

# The New Orleans Index at Five

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## AN OVERVIEW OF GREATER NEW ORLEANS: FROM RECOVERY TO TRANSFORMATION

by Amy Liu and Allison Plyer

It has been often said that New Orleanians are resilient.

They have to be after being dealt three crises in five years—Hurricane Katrina and the levee breaches, the Great Recession, and now the oil disaster in the Gulf of Mexico.<sup>1</sup>

To be resilient is to be able to recover from a major stress or shock.<sup>2</sup> But New Orleanians have issued a more laudable challenge for themselves after Hurricane Katrina: They must not only bounce back, but do so better than before.

Yet, as the nation witnesses another disaster unfolding in the Gulf Coast region on the eve of the fifth anniversary of Hurricane Katrina, some have questioned whether New Orleans can rebound at all.

The answer is yes. The city and metro area have been recovering from Katrina and, in fact, may even be on the path to transformation.

National attention on the massive oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico has overshadowed the more mundane but herculean task of reinventing New Orleans. In the last five years, hundreds of citizens, government leaders, business and civic leaders, nonprofits, and philanthropies have been tirelessly working together to ensure that the city they love emerges from the 2005 hurricanes with all of the city's assets preserved but its flaws corrected.

This year's *New Orleans Index at Five* includes a series of trend analyses and essays of key reforms that together assess the extent to which these efforts are helping greater New Orleans rebound from Hurricane Katrina and subsequent shocks in more economically robust, inclusive, safe, and sustainable ways. Such post-Katrina aspirations contrast markedly with New Orleans' historic trajectory: a stagnant economy generating primarily low-wage jobs, high poverty and stark racial and ethnic disparities, and increasingly unsustainable growth and development patterns.<sup>3</sup> Further, city taxpayer dollars were supporting one of the worst public school systems in the country, an ineffective criminal justice system, and a city government known more for mismanagement than quality public services.<sup>4</sup>

To reverse these trends is not easy and does not happen overnight. Without a doubt, New Orleans is still a work in progress, only five years into a long period of recovery and redevelopment.<sup>5</sup> This anniversary represents a good moment to assess the extent to which efforts to date are putting the city and region on a brighter course for the future so leaders can make informed decisions that keep their city moving toward prosperity, sustainability and resilience. In short, this research finds:

- **Despite sustaining three “shocks” in the last five years, greater New Orleans is rebounding and, in some ways, doing so better than before.**



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- **Further, greater New Orleans has become more “resilient,” with increased civic capacity and new systemic reforms, better positioning the metro area to adapt and transform its future.**
- **Yet, key economic, social, and environmental trends in the New Orleans metro area remain troubling, testing the region’s path to prosperity.**
- **New Orleanians, and their partners, must use the latest oil spill crisis as an opportunity to continue the goal of transformation and further the progress made since Hurricane Katrina, moving the region toward prosperity.**

This overview summarizes each of these findings, extracted from *The New Orleans Index at Five* data trends and essays. To set these findings in context, they are preceded by a brief background discussion of what it means to be resilient in the aftermath of disaster.

## Background

### Post-Disasters Recovery

“...New Orleans is in the throes of *post-disasters recovery*.”

To start, New Orleans is in the throes of *post-disasters recovery*.

The 2005 disaster flooded roughly 80 percent of the city, destroyed over 182,000 homes and related public infrastructure across the seven-parish metro area and exposed the weaknesses of our national disaster response.<sup>6</sup> Parish leaders in the New Orleans metro area and the state, with federal agencies, are still grappling with the aftermath of the 2005 hurricanes.

By the end of 2007, repopulation, public school enrollment, housing demolitions, and new construction were picking up pace in the New Orleans area.<sup>7</sup> But the Great Recession essentially stalled the recovery’s momentum. Home sales fell, reflecting the meltdown in the national housing market. The private investment climate cooled as housing tax credits lost their value and overall financing dried up, at a time when housing and commercial redevelopments needed capital the most.<sup>8</sup> And the metro area experienced its share of layoffs as a result of the economic downturn.<sup>9</sup> However, federal housing and infrastructure rebuilding dollars still flowed, buoying job growth and cushioning greater New Orleans from the worst of the recession.<sup>10</sup>

By early 2010, the city was brimming with optimism for the first time in years. The New Orleans Saints claimed their first Super Bowl title, in the very stadium that symbolized the abject failure of the Katrina response. That same weekend, voters gave then-Lt. Governor Mitch Landrieu a decisive victory, electing him mayor with two-thirds of the vote and a majority of black support. And HBO rolled out its drama, “Treme,” which has served to underscore, both to New Orleanians and others across the country, the many assets that make New Orleans special and unique.

Then came April 20, when an explosion occurred on the Deepwater Horizon oil rig approximately 50 miles from the Louisiana shoreline, releasing tens of thousands of barrels of crude oil daily into the Gulf of Mexico. The residents and businesses of the seven-parish New Orleans metro area faced another environmental catastrophe, the full impact of which remains unknown.

It is against this harsh backdrop that one can and must appreciate the progress made in the New Orleans metro area since 2005.

## Defining Resilience

One way to evaluate progress is through the lens of regional resilience. There have been a number of studies produced in the last few decades, in the regional economic development and natural disaster response fields, about the ways in which a regional economy adapts to, bounces back from, or withstands external shocks that throw a metro area off its course. These shocks can be produced by a natural disaster, a national or global market force like a recession, or market forces that harm a particular critical industry or employer.<sup>11</sup>

In brief, there are two basic, related components to the meaning of resilience.<sup>12</sup> First, regional resilience refers to the capacities, resources, and characteristics, inherent or learned, that can help a metro area absorb, adapt to, or bounce back from a shock. Second, resilience also refers to the outcome or performance of a community after a shock. In this sense, a metro area would be considered resilient if it rebounds from a shock to pre-stress or better-than pre-stress trend lines.

A review of the academic literature and their case studies finds a common hypothesis about the factors or characteristics that can increase the ability of a metro area to absorb, minimize, or adapt positively to a negative shock and be resilient. They are:<sup>13</sup>

**Strong and diverse regional economy.** A diversity of major export industries, low reliance on durable goods manufacturing, and a relatively small gap between the incomes of high- and low-income residents help a region withstand or avoid negative economic shocks.

