

2023 ANNUAL REPORT

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When we reflect on the past year, we want to first and foremost thank our school leaders, teachers, and staff for their ongoing dedication to our students and their families. In 2011, Crescent City Schools served 500 students at one school. Over the past thirteen years, we have grown to serve nearly 2,600 students across four campuses as well as through the Aurora Program.

This work simply could not be done without our amazing staff members.

As you will learn in the following pages, 2023 saw a number of important transitions and developments for Crescent City Schools:

- In Fall 2023, CCS welcomed 809 students at the newly-merged Mildred Osborne Charter School.
- As part of an ongoing focus on equity across our network, we unveiled new systems designed to reward longevity with the organization as well as overall experience, to increase salary transparency for all staff, and to overall increase compensation to school-based staff members.
- Although our staff continue to incorporate lessons learned throughout the years of the pandemic, they have thankfully seen their days of virtual instruction recede into the past.
- With an eye on moving the academic needle, CCS continued to increase support services for our students and teachers in the areas of Academics, Special Education, and Data & Technology.

We recognize that the readers of this annual report are connected to CCS in different ways. Perhaps you are a CCS staff member, a donor, an advocate for children and families, or a government official. Regardless of how you are connected to CCS, we thank you for caring about the children and families served by our network.

Sincerely,



Kate Mehok (left)
Co-Founder & CEO,
Crescent City Schools



Julie Lause (right)
Co-Founder & Chief of Schools,
Crescent City Schools

OUR MISSION

The mission of Crescent City Schools is to support and develop open enrollment charter schools that raise student achievement and prepare students for college.

Established in 2010, Crescent City Schools was founded on the belief that all students deserve great schools. Crescent City Schools is a Charter Management Organization (CMO) founded by two veteran educators, Kate Mehok and Julie Lause, in order to address the specific need of transforming failing schools.

Crescent City Schools fosters the performance and improvement of schools and provides the support structure necessary for schools to achieve success. Our organization provides sound methodology and implements best practices for teaching and learning to create a model that transforms the lowest-performing schools into excellent educational institutions.

2023 Highlights

94%

The percentage of families who would recommend their child's school in the CCS network to family and friends

A

Grade received by all three schools in the CCS network for the "Interests and Opportunities" measure, as assessed by the Louisiana Department of Education

+516

Number of students added to the network through Akili and Osborne merger





OUR SCHOOLS Fall 2023



tubmancharterschool.org

888

Students enrolled
in grades PreK–8



osbornecharter.org

809

Students enrolled
in grades PreK–8



heightcharterschool.org

848

Students enrolled
in grades PreK–8



A YEAR IN REVIEW



43,209

Calls to parents and families from August 2022–May 2023



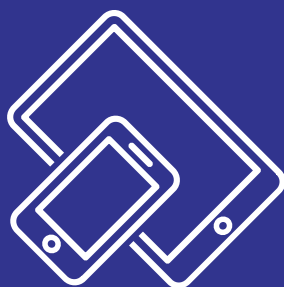
20,921

Texts and emails sent to parents and families from August 2022–May 2023



1.1 million

Student logins to online learning platforms



900+

Staff devices (MacBooks, iPhones, iPads) used throughout the network



2,500

Student Chromebooks in use throughout the network

HOW CCS GREW AND CHANGED TO SERVE MORE STUDENTS IN NEW ORLEANS

Prior to the pandemic, Crescent City Schools was actively preparing to grow as a network. The success that CCS had experienced turning around Harriet Tubman Charter School and Dorothy Height Charter School confirmed that CCS’s approach to improving student outcomes was effective. As such, leaders at CCS wanted to grow the network and serve more students in the city.

“We knew that there were many children in the city who needed to be in a better school environment, and we also had really high-caliber individuals at our schools who wanted to continue doing the challenging work of turnaround,” shared Crescent City Schools CEO Kate Mehok.

CCS received authorization from the district to assume operations of additional schools in 2019, and the network also received external funding to support expansion efforts. However, two factors made growing the CCS network much more difficult than originally anticipated.

First, there was the trend of declining enrollment in public schools seen both in New Orleans as well as across the country. Fewer students in New Orleans overall meant that, rather than experiencing a need for new schools, the city instead saw several existing schools close voluntarily due to persistent enrollment issues. Second, ripple effects from the physical closure of school buildings during the pandemic also impacted CCS’s ability to assume operations of a low-performing school. The shuttering of school buildings in Spring 2020 meant that state assessments were not administered. Consequently, there were no LEAP scores, which factors significantly into school renewal decisions, and very few schools were eligible for turnaround in 2020–21, 2021–22, and 2022–23.

