School Closure and Replacement: the New Orleans Experience

Agenda

1. Overview
2. RSD Strategy
3. New Orleans Results
4. Lessons Learned
5. Managing Closure Processes

Overview
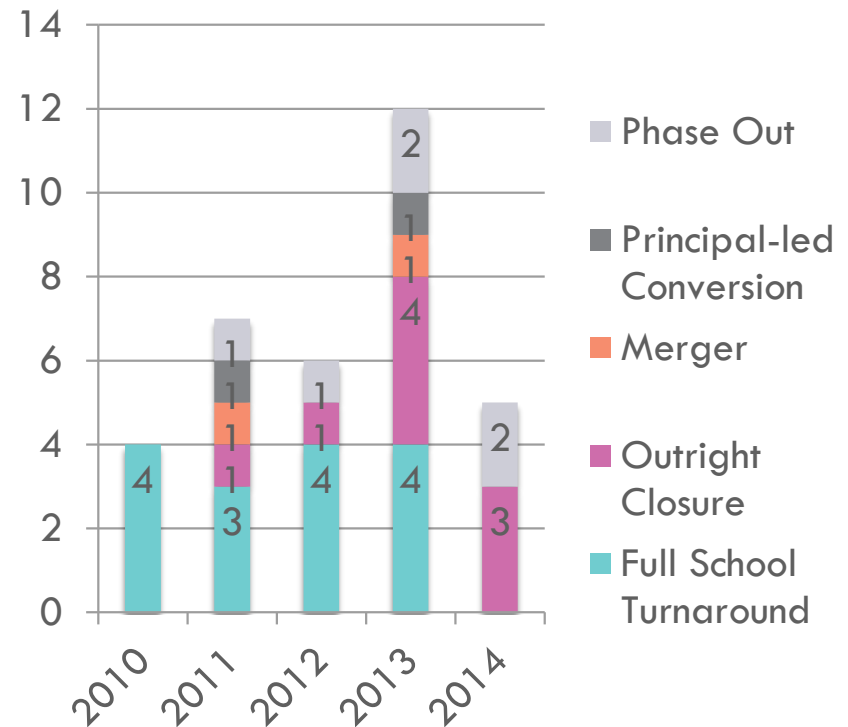
Key Findings & Context

Key Findings

Over the last 5 years, we have closed/replaced 34 schools in New Orleans – including 11 outright – and believe the majority of these closures resulted in better outcomes for kids.

In our data set both turnaround and outright closures have led to better school-level and student-level performance.