**Large shares of skilled and educated workers.** Workers with skills and higher levels of formal education have greater capacity to learn new skills and adapt to the changing needs of an economy. Regions with high percentages of highly-educated people are better able to withstand or avoid negative economic shocks.

**Wealth.** A community with funds, whether government, private, philanthropic, or individual, can help provide adaptive cushion and resources to invest in rebuilding, reconstruction, reforms, and needed capacities.

**Strong social capital.** A community with strong attachment to place, strong citizen participation and community engagement, and social cohesion between groups and individuals is more resilient.

**Community competence.** The ability of a community to solve problems, identify creative solutions, have nimble policies and institutions, and build strong political partnerships can all be critical tools to help a metro area adapt to and rebound well from a shock.

For metro New Orleans, the aspiration to rebound successfully from three successive shocks therefore takes two forms. The city must demonstrate its capacity to adapt positively to major disruptions. Second, the city must not return to its pre-Katrina state but instead rebound to improved outcomes that embody greater prosperity.

## Defining Prosperity

To achieve prosperity, greater New Orleans should strive to meet the following goals:<sup>14</sup>

- Quality economic growth that boosts productivity, spurs innovation and entrepreneurship, and generates quality jobs and rising incomes;

- Inclusive growth that expands educational and employment opportunities, reduces poverty, and fosters a strong and diverse middle class;
- Sustainable growth that conserves natural resources, maintains environmental quality, and increases the safety of the area; and
- High quality of life for residents and businesses that often includes a package of strong amenities and quality public services, like good schools and safe streets.

*The New Orleans Index at Five's* data trends and essays examine New Orleans' capacity and resources to be resilient post-Katrina and present data to help decisionmakers and change agents begin measuring the metro area's progress in achieving these goals of prosperity.

## Key Findings

### 1. Despite sustaining three “shocks” in the last five years, greater New Orleans is rebounding and, in some ways, doing so better than before.

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The negative impacts of Hurricane Katrina, the Great Recession, and the latest disaster, the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, are still reverberating through the New Orleans economy. Given that, the region's economy has far from settled into a predictable set of outcomes. Yet leaders are not waiting. They are pursuing transformational reforms in hopes of generating positive dividends in the future, while grappling with the immediate challenges posed by the oil spill and the prolonged economic downturn.

Leaders should be encouraged by some early signs. At the most basic level, the New Orleans metro area had recovered more than 90 percent of its population and 85 percent of its jobs by June 2010. The city itself is home to an estimated 354,850 persons, or 78 percent of pre-Katrina population levels, as of July 2009.

Further, the metro area is beginning to recover in some ways that break from its historic path, showing improvements on several key indicators of prosperity, such as improved average wages, greater entrepreneurship, and less poverty. To be sure, many of these “improvements” result from market and demographic shifts post-Katrina, rather than from intentional actions. Nonetheless, the trends are worth noting.

#### Quality Economic Growth

- **Relatively mild job loss during recession.** New Orleans has experienced a rather volatile employment picture in the last five years, as jobs plummeted post-Katrina and then shot back up a few years later, driven by rebuilding activities. The Great Recession put a stop to job growth in the region. But greater New Orleans shed jobs at a much slower rate than the nation, at -1.4 percent between 2008 and 2009 compared to -4.3 percent nationally, cushioned by rebuilding-related activities and the relative strength of the oil and gas industry. Prior to Katrina, the last time the New Orleans metro area bested the nation on job growth was 20 years ago, when it weathered the early 1990s recession better than the norm.
- **Emerging growth in knowledge-based industries.** The region's economy is beginning to diversify. This is primarily due to deep and steady job losses over the last 25 years in the key regional “export” sectors that have driven the New Orleans area economy—tourism, oil and gas, shipping, ship building, and food manufacturing. In their place

is the gradual emergence of more knowledge-based jobs, such as those in higher education, legal services, and insurance. In fact, by 2009, jobs in higher education surpassed ship building and heavy construction and engineering to be the fourth largest economic driver in the metropolitan area.

- **Improving wages.** Average wages in greater New Orleans grew by nearly 14 percent in the last five years, catching up to the national average for the first time since the mid-1980s. Average wages in the New Orleans metro have climbed to \$45,325, similar to the national average of \$45,716, up from \$39,842 in 2004. The increase in average wages may be due to both the slight growth in knowledge-based jobs, coupled with the severe loss of low-wage jobs in the tourism/hospitality sector since the storm.
- **Increasing entrepreneurship.** Entrepreneurship, a critical source of innovation, has spiked in the New Orleans metro post-Katrina, surpassing the rate of individuals starting businesses nationally after having lagged the nation for nearly 10 years. This is promising news. However, some studies have cautioned that entrepreneurship during a recession or periods of economic shock can mean that individuals fail to find employment and start businesses out of necessity; or they may be more likely to fail, given the weak consumer and market climate.<sup>15</sup>

### *Inclusive Growth*

While there are some trends that point to improving opportunities for households, they have to be interpreted with much caution. The bulk of changes in income result from changing demographics, with the city and metro area now home to a smaller share of low-income persons, nonwhite households, and households with children, many of whom were displaced, or chose to relocate after Katrina and have not returned.<sup>16</sup>

- **Less poverty.** While the poverty rate in the city remains high, at 23 percent (compared to 13 percent nationally), it is the lowest rate since at least 1979. By 2008, the number of poor persons living in Orleans Parish has been cut by more than half, to about 68,000 persons.
- **Growing median household incomes.** Greater New Orleans' median household income grew by 4 percent between 1999 and 2008 to \$47,585. Meanwhile, median household incomes declined nationally over that same period, driven by the 2007 recession.
- **Greater share of middle class families in the core.** Between 1979 and 1999, the city was home to a declining share of middle- and upper-income households. Post-Katrina, the city is now home to a broader number of households from across the income spectrum, specifically a higher share of middle-class families and upper-income families than before the storm.

### *Sustainable Growth*

- **Better air quality.** Air quality in the New Orleans metro has improved over the last decade, and generally since Katrina, reflecting in part national improvements in air quality and a decrease in vehicles and occupied buildings in the metro area after the storm.

