



BATON ROUGE ACHIEVEMENT ZONE

COMMUNITY-BASED PRIORITIES FOR SCHOOL TRANSFORMATION

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Engaging parents, students, local leaders and a cross-section of community members in the work of turning around chronically underperforming schools is central to the mission of the Recovery School District. In an effort to achieve that mission, The RSD created the Baton Rouge Achievement Zone Advisory Board (BRAZAB), a diverse group of stakeholders from across Baton Rouge who are working to create and foster a sustainable ecosystem for school turnaround in the Baton Rouge Achievement Zone (BRAZ). Working as a liaison to foster dialogue with community members on values and priorities for transformation of public schools in the region, the BRAZAB will provide a report to the RSD Superintendent on community-based priorities for school transformation in the BRAZ and the capacity of approved charter school operators to meet those priorities. This process will be used to inform the superintendent's siting decision-making. Additionally, this will allow for critical feedback to charter school operators regarding community expectations for schools in the zone, and provide a pathway to successfully launch new schools.

The community engagement process to determine a set of community-based priorities included focus group conversations and community visioning meetings with key stakeholders. These priorities will be used as a guide for community stakeholders to give feedback during charter school operator introduction meetings. These community priorities were initially developed through a series of focus group conversations led by faculty and graduate assistants from the Nelson Mandela School of Public Policy at Southern University and the Department of Education and Human Sciences at Louisiana State University. The research uncovered in focus group discussions was used to guide additional small group dialogue in community visioning meetings facilitated by BRAZAB members and the RSD.

Through these facilitated conversations, four major themes emerged:

- **Leadership in Education:** high quality leaders and principals are one of the most important factors in success of schools;
- **Creating Great Schools For All Kids:** set high expectations for student success;
- **Empowering Parents:** give parents the tools to be successful, engaged parents;



- **Connected to Community:** create space and opportunity for community to support schools

Below is a list of priorities that emerged most consistently across different stakeholder groups for each of the major themes:

Tops Priorities for Leadership in Education:

- 1) School leaders and teachers have a collective vision, shared goals, and expectations for success.
- 2) Hire quality principals and teachers who are committed to the success of their students; have high expectations for themselves and their students; and can clearly communicate to staff, parents, and students how high expectations can be met.
- 3) Create space for parents and community to share in the success of the school.
- 4) School leaders and staff understand the culture of the community- both the legacy and traditions that are important to families and the challenges that families face and that students may need assistance with overcoming.

Top Priorities for Creating Great Schools for All Kids:

- 1) Create expectation of greatness for school leaders, teachers, and students.
- 2) Schools are safe and caring environments.
- 3) Schools build trust with parents and students.
- 4) Develop students academically, foster critical thinking skills, and build character in students to support their development.
- 5) Support diverse extra-curricular activities including athletics, arts, music, drama, and more.
- 6) Prepare students for college, and career and technical training.

Top Priorities for Empowering Parents:

- 1) Schools work to increase parental involvement, but are prepared to educate students even when it doesn't exist.
- 2) Be flexible and meet parents where they are.
- 3) Provide parent liaisons to help develop consistent relationship building opportunities with parents.
- 4) Schools should be innovative and consistent in the ways they communicate and interact with parents.
- 5) Provide parent education opportunities and help them map out what success looks like for their children - give parents the tools needed to ensure their students are on track.



Top Priorities for Connecting to Community:

- 1) Honor legacy and tradition of schools and community.
- 2) Establish community liaisons to help foster and develop relationships with school communities that help build a foundation for success.
- 3) Work with community to provide support services and resources for students and parents. For example, mentoring, health care, career-training, extended day services for working parents or transportation services.
- 4) Develop students who are civically engaged in their communities.