As it became clear that there were no schools for CCS to assume operations of, Mehok presented a new approach to the Crescent City Schools board - to merge Akili Academy with Mildred Osborne Charter School. Akili Academy joined CCS in 2012 and, in terms of the number of students served, was the smallest school in the network. This made it the most challenging school to operate financially, since all public schools in New Orleans are funded using a per pupil funding formula. Mildred



CHANEL LONG, BOARD VICE CHAIR,
CRESCENT CITY SCHOOLS

Osborne Charter School had struggled academically for a few years and, as the only school in the ARISE network, faced similar financial challenges experienced by Akili in terms of school operations.

Mehok proposed that Akili and Osborne merge to form one school, under the Osborne name and on the Osborne campus, but operated by Crescent City Schools.

“After Kate approached the board about merging Akili and Osborne, we considered the needs of the children and their families at both schools. Ultimately, we felt that merging the two schools was the best course of action,” shared Chanel Long, Vice Chair of the CCS board. “The two student populations were similar in many ways, and we felt that bringing them together would provide more students with more resources and a higher-quality education on one campus, with the belief that we were paving the way for a more positive, robust, and effective impact on the education of the children from both schools.”

With the support of the ARISE board, as well as New Orleans Public Schools, the merger of the two schools moved forward and was finalized in July 2023. Three board members from ARISE came to the Crescent City Schools board, and 116 staff members from both Akili and Osborne came together to form the newly-merged staff roster. Veteran educator Charlie DePietro, who has been with CCS since 2012, was chosen to lead the newly-merged school.

“There is much that we cannot control in our world. We don’t control how many kindergarteners live in New Orleans, and we certainly did not foresee a global pandemic,” added Mehok. “But we can control how we respond to challenging circumstances, and strive to keep the best interests of children at the center of our decision-making.”

As DePietro prepared for the opening of the newly-merged Osborne in Fall 2023, it was gratifying to work with staff members who shared this view - that doing what was best for children should remain the top priority.

“It’s been amazing to work with dedicated staff members who work tirelessly to pursue academic excellence and create an environment where students not only grow, but also love coming to school and being a part of the Mildred Osborne Charter School community,” shared DePietro.

“Whether a staff member came from Akili, the previous Osborne, a different CCS school, or another school in the city, we are united by the mission and values of the school,” added DePietro.



CHARLIE DEPIETRO, PRINCIPAL, MILDRED OSBORNE CHARTER SCHOOL

There is much that we cannot control in our world. We don't control how many kindergarteners live in New Orleans, and we certainly did not foresee a global pandemic. But we can control how we respond to challenging circumstances, and strive to keep the best interests of children at the center of our decision-making.

Kate Mehok, Co-Founder & CEO, Crescent City Schools



CREATING SCHOOLS WHERE TEACHERS WANT TO STAY

Recruiting and retaining the best educators is not an easy task but it is one that CCS feels is critical to accomplishing its mission. Simply put, the educators teaching children are the people in schools who can make the most significant difference in what a child learns. However, additional stresses of the past few years due to the pandemic have resulted in higher teacher attrition rates than normal, in Louisiana as well as other states.¹

From its inception, CCS has emphasized the importance of creating schools where teachers want to stay and students can joyfully learn. From generous benefits to an accessible and dedicated human capital team, CCS strives to attract and retain the best educators in the city.

However, beginning in 2022, cofounders Kate Mehok and Julie Lause felt that more could be done to increase equity across the organization, particularly in the realm of compensation.

“We wanted to make sure that people with the same years of experience, doing the same role, were being compensated in the same way as their counterparts at another school,” shared Julie Lause, Cofounder of CCS and Chief of Schools.

So CCS got to work. CEO Kate Mehok, Lause, Director of Human Capital Amanda Hollman, and others wanted to create a



We say all the time in our country that teachers aren't paid enough, so it was nice that our company did something about it, to acknowledge the people who are staying longer at the schools.

Alexandra Fontini, Director of Enrichment and Intervention, Tubman Montessori

compensation system that was transparent, equitable, and one that rewarded people who stayed with the organization. To that end, CCS created multiple salary scales and assigned all the organization's positions to a salary scale based on the complexity of the work.

