Background Information

L.B. Landry High School

L.B. Landry High School, named after Dr. Lord Beaconsfield Landry, an African American physician, civic leader and vocalist who served the residents of Algiers, opened as an elementary school in 1938 and added high school grades in 1942. It was the first high school in Algiers to enroll African American students and has long been an important institution in the Algiers community. After Hurricane Katrina, the school remained closed due to deteriorating conditions and storm damage. However, after intense negotiations with FEMA, then-Superintendent Paul Pastorek announced an agreement to begin construction or renovation on five “Quick Start” schools before the end of 2007. Shortly thereafter, input from the Algiers community secured a commitment to use the Quick Start Initiative to build a new high school at the Landry site. The new school building’s doors were opened in 2010 as an RSD direct-run high school.

O.P. Walker High School

New Orleans’s West Bank is home to several high schools with long histories of proud and rich traditions. O. P. Walker High School, named after long-time Orleans Parish educator and former Orleans Parish Schools Superintendent Oliver Perry Walker originally opened in 1970. In 2005, and only a few months after Hurricane Katrina, the Algiers Charter School Association reopened the high school as a BESE-authorized Type 5 charter school. After the storm, the Algiers Charter School Association and Walker High School played an invaluable role in the recovery effort for the West Bank by providing a safe and academically rigorous high school education for students and families returning to the City. Since opening, O.P. Walker has improved its School Performance Score over 50 points, turning a once-failing school into one of the top-performing public high schools in New Orleans.

School Facilities Master Plan

Prior to Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans public school buildings had capacity to serve more than 125,000 students, though the enrollment was roughly 60,000. This inefficiency meant fewer resources for the students the school system served. Enrollment today hovers slightly above 40,000 students; thus, in planning facilities for the city, RSD and OPSB must make difficult decisions in deciding which buildings to rebuild or renovate.

Following the Quick Start Initiative, the RSD and the Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB) began the process to develop a long-term, comprehensive plan to rebuild public schools in New Orleans. The School Facilities Master Plan (SFMP), a $1.6 billion school construction plan funded primarily through hurricane-related recovery FEMA funds, was developed after months of community outreach and engagement, including more than 200 community meetings, educator focus groups, and meetings with school alumni associations between October 2007 and February 2008. The RSD released a draft of the plan in August 2008, and on November 6, 2008, the OPSB formally adopted the SFMP.

A demographics study commissioned by the RSD and OPSB in 2010 showed major changes in student demographics from 2006 to 2010 as families were moving back to the city after Hurricane Katrina. As a result...
of this study, the RSD partnered with experts to design amendments to the SMFP plan that would ensure every student could attend a newly built or renovated school building. This two month process included review of public comment, analysis of the space needs of school programs, and development of plans to save funds that could be used to serve more children. The resulting amendments sought to accomplish three primary goals: 1) ensuring that the SFMP would enable all public school students in Orleans Parish to attend school in a new, renovated, or refurbished building; 2) creating revenue through tax credits and additional savings; and 3) ensuring that the location, size, and design of school construction projects aligned with updated demographic projections, including hard choices about which buildings would be rebuilt and which would not. After undergoing a community engagement process similar to the one employed with the original SFMP, the RSD and OPSB officially approved these amendments in October 2011. Both BESE and the OPSB voted to approve the plan for every school building in the city.

**Algiers and the West Bank**

The demographic study showed a high number of excess high school seats throughout the city. The amended SFMP provides a total of 18,204 high school seats. However, the latest demographic projections show that the high estimate for 2016 is that there will be only 12,566 high school students in the city.

On the West Bank, the demographics demonstrated clearly that there are more West Bank high school buildings than are necessary to serve the projected student population. The total program capacity of the high school buildings on the West Bank in 2011 is 4,089 students. However, the demographics study projected that there would be only 2,455 high school students on the West Bank in 2016—a surplus of 1,634 seats on the West Bank, representing an excess capacity of 66% of the current population.

The only way to ensure that the limited funds available for the SFMP are used equitably was to make a number of difficult decisions regarding projects for specific schools. Advocates throughout the entire city advocated for new school buildings in their respective neighborhoods, but given limited resources, the decision to place a new school building in one neighborhood necessarily meant that there would not be enough dollars to rebuild another school building located nearby. In order to provide all public school students in Orleans Parish a seat in a new, renovated, or refurbished building, OPSB and the RSD had to limit the number of projects undertaken. Inefficiency means fewer resources for all other schools and other neighborhoods deprived of badly needed dollars. In fact, it was in large part due to the reluctance of the old Orleans Parish School Board to make difficult decisions that prior to Hurricane Katrina, school buildings operated at a surplus of nearly twice what was needed for enrollment. The 2011 revised SFMP seeks to prevent putting the city in a similar position in the future, where over-capacity wastes funds and deprives schools citywide of the resources they need.