Context

We conclude from our experience that school closure – including outright closure - can be an effective and positive part of a system transformation strategy so long as adequate attention is paid to issues of transparency and equity.
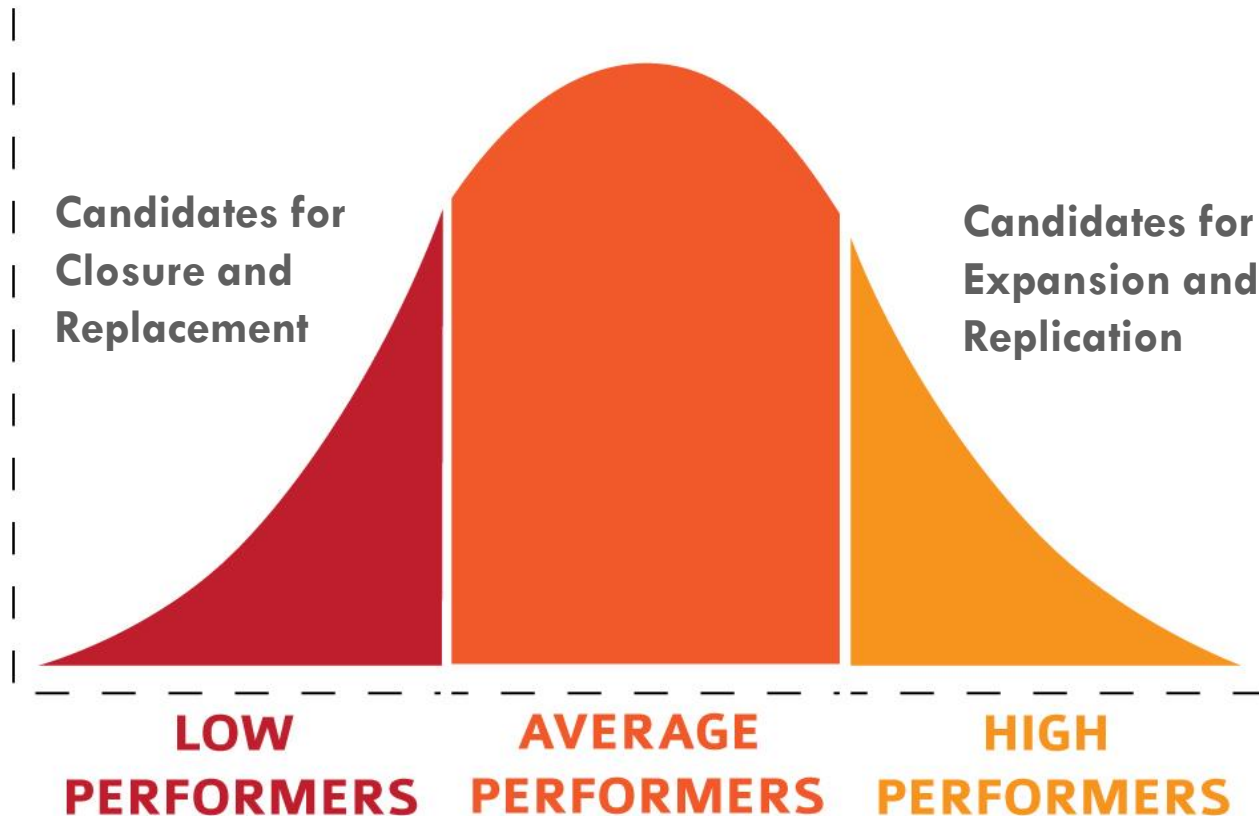
RSD Strategy

RSD Approach to Portfolio Management

Candidates for Closure and Replacement

Candidates for Expansion and Replication

LOW PERFORMERS   **AVERAGE PERFORMERS**   **HIGH PERFORMERS**

Shifting the Curve

We strive to shift the curve to the right by consistently closing low-performers, replicating high-performers, and increasing performance expectations for all schools.

Evolution of RSD Strategy

Initial RSD strategy focused on whole school turnaround and measured success in terms of the number of failing schools.