To encourage individuals to stay longer with the organization, CCS also implemented Longevity Bumps in 2023. Starting in a staff member's fifth year with Crescent City Schools, a sizable amount is added to a staff member's salary every year. In the tenth year and beyond, CCS doubles the corresponding Longevity Bump. And while many organizations update salary scales once or twice per decade, CCS releases new salary scales every year, adjusted for inflation. The staff response has been positive.

"In 2022–2023, there were a lot of people at CCS who were hitting either five or ten years with their school and were thinking a lot about their futures and maybe making a change," shared Alexandra Fontini, Director of Enrichment and Intervention at Tubman Montessori. "All that stopped because of the big bumps for longevity. I mean, we say all the time in our country that teachers aren't paid enough, so it was nice that our company did something about it, to acknowledge the people who are staying longer at the schools."

An important nuance of the Longevity Bump is the increased ability to keep the strongest teachers in the classroom. In many school settings, experienced educators often find that, if they want to earn higher salaries, they need to transition to leadership positions outside of the classroom.

Gwendolyn Jones, a veteran educator who has been at Harriet Tubman Charter School since 2014, experienced a shift in her thinking once the Longevity Bumps were rolled out.

"The Longevity Bumps made me think about my career in a different way. I know people who felt like moving to a leadership position was the only way to get a higher salary. But then the Longevity Bump came along and they realized that they could stay fully committed to the classroom but still get the salary that they think they deserve, because of the Longevity Bump and their dedication to the organization."



Whether it was someone telling me 'I think you'd be great for this role' or the other way around, me expressing interest in a new position, CCS and Tubman leaders have really invested in my career and my goals in life.

Gwendolyn Jones, Director of Curriculum & Instruction, 6–8 & ELA/Social Studies

I was here before the salary scales and Longevity Bumps, and it was harder to know what to plan on. Now, I know what I can plan on going forward. Now, the longer you are here, the better it is for you.

Thomas Baker, Dean of Social Studies,
Mildred Osborne Charter School



Thomas Baker, Dean of Social Studies at Mildred Osborne Charter School, also found that the new salary scales positively impacted his ability to plan for the future.

“CCS has always had great benefits, especially related to healthcare and mental health, but I was here before the salary scales and Longevity Bumps, and it was harder to know what to plan on. Now, I know what I can plan on going forward. Now, the longer you are here, the better it is for you,” said Baker.

In addition to compensation, leaders across CCS schools invest in the individual careers of staff members, something which Fontinni, Baker, and Jones all identified as helping staff members feel valued and cared for.

“CCS and Tubman have really invested in my career path,” added Jones. “Whether it was someone telling me ‘I think you’d be great for this role’ or the other way around, me expressing interest in a new position, CCS and Tubman leaders have really invested in my career and my goals in life. That is something really rare. That is something that I don’t hear about from others in different organizations.”

1. Barnum, Matthew. *Chalkbeat*, March 6, 2023, *Teacher turnover hits new highs across the U.S.*. <https://www.chalkbeat.org/2023/3/6/23624340/teacher-turnover-leaving-the-profession-quitting-higher-rate/>.



AFTER YEARS OF INTERRUPTIONS, A RETURN TO NORMALCY

After years of interruptions caused by the pandemic, the 2022-2023 school year was the most “normal” that school had felt since Fall 2019, and educators across the CCS network were excited to once again be in the classroom with their students.

For Tubman science teacher Moneisha Cunningham, the biggest thrill of consistently teaching in-person again throughout the academic year was the ability to conduct experiments. One of Cunningham’s favorite experiments was one she designed for eighth graders learning about rock cycles and rock transformation.

“One day, kids came in and the lab was already set up for the day. I had them wear goggles, and I told them that ‘we are going to melt these jolly ranchers as a model to show you what magma looks like and how igneous rocks are formed’. It helped them better understand how magma solidifies and turns into igneous rock,” recalled Cunningham.

Cunningham, who majored in chemistry as an undergraduate, believes that these types of hands-on experiences are critical to deepen students’ understanding of scientific topics and pique their interest in science overall.

“I think about all of the amazing science teachers I had over the years, who introduced me to the scientific method or created assignments where I needed to take toasters apart, and I want to do that for our students, too,” shared Cunningham.

Middle school math teacher Krystal Manning noted another thing that was much easier for students to do when physically in the classroom: engage with each other in their learning.



