

LA's Recovery School District:
A System Innovation
Empowering Educators to Thrive
(a work in process)

Paul Pastorek
Chiefs for Change
Seattle, WA
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Lessons Learned – LA's RSD

- Our children are more capable of learning than we give them credit for.
- When an adult's potential is unleashed, all things become possible.
- When you design a system that rewards high quality leaders and teachers to teach in our public schools where they become the drivers of the solutions
- The experience is replicable provided the innovation is applied to the system with fidelity.

LA's RSD – The Basics

- The Recovery School District is a state agency headed by the State Superintendent of Education.
- Unlike traditional “state takeovers” of districts or schools
 - states have historically replaced a local school board, a superintendent or principal
 - the RSD devolves control of running schools to local community members by chartering schools.
- Unlike a traditional school district where the central office “commands and controls” in a top down approach, the RSD empowers qualified charter schools to determine their own destiny, provided kids benefit.

LA's RSD – The Basics

- The Role of the Recovery School District is to:
 - Authorize high quality operators of schools;
 - Set specific outcome based goals and objectives for the operators of schools to achieve (e.g. academic achievement, graduation rates, college and career readiness for all children, etc.)
 - Monitor the operation of schools to determine whether they are achieving the goals and objectives (schools must meet targets at a three year gate and a five year gate) or face termination of their charter;
 - Assure compliance with law;
 - Reward proven providers of schools with more schools
 - Remove unsuccessful providers from operating schools

LA's RSD – The Basics

- The Recovery School District **cannot dictate:**
 - the curriculum to the school;
 - the pacing of the dissemination of the curriculum;
 - what subject matter programs will be offered in a school (vendor based programs, etc.)
 - what after school programs will be offered;
 - what extracurricular activities are to be offered;
 - that principals run their schools in some particular manner
 - And so on...
- The Recovery School District **can dictate:**
 - Compliance with law

LA's RSD – The Basics

- Every school in the RSD:
 - Is a public school;
 - Charter must be owned by a non-profit;
 - Non-profits may hire for-profit operators (only 2/55)
 - Is funded the same way and in the same amounts as every other school in the community;
 - Must be an open admissions school (no “select” admissions schools, no “magnet” schools, no cherry picking)
 - Must offer a lottery when there is more demand than seats;
 - Must comply with law, including offering services to special needs children;
 - Must have a population in the school that equals or is greater than the poverty make up of the community;

LA's RSD – The Basics

- How does a school go into the RSD? (Law passed pre-Katrina – only 2 pre-Katrina in New Orleans)
- If a any school any where in the state is chronically producing large numbers of students who do not meet grade level expectations, we consider the school eligible for placement in the RSD.
 - 50% of students (or more) cannot achieve grade level expectations;
 - Four consecutive years;
 - School Improvement Grant Money provided to the school district for support;
 - State assistance;
- If the above conditions exist for 4 years, then the State Board may place the school in the RSD

LA's RSD – The Basics

- What does it mean to have a school “go into” the RSD?
 - The district must allow the state to “use” the building that it used to educate the children at no charge to the state.
 - The funding for the school that would go to the district for the education of a child leaves the district and goes to the RSD which distributes it to the school. Thus, local, state and federal funding leaves the school district and goes to the RSD for use in the school.
 - The RSD may choose to operate the school itself (hire a principal and staff and manage the day to day) or it may choose to charter the school for it to operate. The strategic intent is to charter the school, but in the absence of a qualified operator, the RSD will operate it until a qualified operator can be identified.

LA's RSD – The Basics

- How did schools in New Orleans go into the RSD after Katrina?
- After Katrina, special law was passed – if 25% of schools in a district were chronically failing, the every school in the district that performed before the state average score (per our accountability system) would be automatically placed in the RSD.
- The remaining schools (17) were kept by the existing school board. (Interestingly, the existing school board has chartered 12 of the 17 schools.)

The Strategies for School Reform

- Everyone is an expert on what's wrong with schools.
- A summary of the voices that I have heard for 25 years:
 - More \$\$\$
 - Get a better school board
 - Get a better superintendent
 - Get better principals
 - Get better teachers
 - Get a better curriculum, standards, programs
 - Get more computers, then software, then online, then laptops, now iPads.
 - Teach kids earlier (early childhood)
 - More parental involvement
 - Better healthcare, mental healthcare
 - Overcome race and/or poverty
 - Etc, etc, etc.
- You can put all of these ideas into an ill designed **system** and you will get poor results or unsustainably good ones.

Strategic Intent

- Foster
 - creation of a competitive environment,
 - empowerment school leaders to build a team of effective teachers,
 - removing the barriers to success and
 - holding school leaders and their team rigorously accountable
- Eschew
 - running the failed schools under a traditional command and control one size fits all school district
 - micro-managing schools from central office
 - bloated bureaucracies by eliminating central office micromanagers and push money to the classroom.