Introduction of centralized enrollment provided us with better data on system capacity, the ability to provide guarantees/priorities for displaced students, and the ability to track/analyze the impact of our school actions.
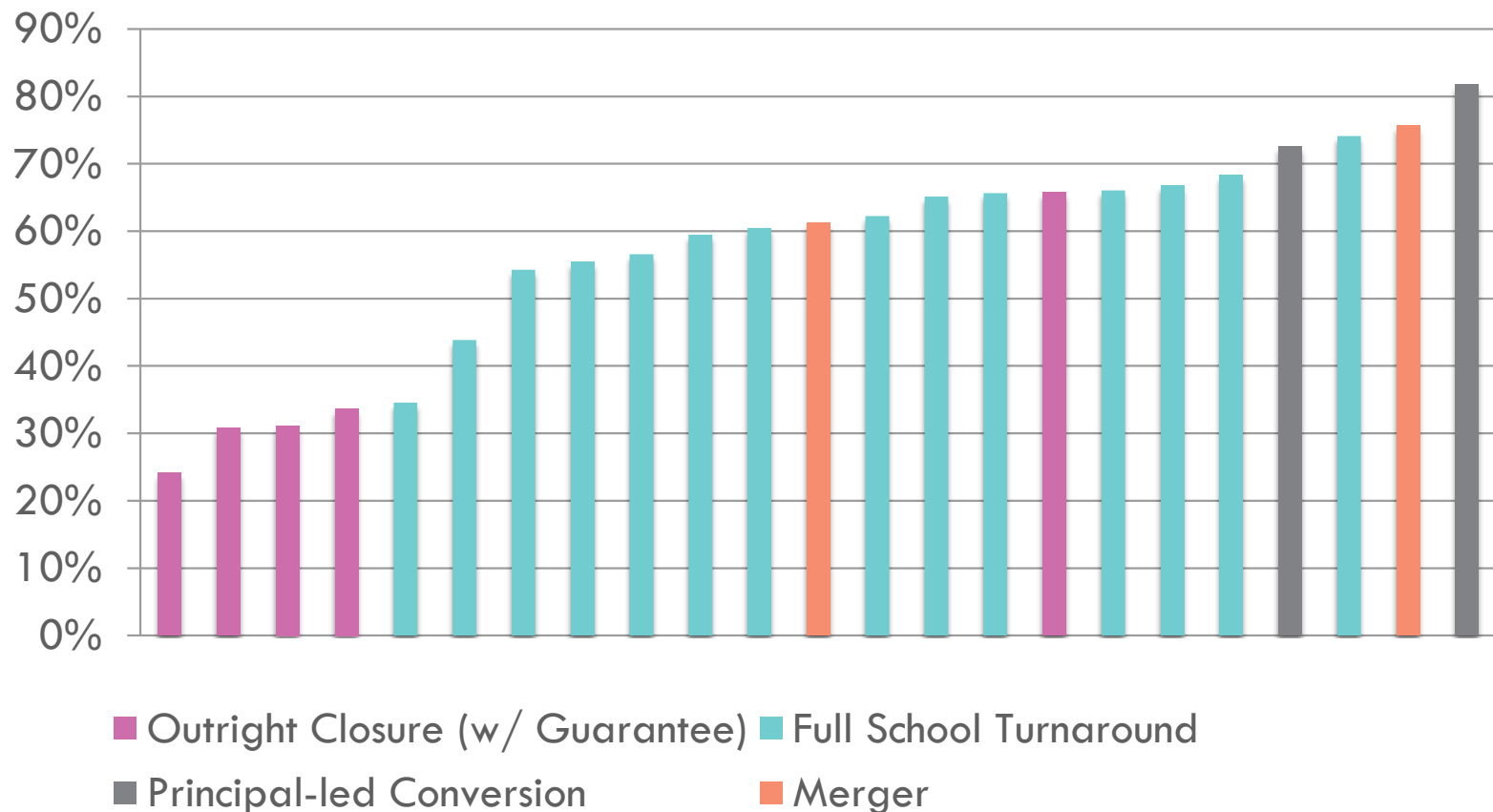
We learned that we could positively impact more students, more quickly by exploring a wider range of school replacement options including outright closure.

New Orleans Results

Student Retention Varies

% of Students Remaining at Replacement School

Legend:
- Outright Closure (w/ Guarantee)
- Full School Turnaround
- Principal-led Conversion
- Merger

Displaced Students Attend Better Schools

Bar chart comparing SPS scores across three turnaround types:

- **Outright Closure:** Pre-Turnaround SPS 60.8, Avg. SPS of Students' New School 84.9, Post-Turnaround SPS NA
- **Full-School Turnaround:** Pre-Turnaround SPS 56.6, Avg. SPS of Students' New School 74.3, Post-Turnaround SPS 71.8
- **Merger:** Pre-Turnaround SPS 61.2, Avg. SPS of Students' New School 97.7, Post-Turnaround SPS 95.1