MONEISHA CUNNINGHAM, INSTRUCTIONAL LEADER, GRADES 6TH-8TH
AND 8TH GRADE SCIENCE TEACHER, HARRIET TUBMAN CHARTER SCHOOL

“When I’m teaching, I really include all kids. I try to make lessons more student-led through things like partner practice and ‘turn and talk’ as a group. I want to make sure that students are doing more of the heavy lifting, making them think more on their own instead of just following proceduralized lessons,” shared Manning.

Manning maintains high expectations for scholars, but recognized that they had more struggles to overcome as a result of the interrupted learning over the past few years.

“A lot of my students last year came to me ‘Unsatisfactory’ in math, but they left my classroom at Mastery. Seeing how many of those scholars made their growth targets was definitely one of my proud moments,” added Manning.

Although CCS and districts around the country hope that extended periods of remote learning are a thing of the past, CCS educators noted how they continue to use the skills they gained during the pandemic in their classrooms.

Tubman teacher Melissa Marshall noted how she now has additional tools available to her to serve students.

“As a special education teacher, I am teaching kids with different exceptionalities and different cognitive abilities, so I have to be responsive to student needs. It’s not one-size-fits-all. We already had a growth mindset but adding tech components to virtual class allowed students to show their thinking in new ways. It was exciting to see how kids responded to using tech, and we continue to bring a lot of that into the classroom now.”



KRYSTAL MANNING, MATH DEAN (GRADES 3-8) AND 6TH GRADE MATH TEACHER, DOROTHY HEIGHT CHARTER SCHOOL



MELISSA MARSHALL, DEAN OF TIER IV SPECIAL EDUCATION & TIER IV SPED TEACHER, HARRIET TUBMAN CHARTER SCHOOL

“For example, now I will have kids create a presentation in Google slides. Maybe they don’t know how to spell the word, but now they know how to use the microphone to say the word and have it spelled out for them. It gave them a level of independence, and I don’t know if it’s something we would have done if we hadn’t gone virtual and really needed to do that,” shared Marshall.

CCS teachers and school leaders will continue to explore how technology, and other skills gained during the pandemic, can enhance student learning. As CCS educators strive to close academic gaps caused by years of interruptions, they recognize now, more than ever, the value and potential of each minute of in-person learning. In so doing, they live out one of the foundational values of Crescent City Schools: *Responsibility: We understand the urgency of our work.*





INCREASING SUPPORT SERVICES FOR STUDENTS AND TEACHERS

In the past few years, CCS has steadily increased support services that it provides to schools and teachers in three key areas: Academics, Special Education, and Data and Technology. Initially, CCS leadership focused on these areas simply in anticipation of serving more students in the network, but these efforts proved to be especially timely in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic resulted in significant learning loss due to interruptions in schooling as well as a dramatic increase in the incorporation of technology in the classroom.

After spending a decade at Harriet Tubman Charter School, Kevin Lapinski moved into a new position to become the Director of Special Education for all of Crescent City Schools. In this role, he supports the Special Education (SPED) Directors and teachers on each of CCS’s four campuses, as well as the Aurora Program.

“CCS has a large population of students with high needs, as well as a high poverty rate amongst our students. So in addition to working closely with Directors of Special Education at each school and thinking through specific students’ situations, I am also connecting with school leaders to talk about bigger picture special education issues and future SPED programming,” said Lapinski.

“I think a lot about how to make the lives of SPED Directors and SPED teachers easier, and I’ve focused on creating systems to save them time. We want them to be able to focus on planning their lessons and making the most of their time in front of kids so that they can really move students academically,” added Lapinski.



KEVIN LAPINSKI, DIRECTOR OF SPECIAL EDUCATION,
CRESCENT CITY SCHOOLS



DOMINIQUE JAMES, DIRECTOR OF DATA & TECHNOLOGY,
CRESCENT CITY SCHOOLS

Dominique James, Director of Data and Technology, shares Lapinski’s motivation to save staff members’ time so that they can focus on what really matters: their students.

“Even before the pandemic, our schools were becoming more digitized, but in 2019 and 2020, our participation in the Verizon Innovative Learning in Schools (VILS) program, as well as the pandemic, accelerated the pace. We saw a need to increase our support of tech, since kids and staff were using these tools more and more,” said James.

“Because of my role, I’m able to take a lot of troubleshooting problems with tech off the plates of school-based staff, so they can focus on what’s happening in the school buildings and in their classrooms,” added James.