### *High Quality of Life*

- **Stronger presence in arts and culture.** For New Orleanians, arts and culture are among the city's greatest assets, both in terms of providing a high quality of life and as a critical source of tourism. Since the storm (between 2004 and 2007), the number of relatively large arts and culture nonprofit organizations in the city has grown from 81 to 86, despite a smaller population from which to generate such growth.
- **Access to better schools.** In each of the seven parishes that make up the New Orleans metro area, a greater share of public school students post-Katrina are attending schools that meet state standards of quality. This is most notable in the city, where that share grew from 28 percent in 2003 to 59 percent in 2009.
- **Declining blight and abandonment.** While the overall number of blighted and vacant properties in Orleans, Jefferson, and St. Bernard parishes today remains higher than before Katrina, the number has dropped dramatically in Orleans and St. Bernard parishes since 2007, by 35 percent and 25 percent respectively, as homeowners have rebuilt their homes with Road Home dollars and large-scale redevelopments have been completed.

## 2. Further, greater New Orleans has become more “resilient,” with increased civic capacity and new systemic reforms, better positioning the metro area to adapt and transform its future.

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With New Orleans' economy still sorting itself out from the impacts of three crises, these trends serve as a preview of the transformation that may be in store.

The real makeover may be in the new spirit of reform and enhanced self-reliance in the city that have been borne out of these crises. As documented through the “essays of key post-Katrina reforms,” citizens and civic groups in the metro area have pro-actively taken the city's future in their hands, building cross-sector partnerships to deliver change, often in the absence of local government leadership.

New Orleanians' desire to use Katrina as a landmark moment to remake the city has been a true maxim.

Of the five factors or capacities that can help predict resilience, New Orleans has demonstrated three of them post-Katrina—greater social cohesion, increased community competence, and sizeable outside wealth, in the form of vast federal, philanthropic, and market investments.

First, New Orleans has experienced an unprecedented rise in community engagement after the storm, strengthening its reserve of social capital.<sup>17</sup> A recent survey of approximately 6,000 residents conducted by researchers at Louisiana State University, accompanied by extensive ethnographic research, underscored the change in the size and nature of civic engagement post-Katrina. In general, higher numbers of New Orleanians are participating in public meetings and processes, and are now more likely than residents of other cities to attend public meetings where city affairs are discussed. Neighborhood and grassroots organizations have demonstrated increasing organizational capacity and autonomy, such as the rise in nonprofit housing advocates and developers. Individuals and groups have become more strategic and sophisticated. And there is greater cooperation between groups and individuals, including the emergence of new umbrella groups.

Second, as a sign of community competence in problem solving, New Orleanians have demanded and pursued systemic changes in key community and government institutions



that were failing to deliver optimal results for citizens and taxpayers. The Index's seven essays do a remarkable job in summarizing the key reforms underway, how such reforms represent a break from the status quo, the outcomes and success metrics to date, and how remaining concerns in implementation yield important implications for the future.

The following are highlights of some but not all of the key reforms or new initiatives underway in the city and metro area over the last five years: <sup>18</sup>

- **An overhaul in public school management, quality, and choice.** New Orleans is home to one of the boldest public school experiments underway in the country. Post-Katrina reforms in the city's public school system include: the state takeover of most schools in the district; the conversion of a majority of public schools to charter schools; modernized facilities; and the recruitment of new teacher talent. Today, there is a smaller share of schools in New Orleans that the state deems as "academically unacceptable" and a greater share of 4th graders and 8th graders proficient in math and English.
- **A new system of accessible, quality, community-based health care.** Prior to the storm, the metro area was home to a weak, centralized health care system that delivered some of the worst health outcomes in the nation. Today, as a result of a mix of grass roots efforts and a close collaboration with state and federal leaders, the metro area provides access to primary care and outpatient mental health services in 93 sites across four parishes in the New Orleans area. This new system of community-based health care is serving a predominantly minority and low-income population (46 percent uninsured, 28 percent Medicaid). Emergency room visits have declined as patients have increased their visits for preventive care.
- **Sweeping changes in criminal justice.** The city has long been plagued with a criminal justice system that was corrupt, abusive, inefficient, and ineffective. In the months and years following Katrina, a diverse set of actors—government, civic, nonprofit, citizens—came together to undertake the tough task of "reinventing" key pieces of the criminal justice system. To date, these efforts have led to innovative programs that have begun to offer socially productive alternatives to incarceration; legislative changes, such as establishing an Independent Police Monitor as part of the new Inspector General's office; new interagency partnerships within the criminal justice system to improve planning and implementation across police, prosecution, and public defense; and top-to-bottom reform of public defense.
- **New capacities and commitments to holistic approaches to creating neighborhoods of opportunity.** Prior to Katrina, high poverty, government mismanagement, a thin community development infrastructure, and a lack of a commitment to quality, affordable housing beset the city and state. In the last five years, there has been a concerted effort to create comprehensive approaches to neighborhood redevelopment so that residents return to neighborhoods of opportunity, and to ensure that new and refurbished homes are stronger, sustainable, and energy efficient. At the core of the transformation underway is the rise of sophisticated resident and community groups undertaking holistic strategies to revive targeted neighborhoods in the city, such as the Lower Ninth Ward, Broadmoor, Lakeview, Gentilly, Central City, and Tremé. Meanwhile, federal, state, and local leaders have adopted approaches to create economically integrated developments and neighborhoods. And finally, federal leaders, especially recently, have taken

"The Index's seven essays do a remarkable job in summarizing the key reforms underway..."

bold steps to overhaul the troubled housing authority and ensure that low-income households, including those formerly in trailers, can find quality, permanent, affordable housing, instilling greater public confidence in the delivery of housing for vulnerable populations who still need resources to recover from displacement.

