when those jobs disappeared, the families left in search of new employment. The enrollment of hundreds of displaced students in the St. John schools created a need for additional teachers, and many highly qualified teachers were available, according to Ann LaBorde. However, the parish could not guarantee anything in terms of employment other than day-to-day substitute teaching, knowing that many students would be leaving—which they did. “There are lots of teachers available,” said LaBorde, “but we are limited in how many we can hire.” An online service lists more than 500 applicants for positions in St. John Parish. Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) funds were used to hire additional counselors at the schools, but the funds were available for only two months. Other funds were used to hire additional administrators at the high schools and 40 teachers, all of whom had been teachers in New Orleans. Teachers and volunteers who had no place to stay lived temporarily with school board members, community members, and teachers who opened their homes to them.

### PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Most of the professional development in 2005-06 is taking place at individual schools. The needs vary from grade level to grade level and from school to school, but since all of the new hires are experienced teachers, no great amounts of training were required. Technology continues to be a major focus of training, as is the professional development needed to implement various programs, such as Accelerated Math and Reading, Renaissance Learning, and Early Literacy.

## Paraprofessional Qualifications and Support

Of the district’s 66 paraprofessionals, all but 12 have met the requirements of NCLB.

## Funding and Costs

There has been very little change in the Title I funding for St. John, as the allocation for 2005-06 is similar to that of the previous year. However, the district spent approximately \$5 million in fall 2005 for materials, transportation, and other resources for displaced students. District administrators expect the increase in enrollment to bring additional funds, but as LaBorde said, “We turn in all the reports, but we haven’t seen anything yet.”

## Data File—St. John the Baptist Parish Public Schools

**Location:** Southern Louisiana

**Type:** Suburban

### Number of Schools

Total: 12

Elementary: 7: (6 are K-8 and 1 is K-7)

High schools: 2 (1 is 9-12; 1 is 8-12)

Other: 3 (Child Development Center; Accelerated Program for students who have experienced failures; Alternative School for expelled students, grades 4-12)

**Number of Title I schools:** 9

### Student Enrollment and Demographics

Total number of students: 6,717

African American: 79%

White: 20%

Other: 1%

Low-income students: 80%

Students with disabilities: 19%

English language learners: 1%

### Teachers

Total number: 444

Percentage meeting NCLB “highly qualified” requirements: 71%

### Paraprofessionals

Total number: 66

Percentage meeting NCLB “highly qualified” requirements: 82%

### Total Number That Did Not Make AYP Based on 2004-05 Testing

Title I and non-Title I schools that did not make AYP,  
including those in improvement, restructuring, or corrective action: 1

**Number of Title I Schools in Improvement, Corrective Action, or Restructuring**

	Based on 2002-03 testing	Based on 2003-04 testing
Schools in year 1 of improvement (Did not make AYP for two consecutive years):	0	0
Schools in year 2 of improvement (Did not make AYP for three consecutive years):	0	0
Schools in corrective action (Did not make AYP for four consecutive years):	0	0
Schools in restructuring (Did not make AYP for five or more consecutive years):	0	0

**Number of Schools Offering Choice and/or SES**

	Based on 2002-03 testing	Based on 2003-04 testing
Schools offering choice <i>only</i> :	0	0
Schools in year 1 of school improvement offering SES <i>instead</i> of choice:	0	0
Schools offering SES <i>and</i> choice:	0	0