With limited funds available for school construction, and an effort to make every dollar count, the 2011 amendments to the SFMP made provisions to rebuild only one additional high school on the West Bank—Edna Karr High School (an OPSB school). Karr High School is several miles away from Landry and Walker High schools and serves a different neighborhood on the West Bank. The 2011 amendments also clearly stated that there would be no full renovations done to any other high schools on the West Bank. Thus, the Walker building would not be rebuilt or renovated under the approved SFMP. Renovating the Walker building in
addition would have been at a cost of at least $35 million for additional, unneeded seats. Further, choosing to renovate Walker would have been at the expense of another construction project or projects.

Unification

The fact that only two new high school buildings would be located on the West Bank necessitated that the RSD make a long-term decision regarding the academic programs at the respective Landry and Walker school buildings, less than a mile away from one another. In making this decision, the RSD considered factors critical to the mission of the RSD, which is to aggressively pursue effective, proven turnaround strategies for the state’s lowest performing schools to ensure that all students graduate high school on time, prepared for college and careers.

Given the impressive academic progress and achievement demonstrated at O.P. Walker, and the geographic proximity of the two schools, the RSD made the decision to combine the two high school programs into a single, unified high school in the L.B. Landry High School building. This unification will create additional high-quality academic seats for more students, and allow the Master Plan funding to serve a greater number of students across the City.

As a recognized Top Gains school, Walker has demonstrated consistent growth in its School Performance Score which jumped 13 points last year to 108.9. Walker has also demonstrated success in preparing students to enter college and career, as evidenced by an increased ACT composite score of 19.4 (an increase of more than 2 points from the previous year; a composite score that is on par with the state average for public high schools), and a cohort graduation rate of 79.4% which is well above the state average of 72.3%. The unification of these two schools will expand the opportunity to benefit from the academically rigorous education offered by the leadership of O. Perry Walker with the support of the Algiers Charter School Association to approximately 400 more students in the City.

O. Perry Walker and L. B. Landry alumni and current students have earned the right for both schools’ legacies to continue on for generations to come. Therefore great emphasis and care has been taken to unify the schools in a way that will allow the legacies of both historic institutions to be represented for years to come. Under the leadership of ACSA and Principal Mary Laurie, a thorough approach has been employed to ensure that the process of unifying L. B. Landry and O. Perry Walker High Schools has been inclusive, transparent and equitable. Students, parents, faculty, staff and alumni of both L. B. Landry and O.P. Walker have had an opportunity to voice their input in the development of the symbols that will represent the unified Landry-Walker High School.

By naming the school Lord Beaconsfield Landry - Oliver Perry Walker College and Career Preparatory High School, the alumni and current students of both L. B. Landry and O. Perry Walker can feel that they are equally represented in the new school. The facility located at 1200 L. B. Landry Ave. will be recognized as the Dr. Lord Beaconsfield Landry Educational Complex in honor of Dr. Lord Beaconsfield Landry’s legacy in the Algiers community. The Dr. Lord Beaconsfield Landry Educational Complex will house five programs: Landry-Walker High School, LSU Community Health Clinic, Southern University at New Orleans West Bank Evening Satellite Campus, and Rev. Arthur Wardsworth, Jr. Theater of the Performing Arts.
The students of both schools have selected the “Charging Buccaneer” as Landry-Walker’s mascot. The Charging Buccaneer merges the mascots of L. B. Landry (Buccaneers) and O. Perry Walker (Chargers) together. The mascot is comprised of a buccaneer clad in royal blue and gold garments riding atop a white horse with a blue and orange saddle draped over it. The new Landry-Walker school crest and colors of royal blue and orange with gold accents encompass elements and colors representative of both L. B. Landry (royal blue and gold) and O. Perry Walker (orange and navy blue).

At the beginning of this calendar year, the Landry and Walker High Schools began the process of unifying their sports and other extracurricular activities. These groups are now practicing together, and are learning from the particular strengths that can come from each school. These combined groups include the football team, chorus, gospel choir, concert band, jazz band, cheerleading squads, and jazz band.