- **New city master plan that will codify citizen engagement and will have the force of law.** Pre-Katrina, New Orleans was characterized by weak planning, zoning, and land use laws and a culture such that development occurred in ad-hoc and politically unpredictable ways. After the storm, and a series of planning missteps and countless hours of neighborhood and citywide meetings, New Orleanians now have an approved master plan that promotes livability, economic opportunity, and sustainability and ways to “live with water.” The plan will also have “teeth,” likely provide development predictability, and formalize the community participation process.
- **A new framework for restoring coastal wetlands. Prior to Katrina and the levee failures, New Orleanians had walled themselves away from the water that gave the region its reason for being.** But in the last five years, that approach has been questioned. Citizens and leaders now recognize that wetlands restoration and learning to live *with* water are essential components of flood protection and the sustainability of the region. The state created the Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority, passed a master plan for coastal restoration, and recognized the need for smarter land use choices including the adoption of a state wide building code. At the federal level, the Obama administration released a “roadmap” in the spring of 2010 to guide federal efforts to successfully restore the ecosystems of coastal Louisiana and coastal Mississippi, the first comprehensive policy commitment from Washington concerning the restoration of coastal Louisiana. While that roadmap is being updated to reflect the latest challenges presented by the massive oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, opportunities remain for a bold federal plan and partnership, with BP, to clean up and restore the oil-slicked wetlands.

In addition to these efforts, citizens and civic leaders have also advocated for and won other critical governance reforms, such as the consolidation of the levee boards, the merger of the city’s seven property assessors into one office, the creation of an Office of the Inspector General within the city, an overhaul of city contracting, and other ethics reforms.<sup>19</sup>

Finally, while metro area-specific numbers are hard to find, the city and metro area have no doubt benefited from the vast funding coming from outside the region to invest in post-Katrina reforms and the expansion of New Orleans’ community and social infrastructure. At least \$42 billion of federal funds have flowed to the city or state to help the region respond to the hurricane and the recession.<sup>20</sup> Further, one study estimates that foundation and corporate philanthropies dedicated approximately \$1 billion in grants and program-related investments to the whole Gulf region between 2005 and 2009.<sup>21</sup>

### **3. Yet, key economic, social, and environmental trends in the New Orleans metro area remain troubling, testing the region’s path to prosperity.**

This new reserve of capacity, community competence, and wealth in greater New Orleans will be crucial in enabling residents and institutions to effectively prepare for future crises and tackle the challenges ahead. And, undeniably, the challenges are many. The goal of truly transforming the city and region is widely held. To get there will require earnest,

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focused, and broad-based efforts to reverse some troubling trends that remain or were made worse by the last three crises.

### **Quality Economic Growth**

- **Sluggish economy reliant on a few lagging industries.** The shift to a more diverse regional economy lags as stagnant or declining legacy industries still dominate but are not contributing to overall improved living standards. In 1980, the five largest regional “export” sectors in terms of number of jobs in the New Orleans economy were tourism, oil and gas, shipping, ship building, and heavy construction and engineering. By 2009, the top three drivers remained the same, while higher education replaced ship building as the fourth most important sector of the economy.<sup>22</sup> Construction remained in fifth spot. Thus, tourism, oil and gas, and shipping retained their top economic driver status, even though these industries are generally struggling to stay vibrant. Together these three sectors have shed tens of thousands of “export” jobs in the last three decades and sparked a decline in local-serving jobs, contributing to a New Orleans economy that is smaller today than it was in 1980.<sup>23</sup> But a smaller economy is not a problem if the economy is productive, boosting the standard of living for all workers and residents. Unfortunately, the metro area’s productivity has been relatively stagnant over the last 30 years, improving by only 6 percent, while it grew by 51 percent nationally. Meanwhile, the growth in knowledge-based jobs in greater New Orleans, while encouraging, is quite small compared to the extreme job losses in the oil and gas, tourism, and shipping sectors.

To understand more about New Orleans’ economic drivers, see Allison Plyer’s and Elaine Ortiz’s *Jobs that Matter Most: Regional Export Industries in the New Orleans Area*.

The Deepwater Horizon disaster may further weaken legacy industry sectors—especially tourism, oil and gas, and ship building—and exposes the vulnerability of these sectors to offshore or water-related catastrophes.

- **Relatively small, educated workforce.** Despite the sense that New Orleans is benefiting from an influx of skilled workers to the region, the numbers point differently, perhaps due to a loss of educated workers immediately after the storm. In 2008, the share of college-educated workers in the New Orleans metro remained unchanged from 2000, at 23 percent, even while it grew nationally by four percentage points to 28 percent. The share of the working-age population that has some college education did grow since 2000, but also lags the national average.

### **Inclusive Growth**

- **Stark social and economic disparities.** The latest census figures show that people of color make up 45 percent of the metro area population and 69 percent of the city population. Yet, the overall growth in median household incomes has not been broadly shared by blacks and Hispanics. Black and Hispanic households earn incomes that are 44 percent and 25 percent lower than whites, respectively. Further, just 13 percent of African Americans and 19 percent of Latinos have a college degree, compared to 29 percent among whites.
- **High numbers of suburban poor.** The share of the suburban population that is poor has remained relatively unchanged since the storm, staying at approximately 11 percent. Yet, the suburban parishes are now home to the majority of the metro area’s poor, with nearly 93,000 poor residents living there compared to nearly 68,000 in the city, creating wide implications for social service delivery, affordable housing, and transportation choices throughout the metro.

- **Severe housing cost burdens, especially for renters.** Despite the growth in average wages and median household incomes in the metro area, renters in the city and suburbs still pay too much of their earnings towards housing. Fully 58 percent of city renters and 45 percent of suburban renters contribute more than 35 percent of their pre-tax household income towards housing, compared to 41 percent nationally. Homeowners in the city also feel the crunch, with 30 percent bearing that high cost burden when paying their total housing costs, compared to 24 percent of U.S. homeowners.

### *Sustainable Growth*

- **Coastal wetland erosion.** As is well-documented, coastal wetlands have been eroding for more than a century, with further losses continuing after Hurricane Katrina.<sup>24</sup> Fully 23 percent of the land that protects the New Orleans metro in particular has converted to open water since measurements began in 1956. The quantitative impact of the oil disaster on the wetlands, and other aspects of the environment, remain unknown at this time but are potentially grave.

### *High Quality of Life*

- **High and increasing levels of crime.** Violent crimes and property crimes have risen in the city of New Orleans since Katrina and remain well above national rates, while crime rates have declined in the rest of the metro area.