Strategic Intent

- Charter as many schools as possible;
- Charter approval set to very high standards;
- Create a very decentralized school district that abhors command and control and empowers people and provides support (capacity building);
- Build the capacity of the RSD to oversee, not manage schools;
- Get School Boards out of the business of micromanaging central office and schools; and
- RSD may offer support, but schools in the RSD are not required to use RSD support (RSD support is “an” answer, not “the” answer)

Strategic Intent (con't)

- Principals take responsibility for the outcomes in schools and are given the flexibility to make the decisions around:
 - Human capital (hiring, firing and position appointments);
 - Financial capital;
 - Educational strategy
- Schools which perform well are given the opportunity to run other schools;
- Schools which perform poorly are given the boot;
- Every year the four chronically lowest performing schools are closed and new operators come in;
- Money follows the child (calculated twice per year) creating competition for the child;
- Open enrollment across the district (giving children an opportunity to go to a school fit for him or her);

Strategic Intent (con't)

- Significantly increased community engagement
 - Creation of New Schools for New Orleans (non-profit)
 - A human capital engine
 - An incubator of new schools
 - A replicator of excellent schools
 - Hundreds of citizens serve as charter school board members.
- Reliance on Teach for America, Teach NOLA, The New Teacher Project
- Strong alternative certification options

Strategic Intent (con't)

- Children failure
not an option
- Adult failure
not tolerated.

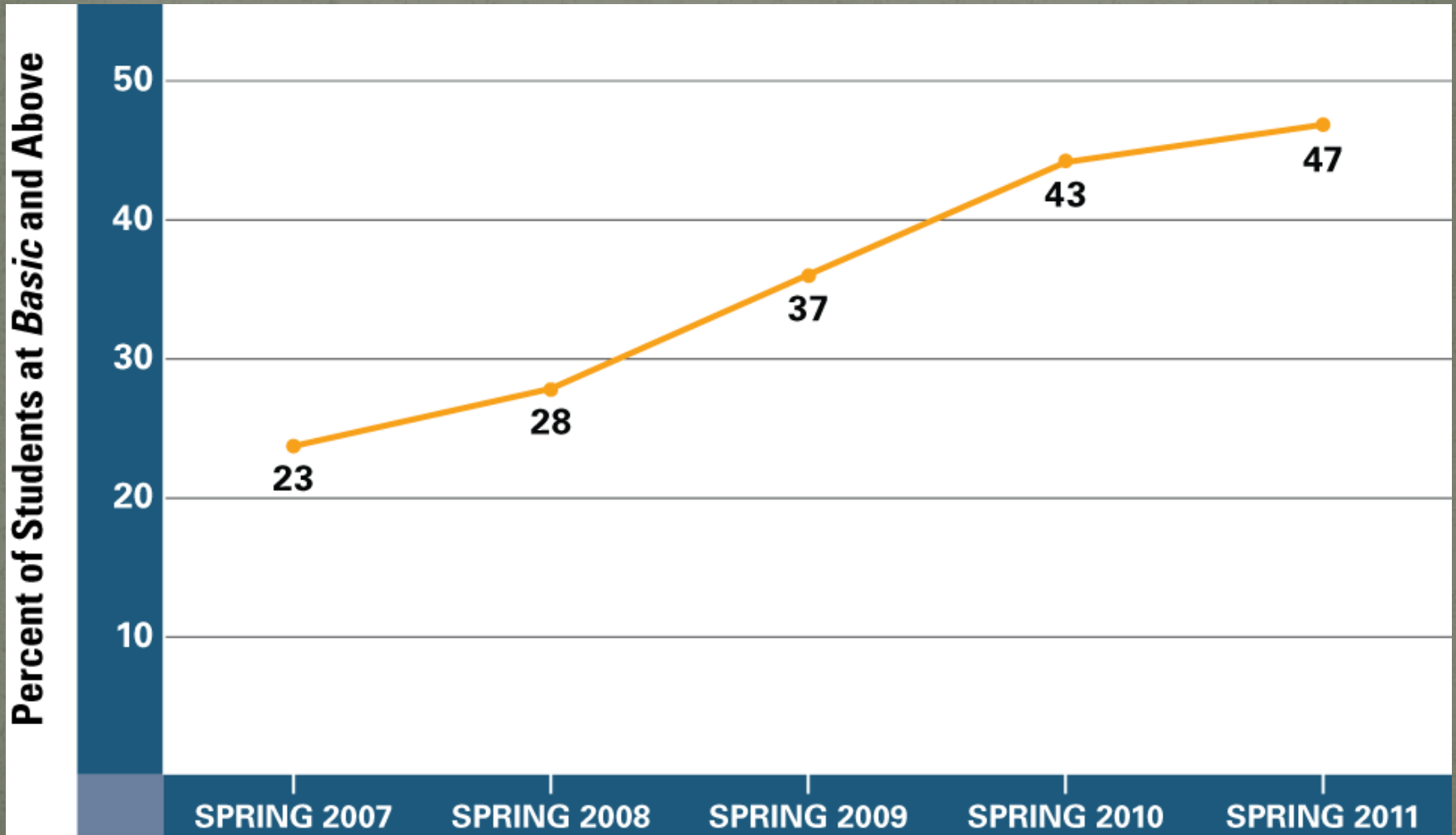
Results

2011 RSD Press Conference

Since 2007, the Percent of Students Performing at Grade-Level on State Assessments in Recovery School District Schools in New Orleans Has More than Doubled.