As the Chief Academic Officer for Crescent City Schools, Cynthia Costello works closely with Directors of Curriculum and Instruction (DCIs) in the network, so that they can in turn be the best coaches possible for teachers at their school. Costello’s approach to coaching DCIs has been influenced by author and educational leader Paul Bambrick-Santoyo, who identifies four key levers through which coaches can help teachers grow: in-class observation and feedback, guidance around data-driven instruction, ongoing professional development, and support in instructional planning.

“To really coach a teacher so that they can get dramatic academic gains for students, instructional leaders like DCIs need to be versed in those four areas and pulling on the strings in those four buckets,” shared Costello.

All teachers in the CCS network, whether in their first or tenth year of teaching, receive two coaching touchpoints each month. “We think all of our teachers deserve that ongoing support and opportunity to improve their practice,” added Costello.



CYNTHIA COSTELLO, CHIEF ACADEMIC OFFICER,
CRESCENT CITY SCHOOLS

Although James, Costello, and Lapinski’s roles are quite different from each other, they are motivated by a common goal: raising student achievement. Whether through high-quality coaching or troubleshooting tech problems, their ongoing work aims to support teachers and increase the quality and rigor of student learning across the CCS network.

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

2023 Growth Progress Index Score

The Louisiana Department of Education measures student academic growth across two years in order to increase stability and accuracy.

91.1

HARRIET TUBMAN

85.5

AKILI ACADEMY

84.7

DOROTHY HEIGHT

94.0

NEW ORLEANS

90.0

LOUISIANA

Dropout Credit Accumulation Index

This measure awards points for students who were enrolled in grade 8 at a CCS school in 2021–2022 based on credits those same students earned in ninth grade in 2022–2023. This measure essentially looks at how well-prepared former CCS students were for high school. Anything greater or equal to 90 points is a grade of A. CCS is proud to share that all of its schools performed well on this measure: Tubman received 129.5 points, Akili received 124.1 points, and Height received 126 points.

Top Growth (ELA & Math)

The Louisiana Department of Education tracks what percentage of students achieve “top growth” as they progress academically. Students earn top growth for assessment results that keep them on track to achieving mastery of skills and content (in Math and ELA) by 8th grade or by outperforming other, similar students statewide.

As previously mentioned, Akili Academy merged with Mildred Osborne Charter School in July 2023. However, because Akili Academy was part of the CCS network through the end of the 2022–23 academic year, the student achievement data shown on this page is from the network as it was in Spring 2023.

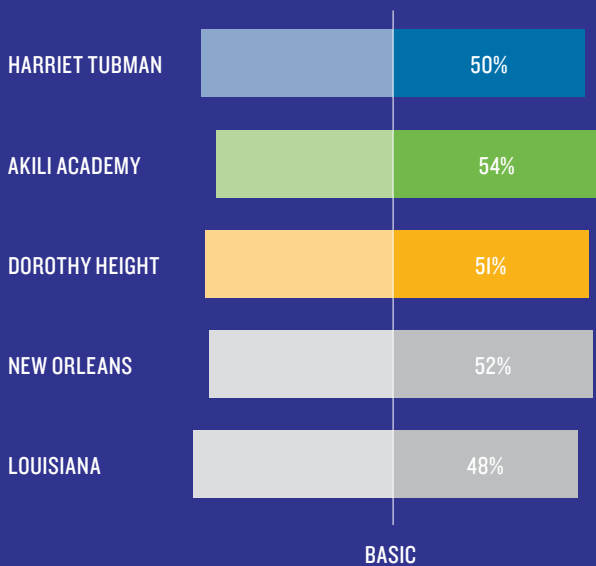


Interests and Opportunities

The Louisiana Department of Education describes this measure, which makes up 5% of a school’s rating, as follows: “Interests and Opportunities is intended to measure whether schools are providing students with access to a well-rounded education, exposing them to diverse areas of learning in which they can develop their skills and talents and leading to a pathway to prosperity.” The maximum number of points a school can receive for this measure is 150, and anything equal or greater than 90 points is considered a grade of A for interests and opportunities. We are proud to report that each of the schools in the CCS network received a grade of A for this indicator. Akili received 137.2 points, and both Tubman and Height received 150 points (a perfect score). The high performance of our schools in this area is evidence of our deep commitment to developing our students’ interests as part of their education.