## **4. New Orleanians, and their partners, must use the latest crisis as an opportunity to continue the goal of transformation and further the progress since Hurricane Katrina, moving the region toward prosperity.**

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For some, this *New Orleans Index at Five* collection reinforces the enormous progress that has been made in New Orleans in the last five years, especially given the metro area’s recent history and starting point after Hurricane Katrina. For others, the community has a long way to go to make meaningful inroads on prosperity, especially in advancing opportunities for those with the least among us. And yet for another group, the Deepwater Horizon oil disaster dealt a major setback for an already struggling economy and coastline, from which positive outcomes are hard to envision.

All of these angles are true. But it is hard to ignore the common thread that weaves through the essays of post-Katrina reforms. In the face of incredible hardship, citizens, nonprofits, political leaders, civic leaders, and philanthropy came together to demand an end to status quo outcomes and those efforts have launched a wave of structural improvements across nearly all aspect of community life. Further citizens, parents and civic leaders are not simply engaging in advocacy but have also become true stakeholders, staying involved in reform and contributing to meaningful implementation.

New Orleanians must continue to tap this energy and mobilize their assets to continue the goal of transformation to achieve true prosperity. And they must also lead by example, demonstrating their ability to carry out their end of the many partnerships needed to advance meaningful change.

But this report is not just aimed at New Orleanians. Federal, state, philanthropic, private, and other national leaders must join them in this goal of transformation. Federal leaders are highly focused on designing a post-oil spill recovery effort that builds on their post-

Katrina investments and partnerships. And they must lead, especially in those areas that span multiple states and metro areas, such as coastal restoration. The state, with the recent sunset of the Louisiana Recovery Authority, has an opportunity to create a new partnership with greater New Orleans that goes beyond Katrina or oil spill recovery but aligns state investments and policies that empower the state's largest economic engine to achieve its ambitions. In general, as new resources of time and dollars arrive in the region, these investments must aim to create a more prosperous New Orleans, one that continues to bring economic, environmental, and cultural value to the nation.

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## Key Actions for the Future

To that end, the following summarizes some of the key actions that New Orleanians, with their key partners, can take to advance the goal of transformation in light of multiple crises.

### **First, leaders must sustain and further the progress made since Katrina.**

There is great momentum behind fundamentally improving the public education, criminal justice, and health care systems while enhancing sustainable development and rebuilding homes in neighborhoods of opportunity. Yet, as the essays have identified, some of this progress is under threat and there are many areas of unfinished business, such as meeting the demands for affordable rental housing.<sup>25</sup> These efforts should not be rolled back but sustained and built upon. Each of the essays has identified a set of actions that leaders can take to advance the next round of improvements.

These are just a few:

- Increase the pool of qualified teachers by building the long-term employment prospects of native residents
- Provide sustained gap funding for the community-based health centers, as federal funding expires this fall, to ensure ongoing care of the uninsured
- Provide technical assistance and increased flexibilities for the 93 community sites to qualify as Federally Qualified Health Centers
- Continue to build cooperative reform policies among criminal justice agencies, with the assistance of the Department of Justice and local and national nonprofit organizations, and build capacity within government to drive systemic improvements based on public safety and justice outcomes
- Do not rescind or reallocate any unspent hurricane recovery dollars, and instead target unmet housing needs, neighborhood rehab, blight reduction, and community capacity

### **Second, leaders must embrace new opportunities presented by the oil spill crisis and the Great Recession.**

Both the recession and the oil spill disaster reinforce the need to pay close attention to the future of the regional economy and the coastline. As the Index points out, most of the major drivers of the economy have been declining, either for decades or since Hurricane Katrina. There is enormous opportunity presented by the oil spill and the recession to strengthen and diversify the core industry sectors that form the foundation of the

For critical perspective, see Richard Campanella's *Economic Timeline: Selected Historical Events that Shaped the New Orleans Economy, 1700-2010*

region's economy. And while New Orleanians had a wake up call after Katrina to embrace a more comprehensive approach to coastal protection, the latest disaster reinforces the importance of committing and investing in healthier coastal wetlands to protect the region's natural assets and key industries. Below are some possible ideas for how leaders can build on greater New Orleans' existing and emerging strengths to capitalize on these opportunities.

- **Diversify and strengthen the key export sectors of the economy.** Regional leaders can leverage strengths by: (a) tapping the area's expertise in energy and higher education research capacity to expand into renewable energy, such as hydropower (with water, as another asset); (b) challenging and encouraging the growing network of entrepreneurs to identify bold, sustainable business ideas that strengthen core industries; and (c) accelerating the transition to innovation-fueled, knowledge-based industries.
- **Expand the region's "export" capacity to help grow existing industries and the number of good-paying jobs.**<sup>26</sup> The Obama administration has called for doubling exports in the next five years, a national (and regional) imperative to close the trade deficit and tap growing global markets when domestic consumption is declining. For greater New Orleans, this could mean: (a) investing in innovation in key industry clusters to increase the quality of the goods and services produced in the region for sale to other regions and abroad; (b) modernizing the port and multimodal freight strategy to help move a greater volume of goods; or (c) helping small and mid-sized businesses reach global customers.
- **Empower the area's many institutions of higher education to help retrain and improve the quality of the workforce for growing sectors of the economy.** The relatively high share of workers with low education levels and skills may be holding back the transition to more robust and knowledge-based industries and hindering workers' pathways to wealth-creating opportunities.
- **Increase the capacity of small businesses, especially minority and women-owned businesses, to participate in new economic development opportunities.** Empowering disadvantaged business enterprises (DBEs) is a critical tool for closing the opportunity gap in the region and helping expand wealth and assets within minority households. The region has an opportunity to connect DBEs to near-term contracts presented by post-Katrina and post-oil spill recovery and longer-term economic opportunities.
- **Invest in the restoration of coastal wetlands, while advancing city steps toward "living with water."** There are many ideas at the moment for federal and state leaders to act quickly on the promise to clean up and restore coastal wetlands and habitat. For instance: Congress has already approved (but not appropriated) a number of nearly "shovel ready" coastal restoration projects in southern Louisiana. Funding just five of them could, at one estimate, cost less than \$2 billion and make meaningful inroads on long-term coastal restoration while creating job opportunities in the near-term.<sup>27</sup> Meanwhile, New Orleanians must lead by example and begin to implement some good ideas already in the city's master plan and the mayor's transition team report on coastal restoration to begin integrating sustainability practices that will enable the city to better integrate water into its form and function.<sup>28</sup>

