

Thank you for inviting me to speak to the committee today from Reed High School, here in New Orleans East, a neighborhood in New Orleans that received more than 10 feet of floodwaters in the wake of Hurricane Katrina.

Reed is one of the 59 schools of the Recovery School District, where I have the honor of serving as Superintendent. Thank you for meeting today to discuss the important issue of school construction and classroom modernization.

Building schools is not easy. While I was Superintendent in Chicago, we oversaw the building of 76 new school buildings and renovated 350 schools over six years. In Philadelphia, we built eight new schools, including the renowned Microsoft School of the Future.

In both Chicago and Philadelphia, we were able to accomplish much with limited resources, specifically tax and bond revenues used to fund school construction.

When I arrived in New Orleans in the summer of 2007, it became very clear to me early on that building schools here is a tremendous challenge — we have an unheard of amount of work to do and a small amount of money to do it with. And this money does not come from traditional capital fund sources, but primarily from FEMA.

Currently, we estimate the cost of Katrina-related damages to the district's 106 school facilities and their contents will exceed \$700 million once FEMA completes its full and updated assessments. On top of the costs of storm damage, prior to Katrina, New Orleans public school facilities already had approximately \$1 billion in deferred maintenance.

The RSD rebuilt its 59 traditional public and charter schools beginning in late 2005 using rebuilding funds from FEMA and federal Community Development Block Grant funding. It is important to note that in the RSD, we have the highest percentage of charter schools of any urban school district, and in facilities maintenance and building schools we make no distinction between charter and RSD-operated schools.

The RSD has spent more than \$132 million in FEMA funding, more than \$15 million in federal Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding, and more than \$53.5 million in operating funding during this effort to rebuild the district's schools.

Among our schools, there are eight modular facilities fully funded by FEMA that will temporarily serve our students as we rebuild their permanent schools.

As we move forward, we plan to build additional schools in New Orleans. Our "Quickstart" effort is a \$140 million initiative, principally funded by FEMA, with construction currently underway to bring online an additional five new schools by fall 2009.

Our facilities master plan, which will guide the rebuilding and renovation of permanent public school facilities in New Orleans, will be released in May 2008.

Our students attend class in improved school facilities, use humane restrooms, enjoy hot food, and use the most modern technology-based instructional tools available.

Despite our past victories and future plans, however, our struggles remain substantial.

While the approximately \$90 million in CDBG rebuilding funds allocated by the State of Louisiana are substantial — and our cooperative work with FEMA has yielded significant dividends — we will not bring our school facilities to more superior condition with these funds alone.

In fact, even when combined, our anticipated total obligated FEMA funds and our CDBG funds will still leave our district more than \$500 million short of being able to bring our facilities up to superior condition.

Despite our fiscal constraints, we are aggressively using the unique opportunity of rebuilding school facilities in the wake of Hurricane Katrina to build the best facilities this district has ever had.

And this effort includes a superior level of classroom modernization previously unheard of in New Orleans. Among such upgrades include:

- Installing a Promethean Board in every 4th-12th grade core classroom, a total of 496 boards in RSD-operated schools;
- Providing a take-home Epic laptop computer to every high school student, a total of approximately 4,500 laptops;
- Providing a take-home Dell laptop computer to every teacher and administrator, a total of approximately 2,000 laptops;
- Installing Read 180 computer labs, with eight computers each, in every 4th-10th grade English classroom, a total of 132 new computer labs;
- Installing e-Rate funded internet access in all of our schools, both wireless and LAN connections.

Next year we plan to expand the distribution of laptops to the middle grades, give all students email addresses, build a virtual school for students throughout the state out of Reed High School, and employ a technology integrationist at all schools focused solely on helping teachers integrate technology into instructional practices.

Twenty-first Century educators know that it is not about the hardware and software – or the basic training it takes to use them in the classroom—that create 21st Century learners. It is instead the innovative uses of these products by teachers that push students to build strong literacy skills and engage in higher levels of learning.

To encourage these teaching practices the RSD is taking steps to:

- 1) Ensure that technology is used to establish a relationship between the home and school environments;
- 3) Use technology to enrich parental involvement in the school community;
- 4) Create small teaching and learning communities at each school where the integration of technological approaches to teaching and learning are discussed and encouraged;
- 5) Setting up student-organized and managed Technology Resource Centers at each of our high schools.

Technology improves students' academic achievement because it enables self-directed learning and provides immediate benchmarking data. The vast majority of our students are two or more years below grade level in reading and math, and these students benefit from the district's technological interventions.

We can only continue our monumental efforts to reform education in New Orleans with further federal resources to cover significant start-up and one-time costs.

Just like RENEWAAL funding last year helped the district to attract hundreds of high-quality teachers by allowing us to pay all teachers bonuses and launch a performance-based pay initiative, we need federal funding in New Orleans to sustain our efforts to build 21st Century schools to continue sparking the rebuilding of the New Orleans region.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify to the committee today and I am happy to answer any questions.