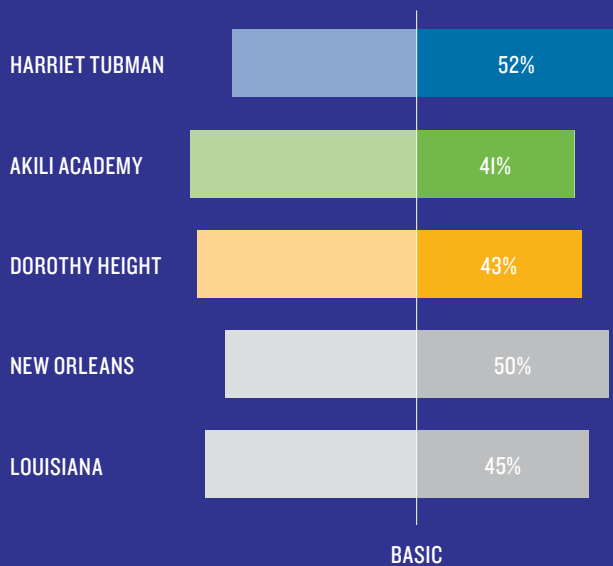
ELA

% of students demonstrating Top Growth



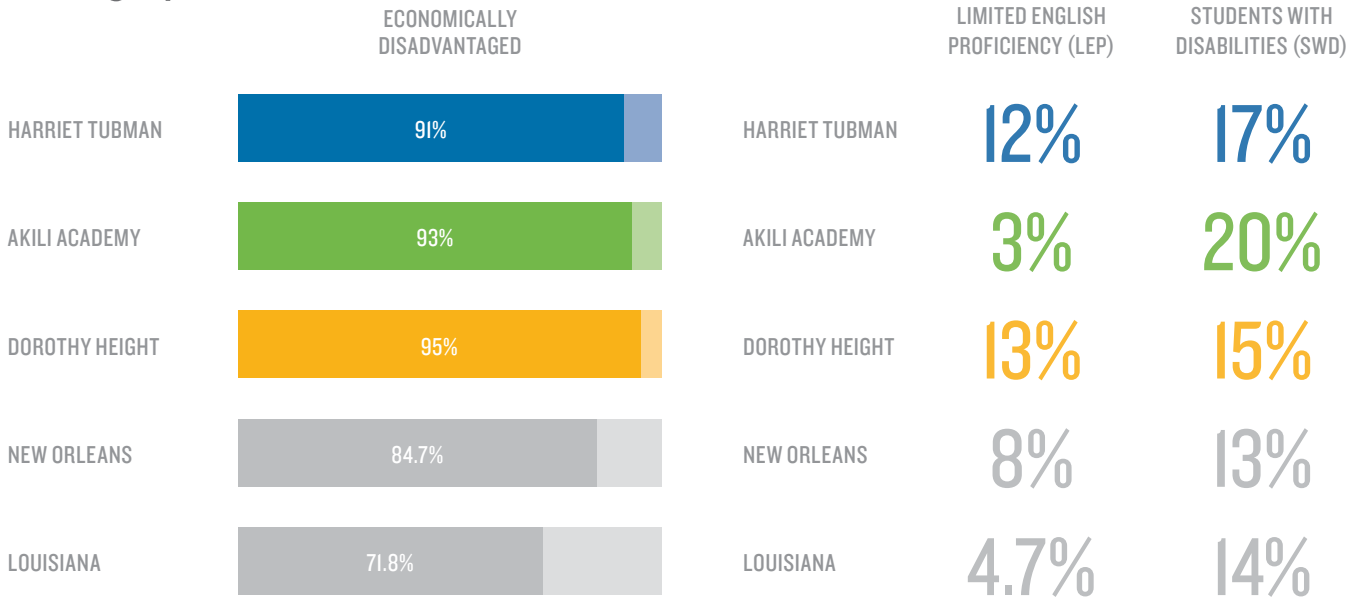
Math

% of students demonstrating Top Growth

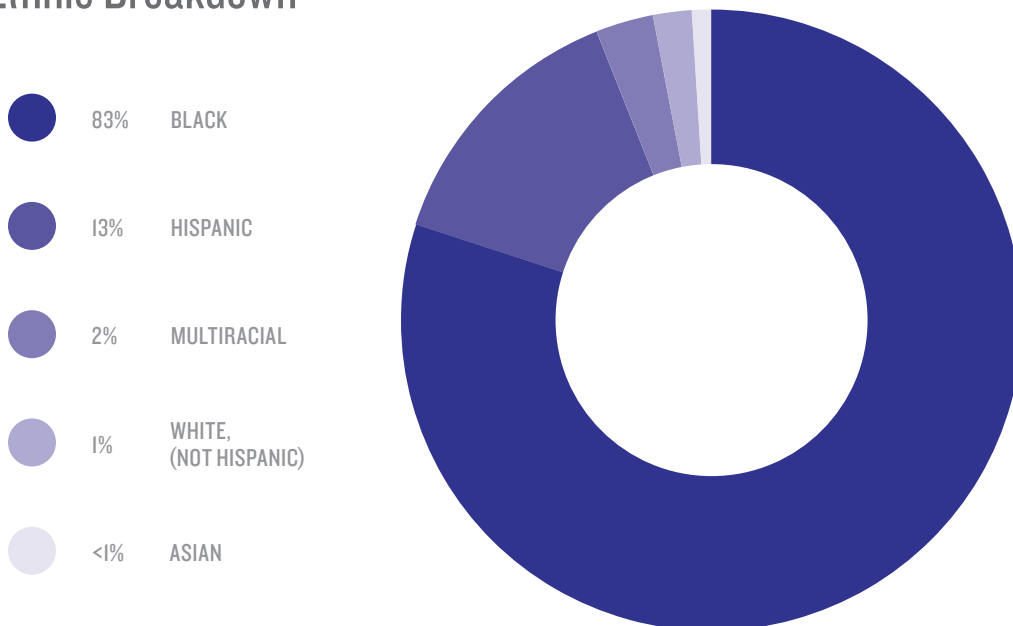


OUR STUDENTS

Demographics



Racial/Ethnic Breakdown



OUR STAFF

Experience

Teachers with 4+ years of experience