### **Third, New Orleanians must strengthen the assets and capacities of regional resilience to minimize future shocks and shape the city's future course.**

If there is one lesson from all of these shocks, it is: There will always be another shock. Therefore, it is critical for New Orleanians to shore up those regional characteristics that will help the metro area absorb, minimize, bounce back from, or avert future crises. The following ideas come from Rick Weil's essay on community engagement, being mindful of the economic and community factors that can predict regional resilience:

- Continue to nurture an "open society" where engagement, networks, partnerships, and collaborations can continue organically
- Help maintain citizen participation as the community transitions from "crisis" to the mundane task of implementation
- Expand local "wealth" (e.g., tax base, private investment, philanthropy, individual) to match outside resources and sustain a level of self-reliance
- Diversify and strengthen the economy's export sectors and increase the share of its skilled and educated workers

Ultimately, all these are just ideas, or starting points, for how the city and region can move forward toward prosperity. However, political, civic, business, and community leaders must come together to identify a set of common goals, priorities, and strategies to set the region on a future course that leads to meaningful outcomes.

## **Conclusion**

According to some experts, a typical disaster-impacted city, around the five-year mark, begins shifting from a phase where "social and economic activities return to pre-disaster levels or greater" to a period of "betterment and development reconstruction" to build prosperity.<sup>29</sup>

Understandably, Hurricane Katrina was not a typical disaster; and New Orleans' experience with three crises in a five-year period is far from the norm. But, these phases of post-disaster recovery activities reinforce that now is the time for New Orleans, and its many partners, to identify the next generation of investments, policies, and capacity-building activities that will ensure the metro area's continued shift toward "betterment" and long-term prosperity.

Certainly, greater New Orleans has come a long way since Hurricane Katrina, when the city and region were decimated by the storm and levee failures. This year's New Orleans Index at Five aims to give New Orleanians, and their federal, state, private sector, nonprofit, and philanthropic partners, the metrics and tools to begin understanding the region's progress to date, its current baseline, and the possibilities for "betterment" in the future.

But data is just data unless acted upon. What is encouraging is that New Orleanians are already demonstrating they have the capacity, problem-solving tenacity, and passion to use this data in ways that will create a more prosperous city and region, both for themselves and the nation.

"...it is critical for New Orleanians to shore up those regional characteristics that will help the metro area absorb, minimize, bounce back from, or avert future crises."



## Endnotes

- 1 To be fair, the Great Recession did not have the same, severe impact on the region as Hurricane Katrina did or the oil spill will likely have. However, the 2007 recession still delivered a “negative” shock to greater New Orleans, especially in suppressing the housing market and increasing unemployment to unusually high levels for a typical post-disaster recovery period.
- 2 In the Merriam-Webster’s Online Dictionary, the term “resilience” means “an ability to recover from or adjust easily to misfortune or change.” There is also a wide academic literature that examines the concept and definition of resilience across multiple disciplines, such as on economy, ecology, biology, and psychology, and across multiple actors, whether region, community, individual, or institutions. See full array of research prepared by the Network on Building Resilient Regions at <http://brr.berkeley.edu/>. Also see two chapters in the forthcoming edited volume by Brookings, George Washington University, and Urban Institute on Urban and Regional Policy and Its Effects: *Building Resilient Regions* (Spring 2011). The chapters are: Edward Hill, et. al., “Economic Shocks and Regional Economic Resilience,” *Urban and Regional Policy and Its Effects: Building Resilient Regions* (Place: Publisher, forthcoming); Kathryn A. Foster, “Regional Resilience: How Do We know It When We See It?” *Urban and Regional Policy and Its Effects: Building Resilient Regions* (Washington: Brookings Institution, forthcoming).
- 3 “New Orleans after the Storm: Lessons from the Past, a Plan for the Future” (Washington: Brookings Institution, 2005), available at [www.brookings.edu/reports/2005/10metropolitanpolicy.aspx](http://www.brookings.edu/reports/2005/10metropolitanpolicy.aspx)
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- 5 According to a federally-sponsored study in the 1970s called “Reconstruction Following Disaster,” researchers found that communities underwent four stages of a recovery process after a major natural disaster, often spanning up to 20 years. Lawrence J. Vale and Thomas J. Campanella, “Conclusion: Axioms of Resilience.” In Lawrence J. Vale and Thomas J. Campanella, eds., *The Resilient City: How Modern Cities Recover from Disaster* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 336.
- 6 Hurricane Katrina damage estimates for the New Orleans region can be found in this GNOCCDC summary, “Hurricane Katrina Impact,” news release, April 15, 2010, available at [www.gnocdc.org/Factsforfeatures/HurricaneKatrinaImpact/index.html](http://www.gnocdc.org/Factsforfeatures/HurricaneKatrinaImpact/index.html) and U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, *Current Unit Housing Damage Estimates: Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, and Wilma* (2006), available at [www.huduser.org/intercept.asp?loc=/Publications/pdf/GulfCoast\\_HsngDmgEst.pdf](http://www.huduser.org/intercept.asp?loc=/Publications/pdf/GulfCoast_HsngDmgEst.pdf).
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- 8 Buzz Roberts, “Strengthening the Low Income Housing Tax Credit Investment Market,” *Cascade* 72 (2009), available at [www.philadelphiafed.org/community-development/publications/cascade/72/03\\_strengthening-low-income-market.cfm](http://www.philadelphiafed.org/community-development/publications/cascade/72/03_strengthening-low-income-market.cfm); Rebecca Mowbray, “Market Crunch Hinders New Housing,” *The Times-Picayune*, March 28, 2008, available at [www.nola.com/business/index.ssf/2008/03/market\\_crunch\\_hinders\\_new\\_hous.html](http://www.nola.com/business/index.ssf/2008/03/market_crunch_hinders_new_hous.html); Kimberly Quillen, “GO Zone Program Lagging in New Orleans,” *The Times-Picayune*, June 21, 2009, available at [blog.nola.com/tpmoney/2009/06/go\\_zone\\_program\\_lagging\\_in\\_new.htm](http://blog.nola.com/tpmoney/2009/06/go_zone_program_lagging_in_new.htm).
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- 10 Howard Wial and Richard Shearer, “MetroMonitor: Tracking Economic Recession and Recovery in America’s 100 Largest Metropolitan Areas,” (Washington: Brookings Institution, 2010).
- 11 Hill, et. al., “Economic Shocks and Regional Economic Resilience,” and Foster, “Regional Resilience: How Do We know It When We See It?”; Vale and Thomas, “Conclusion: Axioms of Resilience.”
- 12 This overview will not do justice to the careful work put forward by scholars on the concept of regional resilience. For a good review, see Hill, et. al., “Economic Shocks and Regional Economic Resilience,” and Foster, “Regional Resilience: How Do We know It When We See It?”