RSD New Orleans: Four Year Summary

Percent Students at *Basic* and Above (All Grades and Subjects)



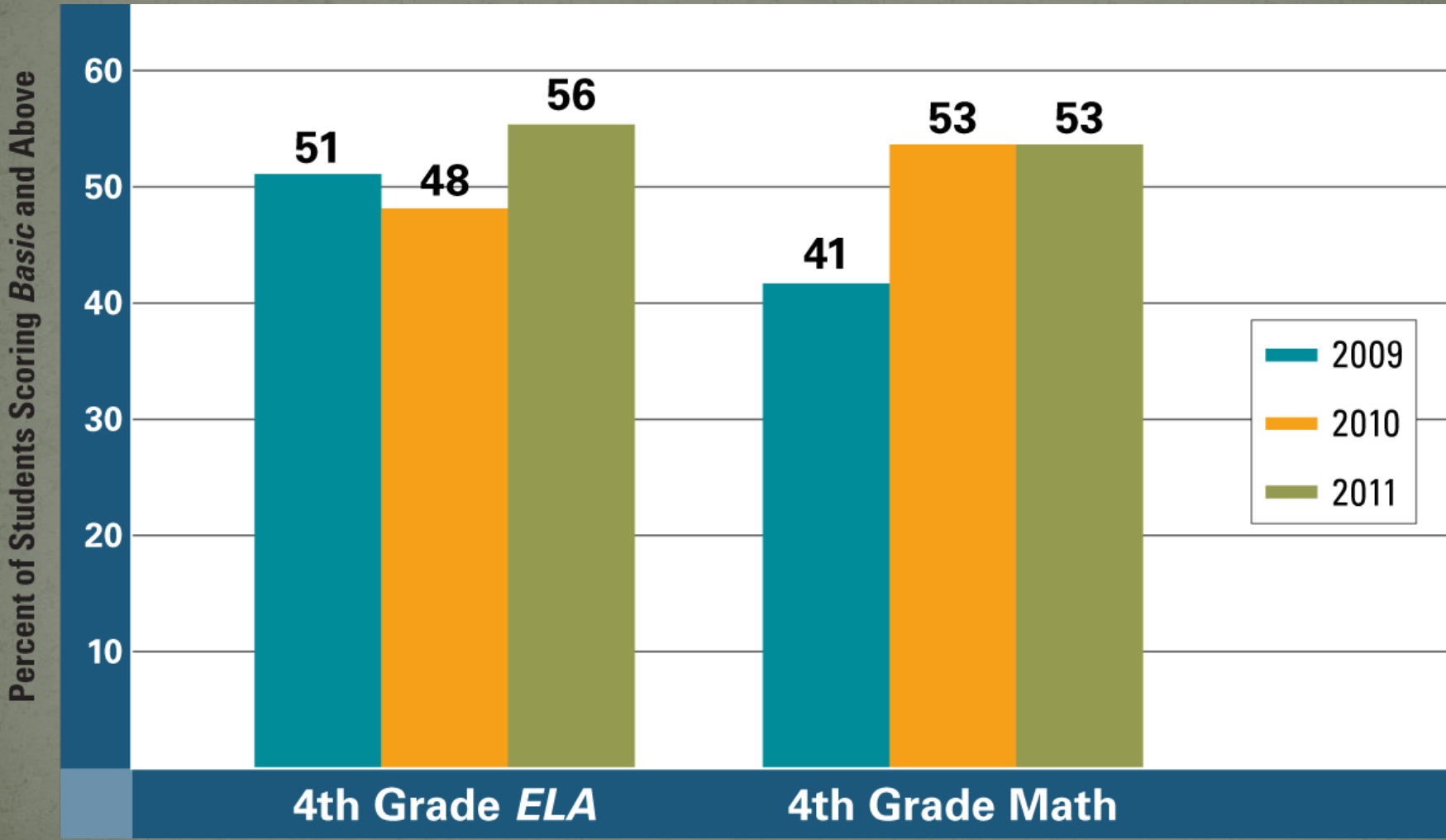
Percentage of Students Scoring *Basic* and Above