HARRIET TUBMAN **55%**

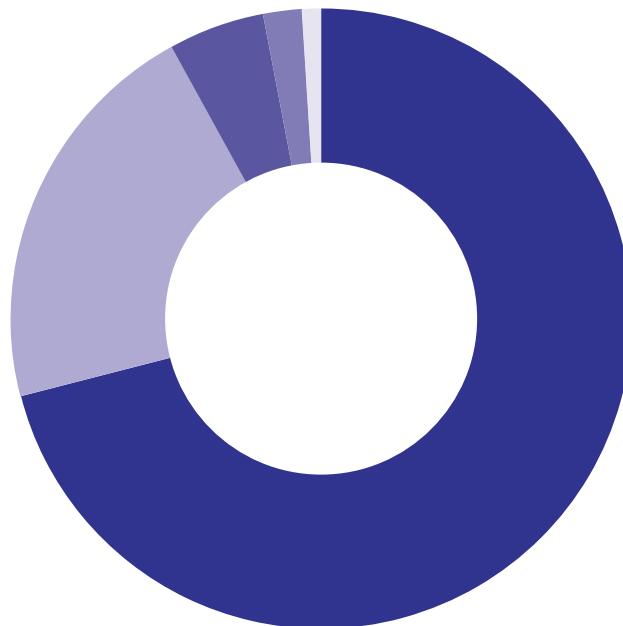
AKILI ACADEMY **44%**

DOROTHY HEIGHT **41%**



Racial/Ethnic Breakdown

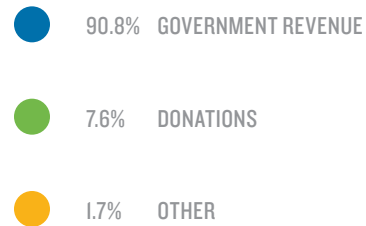
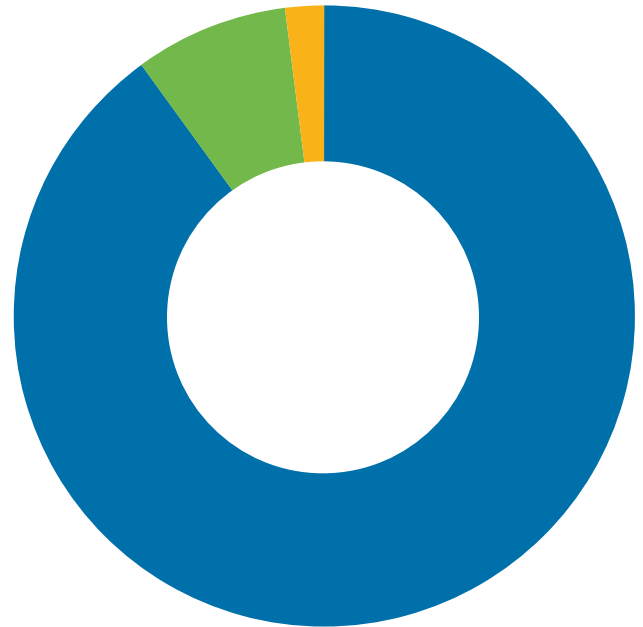
- 73% BLACK
- 21% WHITE, (NOT HISPANIC)
- 4% HISPANIC
- 1% MULTIRACIAL
- 1% ASIAN