- 13 Hill, et. al., "Economic Shocks and Regional Economic Resilience," and Foster, "Regional Resilience: How Do We know It When We See It?"; Katherine Sherrieb, Fran H. Norris, and Sandro Galea, "Measuring Capacities for Community Resilience," *Social Indicators Research* (2010); and Edward L. Glaeser and Albert Saiz, "The Rise of the Skilled City," (Cambridge: Harvard Institute of Economic Research, 2003).
- 14 For a literature review and explanation of this definition of prosperity, please see: Alan Berube, "MetroNation: How U.S. Metropolitan Areas Fuel American Prosperity," (Washington: Brookings Institution, 2007), available at [www.brookings.edu/reports/2007/1106\\_metronation\\_berube.aspx](http://www.brookings.edu/reports/2007/1106_metronation_berube.aspx).
- 15 A study published by the Kauffman Foundation on "Entrepreneurs and Recessions" resulted in three broad conclusions: "First, it is reasonable to expect that fewer companies will be founded during weak economic periods. Second, companies founded during those periods might be expected to fail at higher rates than companies founded during more economically receptive periods. Third, the combination of lower birth rates and higher failure rates would conspire to deplete company cohorts founded during recessionary periods." Paul S. Kredosky, "Entrepreneurs and Recessions: Do Downturns Matter?" (Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, 2008), available at [www.kauffman.org/uploadedFiles/entrepreneurs\\_and\\_recessions\\_121508.pdf](http://www.kauffman.org/uploadedFiles/entrepreneurs_and_recessions_121508.pdf).
- 16 There have been a number of analyses on the composition of the New Orleans population after the storm. To name a few: Allison Plyer and Elaine Ortiz, "Who lives in New Orleans and the Metro Area now? Based on 2008 U.S. Census Bureau Data," (Greater New Orleans Community Data Center, 2009), available at [gnocdc.org/2008Demographics/GNOCDC\\_2008ACSDemographics.pdf](http://gnocdc.org/2008Demographics/GNOCDC_2008ACSDemographics.pdf). The other is a recent look at the demographic shifts from 2000-2008 in New Orleans and other metro areas, see "State of Metropolitan America: New Orleans, LA Metro," (Washington: Brookings Institution, 2010), available at [www.brookings.edu/metro/StateOfMetroAmerica/Profile.aspx?fips=35380#/?fips=35380&viewfips=35380&subject=7&ind=70&year=2008&geo=metro](http://www.brookings.edu/metro/StateOfMetroAmerica/Profile.aspx?fips=35380#/?fips=35380&viewfips=35380&subject=7&ind=70&year=2008&geo=metro)
- 17 New Orleanians, and Louisianans in general, are considered to have a high attachment to place. This is in part because a high share of existing residents were born in the state, following generations of family ties in the community. In 2008, Louisiana was tied with New York as having the highest nativity rate in the country, with 82.1 percent of residents born in the state. U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey 2008.
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- 19 Kevin Wm. Wildes, "The Rebirth of a City: Birth and Achievement of the Ethics Review Board," *Seattle Journal for Social Justice* 7 (1) (2008): 127-138. "In All Fairness: Building a Model Assessment System in New Orleans," (New Orleans: Bureau of Governmental Research, 2009).
- 20 The more than \$42 billion in federal aid to Louisiana and the New Orleans metro area includes: \$8.8 billion obligated to date to the state from FEMA Public Assistance; \$13.4 billion in Community Development Block Grant disaster funds to the state; \$15 billion for the Army Corps of Engineers to complete hurricane protection projects in the New Orleans area; and \$5.2 billion recently in federal economic stimulus funds to Louisiana, as of October 2009. "The New Orleans Index at Five: Measuring Greater New Orleans' Process Toward Prosperity," (Washington: Brookings Institution and Greater New Orleans Community Data Center, 2010). Government Accountability Office, *Gulf Coast Disaster Recovery: Community Development Block Grant Program Guidance to States Needs to be Improved* (GAO-09-541); "Top Construction Projects, 2010," (New Orleans City Business, 2010), available at [neworleanscitybusiness.com/wp-files/events/construction-2010.pdf](http://neworleanscitybusiness.com/wp-files/events/construction-2010.pdf); "Task Force Hope Status Report Newsletter" June 30, 2010, available at [www.mvn.usace.army.mil/hps2/pdf/June\\_30\\_2010.pdf](http://www.mvn.usace.army.mil/hps2/pdf/June_30_2010.pdf); Office of Legislative Auditor, "The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 in Louisiana: Section 1512 Reporting Requirements" (Baton Rouge, 2010), available at [app1.lla.state.la.us/PublicReports.nsf/C6F7989E10F496AE862576C5006440E6/\\$FILE/0001511A.pdf](http://app1.lla.state.la.us/PublicReports.nsf/C6F7989E10F496AE862576C5006440E6/$FILE/0001511A.pdf).
- 21 Loren Renz, "Giving in the Aftermath of the 2005 Gulf Coast Hurricanes: Profile of the Ongoing Foundation and corporate Response (2007-2009)" (The Foundation Center, 2009), available at [foundationcenter.org/focus/katrina/](http://foundationcenter.org/focus/katrina/)
- 22 The decline in export-related ship building jobs has been declining steadily since 1980 and accelerated post-Katrina. The recent announcement by Northrop Grumman to close the Avondale Shipyard by 2013, directly affecting 5,000 jobs and thousands of related jobs, only reinforces the existing shrinkage of the

sector in the region. Northrop Grumman, “Northrop Grumman to Consolidate Gulf Coast Shipyards and Explore Strategic Alternatives for Ship building Business,” news release, July 13, 2010, available at [www.irconnect.com/noc/press/pages/news\\_releases.html?d=196340](http://www.irconnect.com/noc/press/pages/news_releases.html?d=196340).