Legend:
- Pre-Turnaround SPS
- Avg. SPS of Students' New School
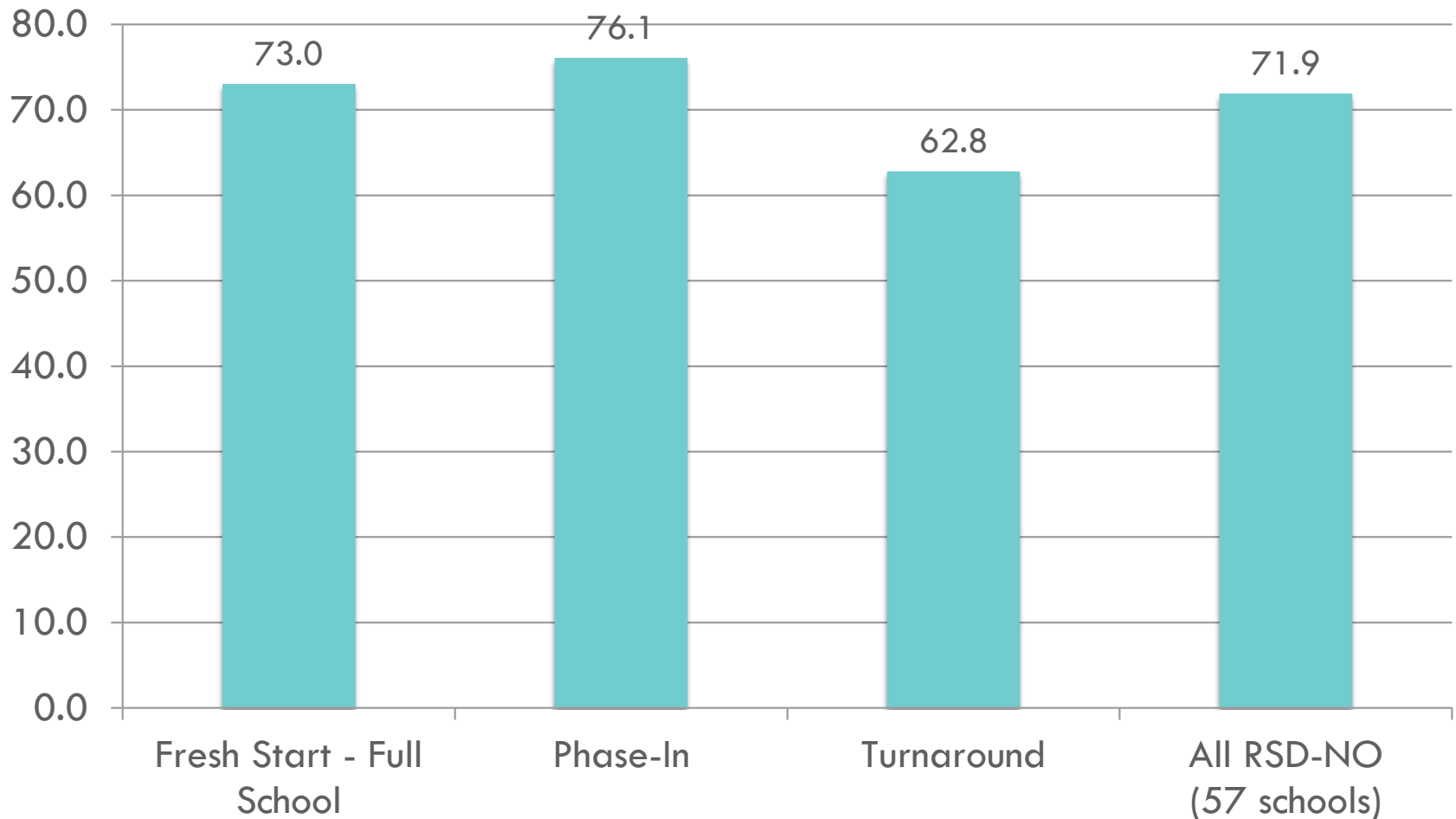- Post-Turnaround SPS

