

**United Scholars  
Proposal to Orleans Parish  
Executive Summary**

**Why we want to start a school:** New Orleans public schools need to prepare its students for academic excellence, as well as real-world careers. However, many modern schools still adhere to the “industrial model” of education, whereby students are grouped according to age, and all taught the same information at the same time, regardless of interest or learning styles. Under this system, some students may be left behind if they cannot keep up, bored if they are too far ahead of their peers, or simply disengaged.

United Scholars will provide families with an option for a safe and high-quality education that provides self-directed academic rigor, as well as career options for those who do not wish to attend college. The school will expose students to highly-qualified teachers with a passion for making a difference in their students’ lives. The school’s approach to education will be centered on students’ well-being, which requires a deep understanding of the community in which it serves.

At United Scholars, students will master a comprehensive curriculum largely at their own pace, supplemented by project-based learning that helps them build essential skills while applying their knowledge to real-world situations. The educational program will prepare them for the career paths of their choice, whether that means enrollment in a two- or four-year college, or immediate employment in a high-demand, living-wage field. Either way, graduating students will be able to compete and succeed in our global economy.

United Scholars will prepare and train its students to be responsible citizens skilled at navigating an increasingly interconnected world. The school will foster a unique culture focused on collaboration and relationships-building. A nurturing community will be founded on restorative principles of conflict resolution, allowing students to independently resolve conflicts without escalation. The school will also value community building and school spirit, and plans to incorporate schoolwide events to build a strong culture throughout the school.

**Mission:** United Scholars’ mission is to change the traditional method of teaching and learning through innovative practices that focus on meaningful partnerships with students, families and community stakeholders, and to ensure that each student acquires the knowledge, skills and love for learning key to achieving personal success.

**Vision:** United Scholars creates a thriving, innovative and inspiring learning environment that develops self-directed learners and stimulates scholars of all ages to trust in, invest in, and benefit from their style—teaching students, faculty, and each other to love learning.

**Scale strategy:** In the first year, United Scholars will open the school to the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grades, and work in that first year to build a strong initial culture and climate. Over the next two years, they will add one grade level per year, until the school is serving students in grades 9 through 12.

**Threats to success:** As a new charter school operator, the United Scholars team is aware that they may encounter community resistance to the school. However, they will work diligently with community representatives and stakeholders, including them in decisions that affect their students, in order to gain trust and ensure that educational plans are in agreement with the needs of the community.

United Scholars will also demonstrate its expertise through proper fiscal management, adequate school performance growth, and the implementation of innovative programs and initiatives that will keep

students moving forward. Moreover, whatever threats they encounter, they will always put students' needs first, all the while, empowering students to identify their own path to success.

#### Measuring success

**Evaluating school performance:** United Scholars will exceed academic standards and expectations set forth for all public schools in the state. They will establish an evaluation process centered on measurable multi-dimensional data that is focused on performance outcomes, rather than inputs or subjective data. They will establish minimum academic and operational performance indicators as a basic framework for our accountability. Academic and operational performance indicators, metrics, and targets will be codified in a performance plan, included in the school's contract.

**Performance goals, Years 1 through 5:** United Scholars will set goals that will be SMART—

**S**pecific and tied to standards;  
**M**easurable,  
**A**mbitious and Attainable,  
**R**eflective of our mission,  
**T**ime-specific with target date.

These goals will be fully defined once the team has identified the neighborhood in which it will be operating. The team will project anticipated growth and improvement against current performance. General goals will include:

- Students' scores on English Language Arts and Math will increase by 15% over baseline.
- 100% of students will be accepted to a four-year college, and/or entry-level position with a high-growth, high-wage employer.
- 100% of students will obtain an Unlimited Shadow Award and Certification.
- 100% of senior class will graduate.
- 95% of students will indicate that they are "satisfied" or "highly satisfied" on school evaluation surveys.
- 95% of parents will indicate that they are "satisfied" or highly satisfied" on school evaluation surveys.
- 80% of our CTE seniors will complete state certification to selected fields and have completed a 3+ month internship as a graduation requirement.

**Capacity to effectively measure success:** At United Scholars, every teacher will gather real-time data—daily. They will do this to gain insight into their students' needs, informing how they teach every day. Teachers will use a variety of tools ranging from a free online personalized learning platform to Google surveys, paper assessments, and quick and easy formative assessments. Gathering real-time insights will allow teachers to differentiate instruction, give their students' choice in how they learn, and create scaffolds and extensions to meet their students' needs. It will also help them see how their students can support one another.

If the school **falls below stated targets**, school leaders will create a School Improvement Plan (SIP) that will outline the indicators of concern, and set targets for improving them. The plan will focus on areas of deficiency as well as areas of success that could be strengthened further or replicated.