- 23 The metro area’s economy is smaller in that it has a smaller number of jobs today than it did in 1980.
- 24 The year 1956 is the first year in this particular study in which wetland loss was systematically measured. Wetland erosion was likely occurring before then, given history of human settlement patterns, accommodations to industry growth, and man-made coastal protection projects in the area. See Mark Davis, “To the Heart of the Matter: Coastal Restoration and the Future of New Orleans,” In *The New Orleans Index at Five*. (Washington: Brookings Institution and Greater New Orleans Community Data Center, 2010).
- 25 Rose and Tuggle’s essay notes that when the public housing authority opened up its voucher waiting list in September 2009 for the first time since 2001, nearly 29,000 people applied for 4,000 vouchers. Laura Tuggle and Kalima Rose, “Community Action: Bringing People Home to Stronger Neighborhoods,” In *The New Orleans Index at Five*. (Washington: Brookings Institution and Greater New Orleans Community Data Center, 2010).
- 26 Emilia Istrate, Jonathan Rothwell and Bruce Katz, “Export Nation: How U.S. Metros Lead National Export Growth and Boost Competitiveness,” (Washington: Brookings Institution, 2010), available at [www.brookings.edu/reports/2010/0726\\_exports\\_istrate\\_rothwell\\_katz.aspx](http://www.brookings.edu/reports/2010/0726_exports_istrate_rothwell_katz.aspx).
- 27 In 2007, Congress authorized the Water Resources Development Act which included a series of important coastal restoration projects for southern Louisiana, jointly identified by state and federal leaders. State officials have claimed that funding just five of the top near-term projects authorized by WRDA, which include a mix of diversion and other projects, would cost \$1.8 billion.
- 28 “Flood Protection and Coastal Restoration: Transition New Orleans Task Force,” available at [transitionneworleans.com/taskforce/Flood](http://transitionneworleans.com/taskforce/Flood).
- 29 Vale and Thomas, “Conclusion: Axioms of Resilience.” 336.

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## Steering Committee

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Bob Brown, Business Council of New Orleans	Marvalene Hughes, Dillard University
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Keith Crawford, Greater New Orleans, Inc.	Albert Ruesga, Greater New Orleans Foundation
Flozell Daniels, Louisiana Disaster Recovery Foundation	Tim Ryan, University of New Orleans
Norman Francis, Xavier University	Denise Thornton, Beacon of Hope

**B** | Metropolitan Policy Program  
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The Brookings Institution Metropolitan Policy Program provides decision makers with cutting-edge research and policy ideas for improving the health and prosperity of cities and metropolitan areas. Created in 1996, the program is based on a simple premise: The United States is a metropolitan nation. These regions are the hubs of research and innovation, the centers of human capital, and the gateways of trade and immigration. They are, in short, the drivers of the U.S. economy, and American competitiveness depends on their ability to prosper in innovative, inclusive, and sustainable ways.

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[www.gnocdc.org](http://www.gnocdc.org)

The Greater New Orleans Community Data Center gathers, analyzes and disseminates data to help nonprofit and civic leaders work smarter and more strategically. By publishing the most reliable data in a highly usable format, [www.gnocdc.org](http://www.gnocdc.org) has become the definitive source for information about New Orleans and its neighborhoods. The Data Center was founded in 1997 and is used by federal agencies, national media, elected officials, neighborhood organizations, and local nonprofits. The Community Data Center is a product of Nonprofit Knowledge Works, and longtime members of the Urban Institute's National Neighborhood Indicators Partnership—local data experts dedicated to community change. GNOCDC is recognized across the country for expertise in actionable data visualization.

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## About The New Orleans Index at Five

The Greater New Orleans Community Data Center and the Brookings Institution Metropolitan Policy Program have been jointly tracking the recovery of New Orleans and the metro area through the regular publication of *The New Orleans Index*. The Index's value as a regularly updated, one-stop shop of Katrina recovery indicators has made it the go-to resource for national and local media, decision-makers across all levels of government, researchers, and leaders in the private sector and nonprofit community.

*The New Orleans Index at Five* aims to move past disaster recovery to assess the remaking of a great American city and examine the extent to which New Orleans is poised to bounce back from any shock better than before. *The New Orleans Index at Five* systematically documents major post-Katrina reforms with the inclusion of seven essays contributed by leading local scholars and practitioners. Then relying on 20 indicators, we examine progress toward metropolitan prosperity, organized by economy, inclusion, quality of life, and sustainability. To do so, we examine the progress from the last five years (from 2004 to the most current data available) and compare that against the prior trend lines, going back to 1980 wherever possible. Indicators were selected from reliable data sources that are regularly updated and, therefore, will allow for tracking going forward.

This Index is intended to be the first of a series of reports that measure progress and prosperity in the greater New Orleans area with indicators and essays that change over time depending on new data availability, relevance, and the needs of the community.

### ***The New Orleans Index at Five collection:***

#### ***An Overview of New Orleans Index at Five: From Recovery to Transformation***

Amy Liu (Brookings Metropolitan Policy Program)

Allison Plyer (Greater New Orleans Community Data Center)

#### ***Twenty Indicators Measuring Greater New Orleans' Progress Toward Prosperity***

Amy Liu (Brookings Metropolitan Policy Program)

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#### ***Essay Series Reviewing Key Reforms After Hurricane Katrina***

##### ***School by School: The Transformation of New Orleans Public Education***

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Allison Plyer and Elaine Ortiz (Greater New Orleans Community Data Center)