Improved Outcomes for Students

Avg. Growth on LEAP/iLEAP Performance Level (5=Advanced, 1=Unsatisfactory)
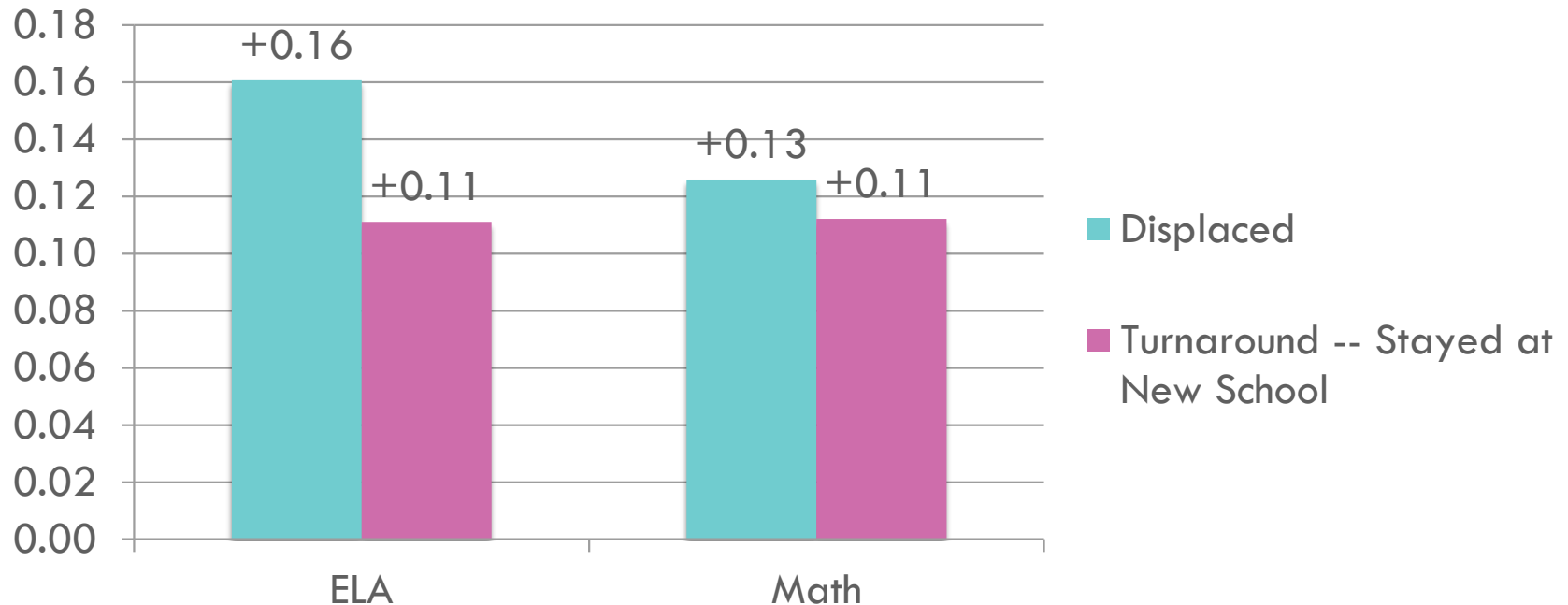
Overall, standardized test scores improved for students in the year following turnaround/closure. Students displaced by school closure saw more growth than students that remained at the turnaround school.

Comparison of School Results

Weighted Average SPS (2013)

Lessons Learned

Lessons Learned

Strategy	Strengths/Opportunities	Weaknesses/Threats
Merger/Con solidation	• Less disruptive than outright closure • Maximizes building utilization	• Community resistance can cause delays and/or rocky starts
Full-School Turnaround	• Popular with community stakeholders • Less disruptive • Federal funding	• Hard work, expensive, often politically contentious • Improved performance often takes time, particularly for HS
Outright Closures	• Students get a guarantee or priority enrollment to higher performing school • Consistent closure criteria based on academic performance	• Mixed community reactions • Must have system capacity for displaced students, funding to support transition • May require further bus travel
Phase-Outs	• Strong academic results for phase-in schools	• Expensive and disruptive for phase out school/students

Managing Closure Processes

Default Closure Framework

School	2013	2014	2015
Regular	• Any renewal: D letter grade or higher Initial Renewal Exemptions: • AI from 4th year is equivalent of D or higher; • Growth SPS of D or higher; • An average of 5 or more SPS points of growth per year of the charter contract (from Pre-AI to last year of data); • 30% or fewer of students are enrolled in tested grades; OR • Alternate tool used	• Any renewal: D letter grade or higher	• 1st renewal: D letter grade or higher • **Subsequent renewals: C letter grade or higher**
Full School Turnaround		• Any renewal: D letter grade or higher OR • An average of 5 or more SPS points of growth per year of the charter contract (from Pre-AI to last year of data)	• 1st renewal: D letter grade or higher • **Subsequent renewals: C letter grade or higher** OR • An average of 5 or more SPS points of growth per year of the charter contract (1st and 2nd renewals only)
Alternative School	• Schools would most likely not meet criteria • Superintendent's discretion necessary to keep open	• Assess using separate framework designed with schools	• Assess using separate framework designed with schools

What to consider prior to closing?

In determining the right closure strategy:

- Facilities availability and condition

- System-level capacity (supply vs. demand)

- Availability of better seats at relevant grades near where the students live and/or the closing school is located

- Availability of ready and willing operators to do turnaround

School Action Timeline

Annual cycle of school actions aligned to the timeline for two important events:

1. Release of the most recent school performance scores
2. Opening of OneApp / enrollment process

We try to notify parents as early as possible so they can make the most informed possible decisions on where to send their kids the next year.

Transformation Process