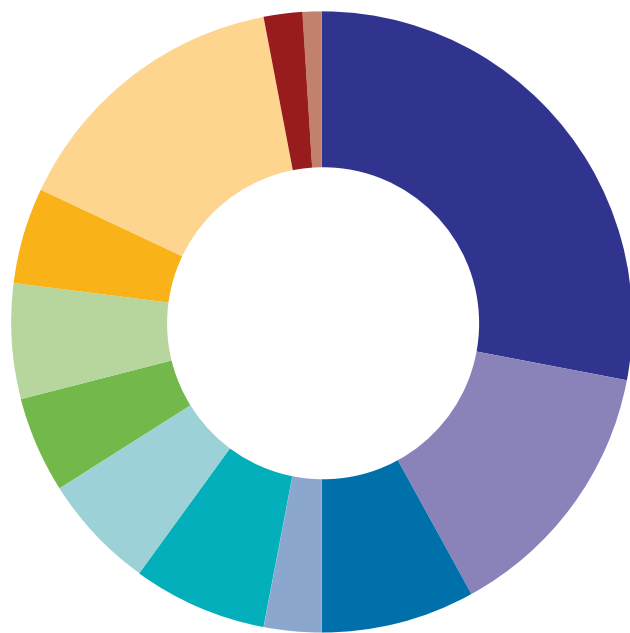
FINANCES

Revenue

Crescent City Schools designs each of its schools to operate sustainably on public funds. However, in order to truly meet the needs of the more than 2,500 children we serve, our schools offer extracurricular activities, innovative programming, and other enrichment opportunities. These programs enhance the quality of our students' education and require us to pursue additional philanthropic dollars. We believe that the extracurricular activities, enrichment opportunities, and specialized programs that we provide our students are critical to their successful development, and we thank all of our donors for supporting the children of New Orleans.



Expenses



- 29.2% GENERAL EDUCATION
- 13.8% SPECIAL EDUCATION
- 7.9% STUDENT SUPPORT
- 3.4% ENRICHMENT & EXTRA-CURRICULARS
- 6.5% FOOD SERVICES
- 6.3% TRANSPORTATION
- 5.1% SCHOOL LEADERSHIP
- 5.8% ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT
- 4.9% TECHNOLOGY
- 15.3% FACILITIES
- 1.4% OTHER
- 0.5% SECURITY

OUR BOARD

Board of Directors

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As the Board Chair of Crescent City Schools, my top priority is to do all I can to provide CCS and its leaders with the resources they need to raise student achievement. However, in order for the CCS board to make informed choices, we must have an accurate grasp of challenges—as well as opportunities—and access to meaningful and relevant data.

Due to my professional background, I am perhaps predisposed to analyze the operational and financial side of things. However, after more than 20 years of working with nonprofits, I know that there is much to be gained by taking in qualitative, as well quantitative, data.

That is why I am so glad that the principals of each of our schools came to our annual board retreat in 2023 to share their thoughts and perspectives on opportunities and challenges in their schools. During that meeting, the CCS board heard from:

- Zondra Howard-Cross, Principal of Harriet Tubman Charter School
- Raquel Krausher, Principal, Tubman Montessori
- LaKeysha Arthur, Principal, Dorothy Height Charter School
- Charlie DePietro, Principal, Mildred Osborne Charter School

I cannot emphasize enough how impactful it was for me, and the rest of the CCS board, to hear directly from these school leaders. As board members, it is our duty to monitor many things related to CCS's operations—such as financial health, student achievement levels, family satisfaction, and staff retention, to name a few—but those facts and figures must also be accompanied by the perspective of those who know our staff, students, and families best.

On behalf of the CCS Board of Directors, I'd like to thank each of our school leaders, and every single staff member, for their hard work and dedication. I'd also like to thank every person who has supported the work of our organization in the past year. Whether you taught, donated, advocated, or volunteered, we are grateful for your support and for your continued belief in the potential of every student.

Best,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ms Landry", with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Monica Landry

OUR DONORS

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