### Why school is critical for New Orleans

**Addressing the identified needs:** While there has been a great deal of innovation and improvement in the educational system since Hurricane Katrina devastated much of the city, there is still much work yet to be done. Due to the education overhaul in New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina, student performance increased by eight to 14 percentage points in the last decade<sup>1</sup>. That said, while proficiency rates have increased, only 38 percent of students mastered English and math. Over the last four years, the achievement gap has widened between African American and white students, and between low-income students and their more-privileged peers in New Orleans<sup>2</sup>. United Scholars would provide a much-needed high-quality educational option to this population of students.

Members of the United Scholars team have been successful at overcoming urban blight, and have experience working create sanctuaries of innovation, inspiration and real, measurable academic achievement. United Scholars will serve a wide array of students through an innovative combination of blended learning and Career Technical Education. This ambitious plan has been developed by a leadership team with a history of success.

The three founders of United Scholars have extensive experience working in under-resourced public schools, and are experts at providing the building blocks of a high-quality education. The team also has a history of innovative programming for public school students that helps them to reach their full potential. The proposed school will bring to fruition many of the ideas they have developed over decades of work.

United Scholars will:

- **Provide families with a safe and high-quality education.** United Scholars will focus on communities that are most in need of educational reform to ensure that we are addressing the needs of our most underserved neighbors.
- **Provide a comprehensive curriculum that will help students become competitive in our global economy.** United Scholars will use an innovative blended learning curriculum, that has been proven to work effectively when implemented properly and supported by effective teachers. The school will also offer the option of Career Technical Education to prepare students for careers in the changing economies of New Orleans and the country in general.
- **Provide a school that is convenient to those most in need.** The United Scholars facility will be accessible to the community. We envision that it will become an educational pillar for the community, as well as a community center where families will have access to a variety of resources.
- **Recruit, hire and train high-quality, passionate teachers who will make a difference.** United Scholars will work with colleges and universities in the surrounding areas, and with other, like-minded organizations, to recruit the best teachers for our students, who will provide the support and nurturing environment they need to thrive.
- **Nurture a culture that builds community and minimizes conflicts:** School culture will be oriented around Restorative Practices, which focus on building strong relationships essential to learning, growth and a health school climate.

**Families and community we will serve:** As discussed, the United Scholars team has not yet identified a site for our school, and therefore cannot say with certainty which families they will serve. However, they expect the student population to be generally reflective of the population served by public schools in the

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[http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/charterschoice/2015/08/new\\_orleans\\_test\\_scores\\_improved\\_with\\_charter\\_schools\\_after\\_hurricane\\_katrina.html](http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/charterschoice/2015/08/new_orleans_test_scores_improved_with_charter_schools_after_hurricane_katrina.html)

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.nola.com/education/index.ssf/2016/08/louisiana\\_test\\_scores\\_2016.html](http://www.nola.com/education/index.ssf/2016/08/louisiana_test_scores_2016.html)

City of New Orleans. According to the city's Department of Education statistics for 2014-2015, these students are approximately 87% African American, 6% White, and 6% other, with 5% identifying as Latino. Moreover, students are overwhelmingly economically underserved, with 85% qualifying for free and reduced lunch. This percentage is higher than that for many other major American cities, including Chicago, New York, and Miami.

United Scholars will be extremely conscientious about making parents feel welcome. They expect to be competitive within New Orleans because of their unique curriculum and educational offerings, as well as strong school culture.

**Collaboration:** United Scholars will conduct extensive outreach to ensure it has established a well-rounded group of partner organizations that are invested in student success. The team will seek immediate relationships with New Orleans colleges and universities, the police department, Mayor's Office, etc.

One early focus for community partnership will be New Orleans organizations focused on students' health, particularly diet and exercise. Possible partnerships include Cooking Matters New Orleans, which provides nutrition education programming that helps participants shop smarter, use nutrition information to make healthier choices and cook delicious, healthy, affordable meals.

**External factors:** As an educational provider that will be new to New Orleans, United Scholars may face resistance from the community and/or local schools. They will work to overcome this resistance by including all stakeholders in our planning activities, and by collaborating with surrounding schools and community-based organizations as much as possible. The team will work throughout the planning year to secure the community's trust.

United Scholars will also strive to share their depth of experience and knowledge with the community. All members of the founding team have successfully served low-income students in cities such as New York City, Camden & Newark, NJ, and Philadelphia, PA. While the Urban Scholars team acknowledges that building relationships takes time, they have full confidence in their ability to successfully forge strong partnerships with the students and families that are an integral part of the community.