+/- Change From Spring 2010 to Spring 2011

Grade	Test	ELA	MATH	Science	Social Studies
3	iLEAP	0	+6	-2	-1
4	LEAP	+8	0	-1	+5
5	iLEAP	+5	+4	+2	+1
6	iLEAP	+1	+1	+9	+7
7	iLEAP	+2	-4	+3	-1
8	LEAP	+13	+13	+12	+14
9	iLEAP	--	--	--	--
10	GEE	+2	+2	+11	--
11	GEE	--	--	--	+8

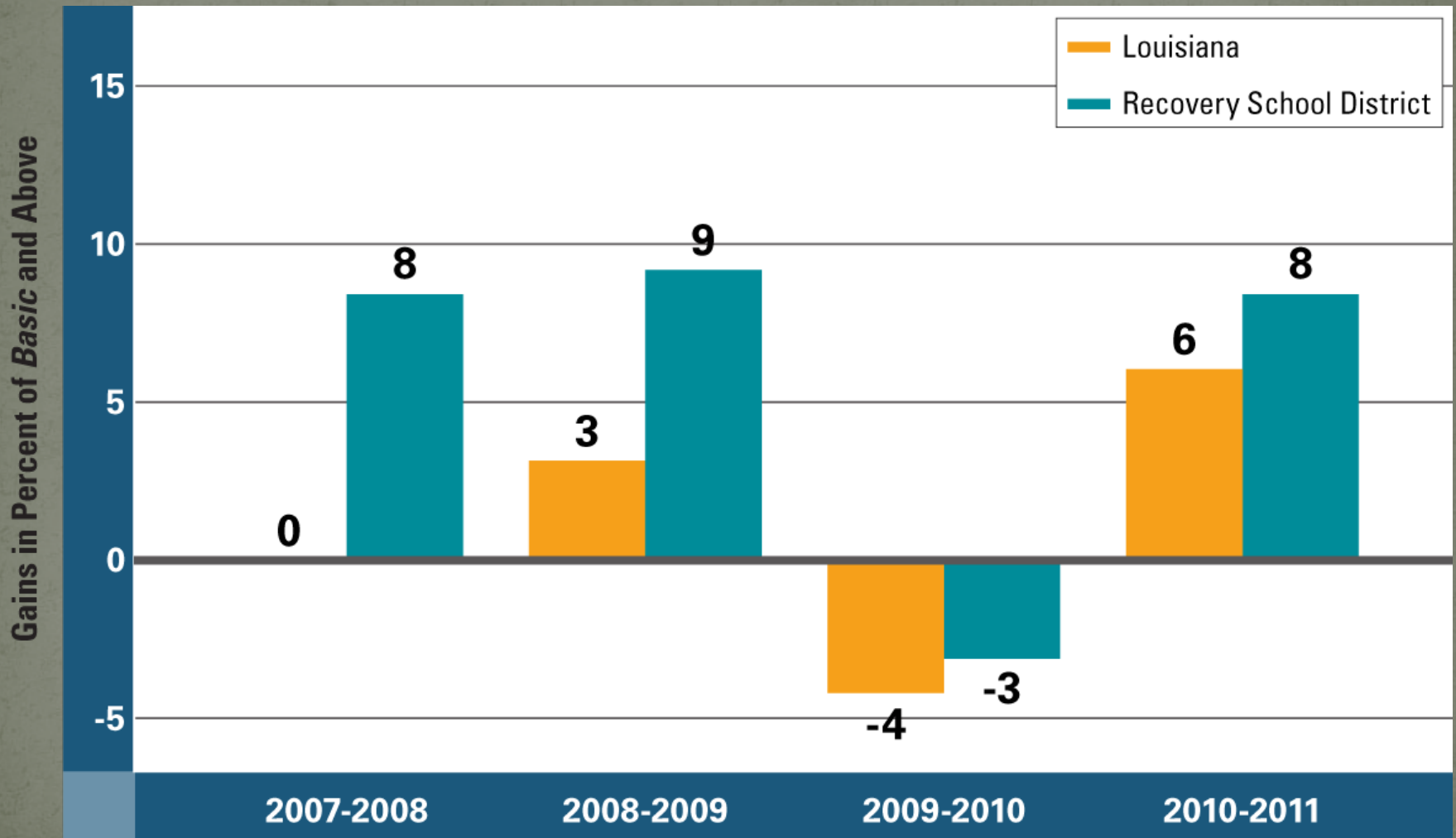
Recovery School District – New Orleans

Percentage of Students scoring *Basic* and Above in 4th Grade