Landry-Walker will field the following athletic teams: Football, Baseball, Softball, Volleyball, Cheerleading, Powerlifting, boys and girls Cross Country, Basketball, Soccer, and Track & Field. The Louisiana High School Athletics Association (LHSAA) has approved the consolidation of the sports schedules and contracts of the two schools into one sports program in Class 4A. The Landry-Walker football team has been practicing together for months now, and has already participated in spring football practice and a spring football scrimmage against East St. John High School. In April, the unified team also participated in Mayor Landrieu’s NOLA FOR LIFE initiative, volunteering with other community members to help revamp McDonough Playground on the West Bank.

The City of New Orleans continues to struggle with the constant prevalence of violence. There have been several incidents of violence involving students from Walker and Landry over the past year, as there were in years past. Please see the attached letter from Fourth District Commander Brian Weiss stating that there is no evidence or intelligence to support any allegations that these incidents are related to the unification of the two schools. Further, the New Orleans Police Department is providing ongoing support to the students throughout the unification process in several ways, including leading student peer groups this past school year and continuing into the summer.

Summer school is currently in session at the Landry Educational Complex and will conclude on June 28th. There is also a NORD summer program, Job 1, that is being hosted at the L.B. Landry Educational Complex which will run until July 12th.
Relevant Legal Information

In 2005, pursuant to Act 35, enacted shortly after Hurricane Katrina, and now codified in R.S. 17:10.7 and 17:1990, L.B. Landry High School and O.P. Walker High Schools were both transferred to the jurisdiction of the Recovery School District. These laws explicitly give the RSD the authority to supervise, manage, and operate schools with the same power and authority a local school board would. This includes the ability to close, merge, or relocate schools. These laws also explicitly give the RSD the same authority as a local school board to receive and use funds for school construction, and make plans to rebuild, make repairs, or dispose of school property. The School Facilities Master Plan is a specific, comprehensive plan for school construction projects that the RSD has lawfully entered into in cooperation and collaboration with the Orleans Parish School Board.

The plan is a collaborative effort between the Orleans Parish School Board and the Recovery School District that encompasses school construction projects for schools under control of both entities. The Orleans Parish School Board formally approved the plan at a board meeting in November 2008. As dictated in law and policy, and stated above, the RSD in New Orleans has the same authority as a local school district to receive and use funds for school construction, and make plans to rebuild, make repairs, dispose of school property, and change the location of particular schools within the RSD. Unlike a local school district, whose governing authority is the local school board, BESE policy specifies that the RSD’s governing authority is the State Superintendent. This means that the SFMP was officially approved by the RSD upon the State Superintendent’s approval. Although not legally required, the RSD also put the School Facilities Master Plan before BESE for approval in November 2008, in order to involve BESE in the process and garner the state board’s endorsement and support for the plan. In October 2011, again, although not legally required, the RSD put the amendments to the SFMP in front of BESE for approval.

In addition to the approval of the SFMP in 2008, and the approval of the amendments in 2011, the RSD has worked to follow appropriate law, policy, and BESE procedure to appropriately involve and inform BESE in regard to the School Facilities Master Plan. Specifically:

- The RSD provides comprehensive monthly update reports to BESE on the SFMP in the “capital projects update report” standing item for each School Innovation and Turnaround Committee meeting. This report details the progress of every project in the SFMP.

- BESE approval is required for RSD professional service contracts (architects and engineers, etc.) exceeding $50,000 and all amendments to those contracts.

- The RSD, like other school districts, must follow all building maintenance, safety, and facility accessibility requirements as set forth in BESE policy in Bulletin 741.

As detailed above, law and policy provide that the RSD has the same rights and responsibilities as a local school board, including the authority to make decisions regarding school facility use and the location of schools throughout the district, subject to the approval of the State Superintendent. Further, the BESE Code speaks to the board’s relationship to these decisions. The BESE Code states that policies for the board’s administrative oversight of the RSD will be included in Bulletin 129, and procedures for the operation of
schools within the RSD, including “school facility use and maintenance” are to be adopted by State Superintendent or the RSD Superintendent.
Impact of the Unification

With 55 days until the first day of school, uniforms have been ordered by families, staff is in place and working on their planning for the start of school, and student extracurricular teams and clubs have combined and are now working as unified Landry-Walker groups. Changing course now would cause a significant disruption for students, families, and school staff.

