

2013 Citizens for 1 Education Committee Report

The fall of 2012 through the spring of 2013 was an active time for the Education Committee of Citizens for 1 Greater New Orleans. This report is organized by focus area. During the year, the committee met approximately twice a month to discuss topics of interest and concern among the members and with invited guests. This process assisted the committee in reaching consensus on positions to take.

Orleans Parish School Board

The Education Committee was one of six community organizations which hosted an Orleans Parish School Board Candidates' Forum on October 2, 2013, at the First Baptist Church. The purpose was to give New Orleans voters the opportunity to understand the positions of the candidates from the 7 districts. Dr. Scott Cowen, President of Tulane University, was the moderator. The groups participating with Citizens for 1 were Baptist Community Ministries, the Cowen Institute, the League of Women Voters, the Urban League and the Young Leadership Council. Candidate participation and attendance was high. The forum was taped and played on public access television throughout the fall.

The Education Committee also endorsed the platform of *Forward New Orleans* and participated in interviewing the school board candidates about their position regarding the [platform](#).

Members attended the school board meetings throughout the year and reported to the committee on actions and issues. After the new school board was sworn in and officers were elected, it became apparent that the new President would exert the power of that position. The President has extraordinary control over the agenda: the President sets the agenda and is required to post it 24 hours before the meeting. A unanimous vote, which includes the President, is needed to change the agenda.

- At the February meeting, the President failed to put a technical authorization of New Market Tax Credits for Wheatley School, a project already under construction, on the agenda. The tax credits had been approved by the prior board, were included in the project budget, and needed to be executed before the next board meeting. The issue was replacing the old board members' names with the new members'. [Citizens for 1, the Business Council and other civic organization spoke in support of putting the item on the agenda](#). The motion failed by 1 vote, which was the President's. Three school board members signed a request for a special meeting to vote on the tax credits. At the special meeting, which was attended by members of Citizens for 1, there were representatives from numerous Disadvantaged Business Enterprises (DBE's), who felt they had not been adequately represented in the post-Katrina rebuilding process. The tax credits, which were the purpose of the special meeting, were ultimately passed.

At the February meeting, the President also attempted to go into Executive Session to discuss and nullify the employment contract for the Deputy Superintendent. This contract had been signed by the prior board. Although the board did not meet in Executive Session, the terms of employment was changed to "at will" at a subsequent meeting.

- In April prior to the meeting, the President had signaled that he wanted a local firm reporting to an appointed community advisory board to conduct the search for the next Superintendent of Schools. Citizens took the position that the selection of the Superintendent was the Board's

primary responsibility and that the search should be done by a national firm with expertise in education. Ultimately, [the board passed a RFQ for a national firm](#).

- As summer approached, the President began to signal that he wanted the acting Superintendent to resign. Citizens for 1 did not support replacing the acting Superintendent until a new Superintendent could be found through a national search.
- Members of the Education Committee attended the May 9 meeting of the resumed School Facilities Master Plan Oversight Committee, which is authorized by BESE, and has advisory oversight of the rebuilding projects for Orleans Parish schools. This was an orientation meeting and not action was taken.

Early Childhood Education

In 2011-12, the Education Committee had agreed to support the expansion of Pre-Kindergarten for Louisiana. During the 2012 legislative session, Pre-K was incorporated into the broader scope of Early Childhood Education, which was defined as birth through 4 years. This legislation was enacted into law as Act 3. The intent was to have children “kindergarten-ready” by outlining competencies by age expected from childcare providers receiving public money. Implementation of the act would be the challenge. Citizens for 1 entered into a state-wide coalition with many early childhood advocacy organizations. Citizens for 1 participated in a state-wide survey in November conducted by BrightStart, Louisiana’s current early childhood system. In December, Citizens for 1 and the coalition successfully advocated before BESE for the roll-out of Act 3 to be done through a pilot project before full implementation throughout the state. Agenda for Children was subsequently selected as the pilot agency for the New Orleans area.

Two bills were brought before the 2013 legislature regarding the implementation of Act 3. SB 130 by Sen. Appel was to create a network of providers and a tiered rating system. This bill passed the Senate Education Committee and the full Senate; however, it was defeated on the House floor. SB 222 by Sen. Walsworth outlined the licensing process for early childhood education centers to be eligible to receive public funds. This bill passed and was signed into law.

Citizens for 1 will continue working with the coalition and with Agenda for Children as this foundational component of public education evolves in Louisiana.

Common Core State Standards

In July of 2010, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) approved Louisiana’s participation in Common Core State Standards. These are internationally bench-marked standards in Math and English Language Arts, which includes reading comprehension and writing. The Department of Education has been actively helping districts transition to these more rigorous standards, which are to be implemented in 2014. As the date for participation moved closer, there has been a national awareness of this change and some confusion between standards and curriculum. In response to fears from constituents that this might reflect a nationalization of public education, Sen. Crowe introduced SCR 68, which would request BESE to withdraw from CCSS and to cease implementation measures. Citizens for 1 was one of many education advocacy organizations that testified in support of CCSS.

Although SCR 68 did pass out of the Senate Education Committee, it was stricken from the record on the Senate floor. [Read “Common core standards are important for Louisiana students”.](#)

BESE

Citizens for 1 took the following positions before BESE:

- To strengthen criteria for private school participation as Scholarship (voucher) schools. Superintendent White recommended, and BESE approved, that private schools receiving any state money would be accredited by the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS) or the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS). The Department of Education would assist schools in meeting these standards.
- To amend [Bulletin 126](#) to provide for a limit on the number of seats that a charter high school could set aside for students coming from feeder elementary schools. (link to one page document on Bulletin 126) Citizens for 1 suggested a 50% cap. Although there was a limit, it was 80%. This was a one-year pilot; therefore, Citizens for 1 may again ask BESE for 50%.
- To roll out Act 3--Early Childhood Education—through a pilot program. (See Early Childhood Education.)

Looking Ahead

In June 2013 Margo Phelps became the Chair of the Education Committee, replacing outgoing Chair, Janet Bean. Also, a new sub-committee has been formed to study and address the challenges of providing quality Special Education options in a system of schools, which is the model of post-Katrina Orleans Parish Schools.