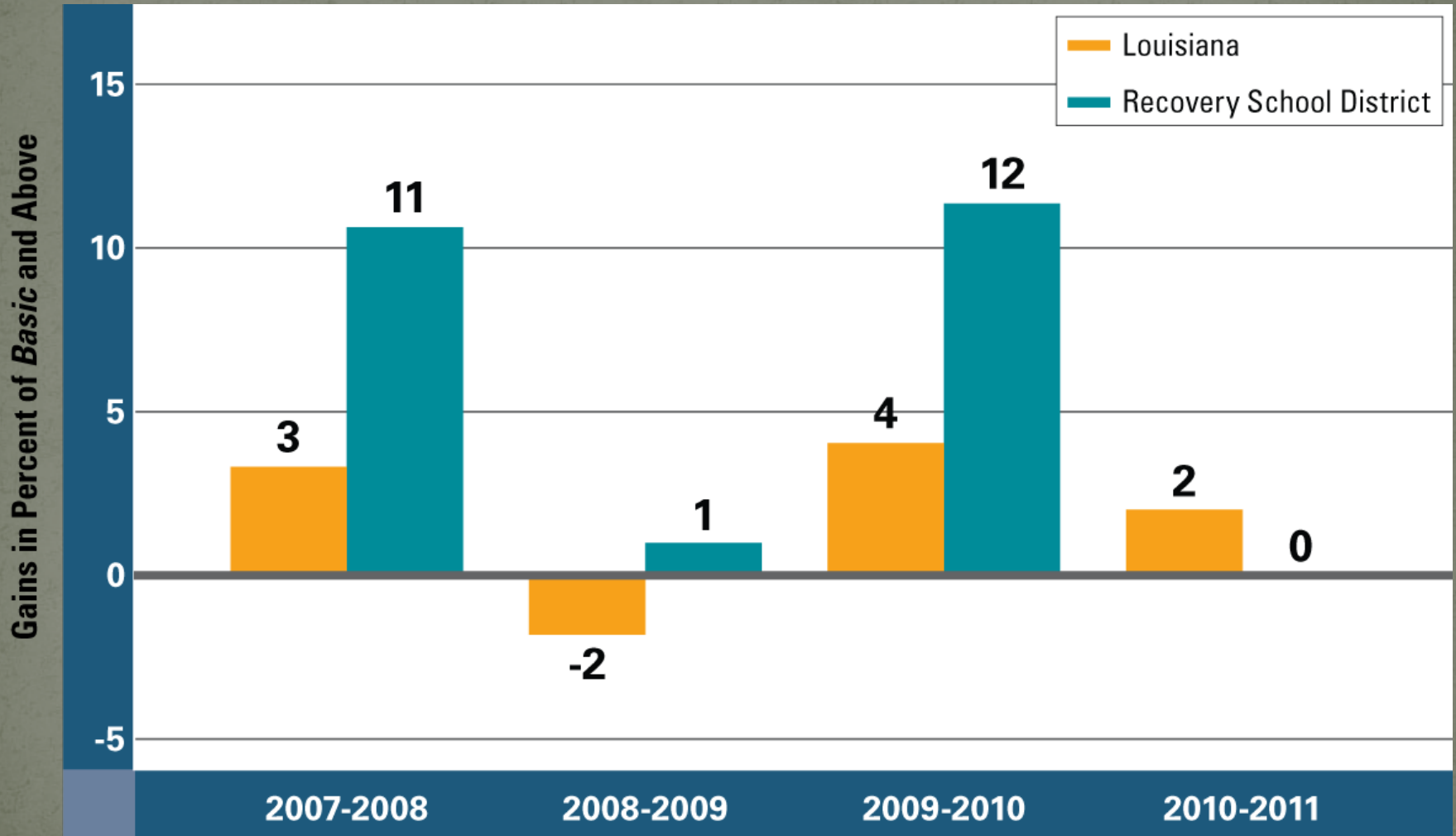
4th Grade LEAP - ELA

Gains in Students Performing at *Basic* and Above



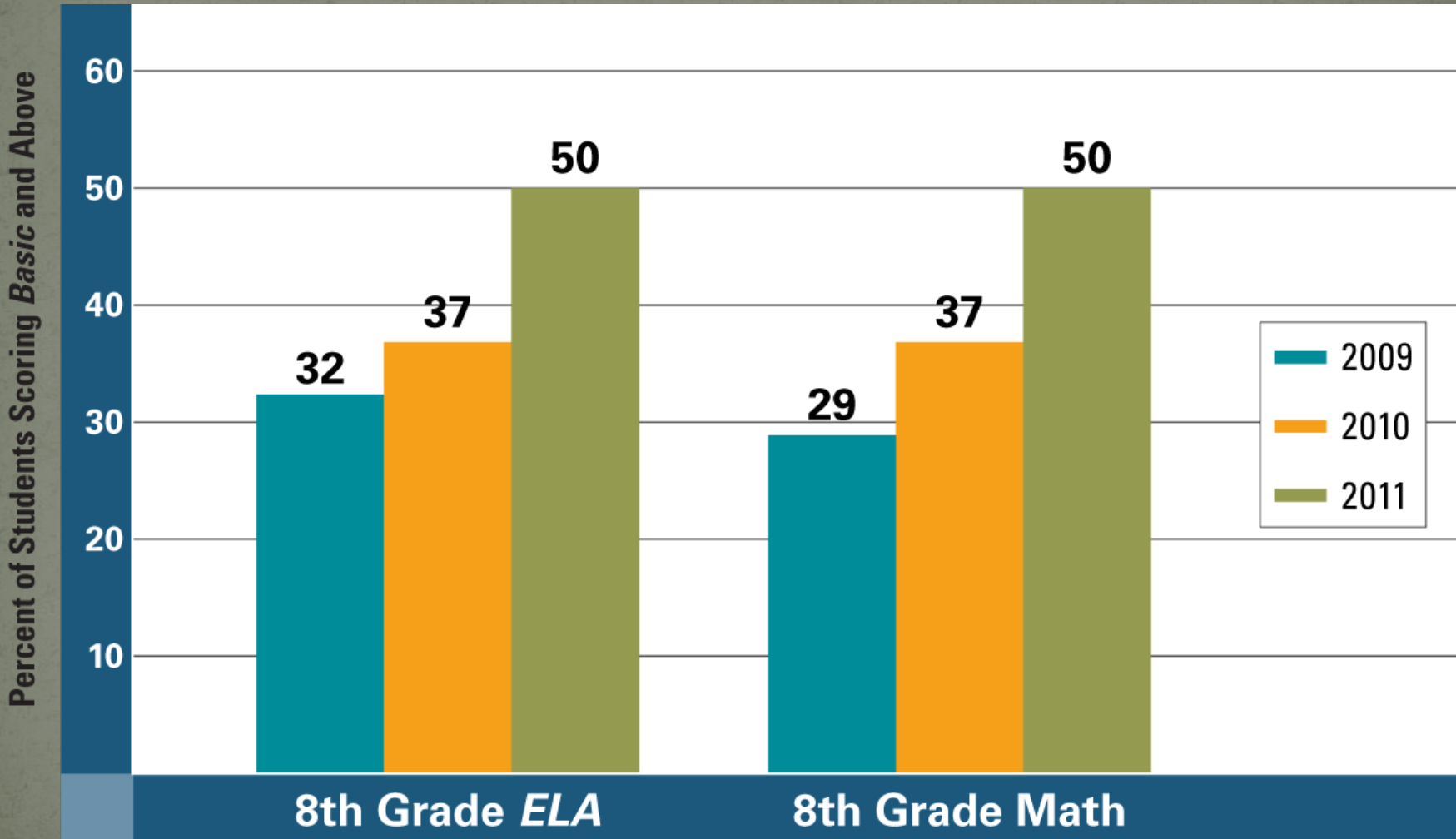
4th Grade LEAP - Math