Impact on Students and Families

As mentioned above, the unification provides an opportunity to an additional 400 students to enroll in a high school led by a school leader and staff that have proven that they have what it takes to achieve incredible gains and measurable success for their students. To reiterate, the academic program at Walker has proven successful for students, as demonstrated by the following data points:

- Since opening in 2005, O.P. Walker has improved its School Performance Score over 50 points, turning a once-failing school into one of the top-performing public high schools in New Orleans.
- The current year, Walker’s SPS increased 13 points to 108.9, earning the statewide designation as a “Top Gains School.”
- Walker’s ACT composite score increased more than 2 points last year to a 19.4, which nearly is on par with the state average for public high schools.
- Walker’s cohort graduation rate of 79.4% is well above the state average for public high schools.

While the size of a high school is not a factor in and of itself for the success of a school—as evidenced by successful and unsuccessful high school programs of all sizes, Walker has been successful with a large student enrollment. In seeking to fully enroll the school, the unified high school will have an enrollment that is on par with the size of successful high school programs across the state. Of Louisiana’s highest performing high schools (those earning an A letter grade), 44% of these schools have enrollment of 1,000 to 2,200 plus students—demonstrating that schools of any size can be successful.

The unified high school’s academic model will provide students with a small school learning environment within a large school setting through grade-level academies. The unification will result in the students of Landry-Walker High School having the opportunity to enroll at SUNO courses for college credit that will be offered at the Landry Educational Complex. In addition, Walker’s already-existing dual enrollment program will be made available to all students of the unified high school, allowing students to earn college credit from Tulane, Dillard, Delgado, Louisiana Technical College, SUNO, and Nunez Community College.

Students enrolled in the unified high school will not only benefit from great academics, but they will benefit from a full range of extracurricular activities that are more sustainable with a large enrollment. Students of the unified school have already started to create a new legacy for their school and demonstrate pride for their united sports teams, band, choir, and other extracurricular activities.
As stated above, the Landry and Walker leadership, staff, and students have taken great effort to transition the students into a unified student population by holding numerous joint events for Walker and Landry students, transitioning staff, sharing resources, and combining extracurricular activities for the students. In addition, LHSAA has already made final decisions regarding sports at the unified high school for next year and have set the football schedule for the unified high school. Due to LHSAA rules, any variance from the planned unification would affect student eligibility to play sports and pursue college scholarships and would likely mean that no LHSAA sports could be played next school year.

Further, the unified high school is attractive to families. Aside from the current student population at both L.B. Landry and O. Perry Walker that will return next year (95% of the 882 Walker families and 94% of the 411 Landry families are re-enrolling), an additional 348 students selected L.B. Landry-O. Perry Walker High School as their preferred school for the 2013-2014 school year. This places L.B. Landry-O. Perry Walker High School amongst the top 10 schools in the City selected through this year’s OneApp Enrollment Process.

Nearly 1,000 students have been matched to attend the unified L.B. Landry-O.P. Walker High School in Rounds 1 and 2 of OneApp. While the majority of these students are current students at Landry and Walker, more than 300 of these students are incoming 9th graders or upperclassmen coming from other schools throughout the City. Walker’s current facility will not allow for an increase in enrollment beyond their current numbers, so the unification and move to the L.B. Landry Educational Complex is providing the opportunity for additional students to take advantage of the unified high school’s expanded academics and extracurricular activities. A disruption in the unification would require all of the nearly 1,000 families to reapply to attend another high school in New Orleans. Further, at this point in the enrollment process, there are a limited number of available seats at other high schools in the City—particularly in high-performing high schools—that students could choose from, were they forced to do so.

**Impact on Facilities**

New Orleans has more public high school seats than needed based on the 2016 projections of high school student demographics. With current facility plans the city will have about 18,000 public high school seats for a projected enrollment of about 13,000 public high school students in 2016. The disproportion of available seats to projected high school enrollment is particularly acute on the West Bank where the unification is saving over 1,600 seats from sitting empty.

The Walker facility is going to be used as a temporary space for other school programs that need “swing-space” while their buildings are renovated. Swing-space is very limited across the city. There is no other vacant West Bank space available that could hold a typical elementary school for swing-space. On the East Bank the space available for temporary location is not available until 2015 and that space is already lined up for other school programs identified for renovations. In December, the Harriet Tubman elementary program, a West Bank school, will be relocated to Walker while the Tubman building is renovated. If there was a delay in the renovation of Tubman, this would also result in a delay for the receipt of tax credits to finance this work.
Were Walker to be used as a permanent building, it would require an unplanned, unfinanced renovation of at least $35 million. The cost of such renovation would be funded through the RSD and OPSB ceasing work on another facility, in another New Orleans community.