Gains in Students Performing at *Basic* and Above



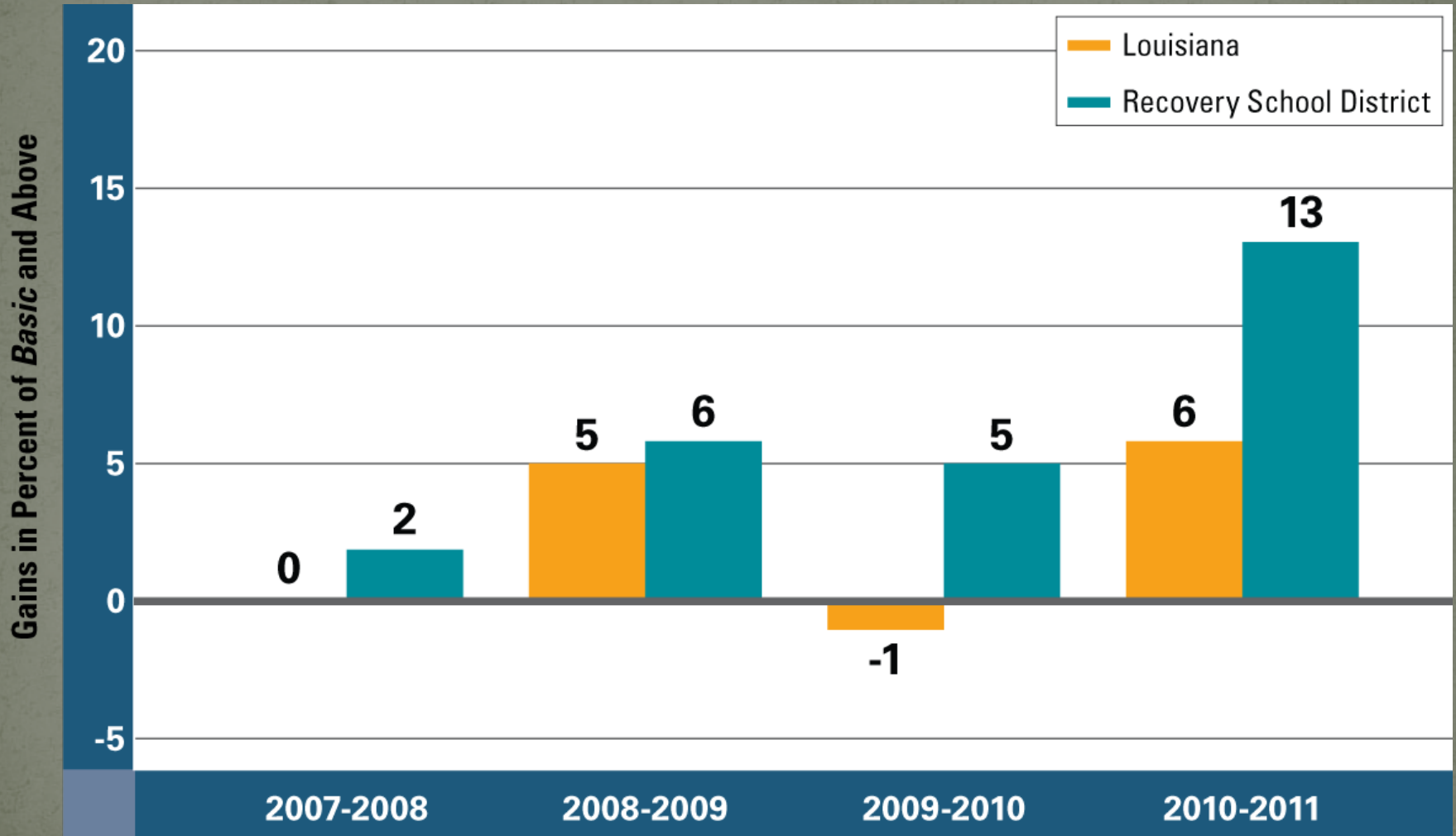
Recovery School District – New Orleans

Percentage of Students Scoring *Basic* and Above in 8th Grade



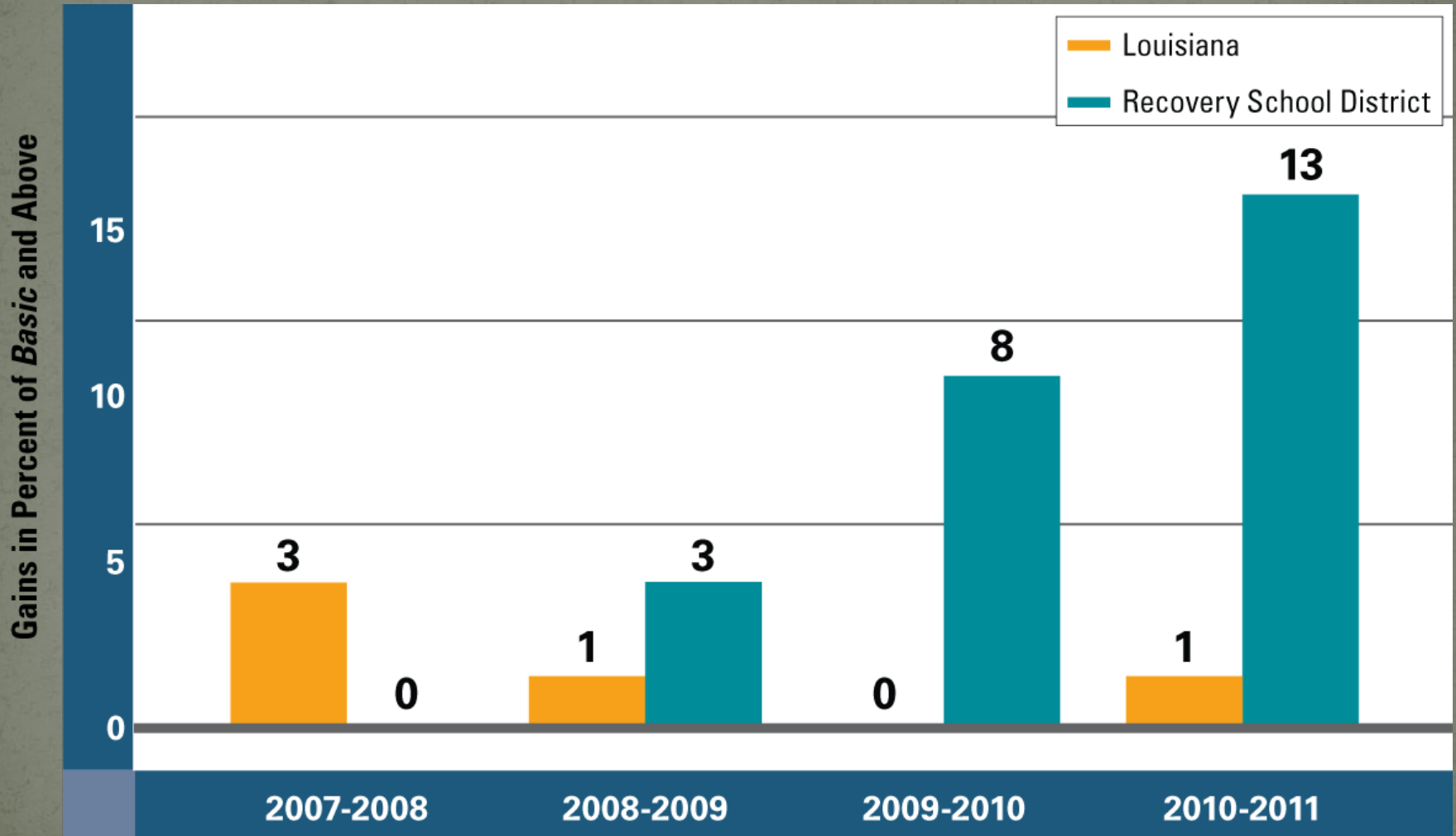
8th Grade LEAP - ELA

Gains in Students Performing at *Basic* and Above



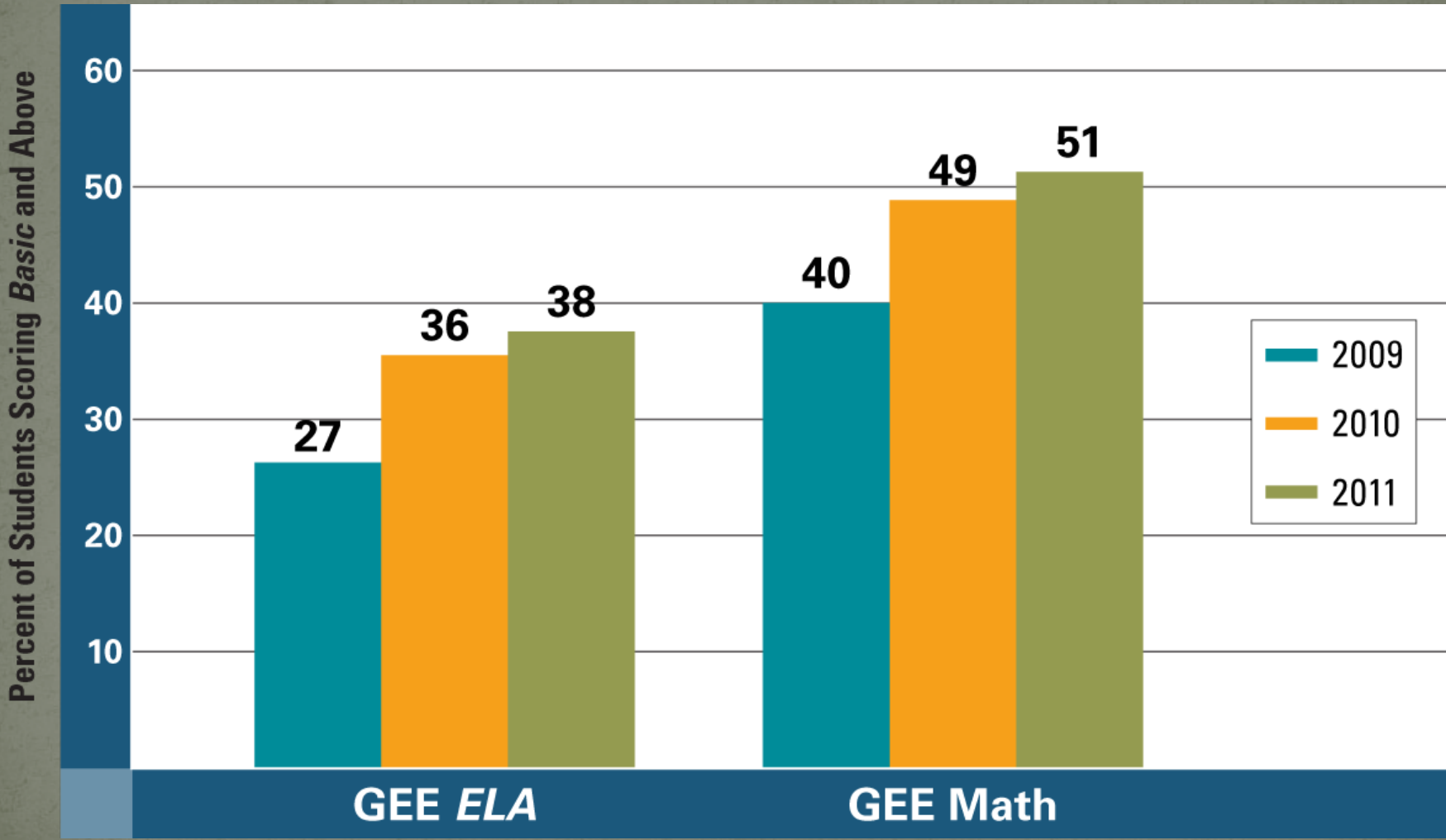
8th Grade LEAP - Math

Gains in Students Performing at *Basic* and Above

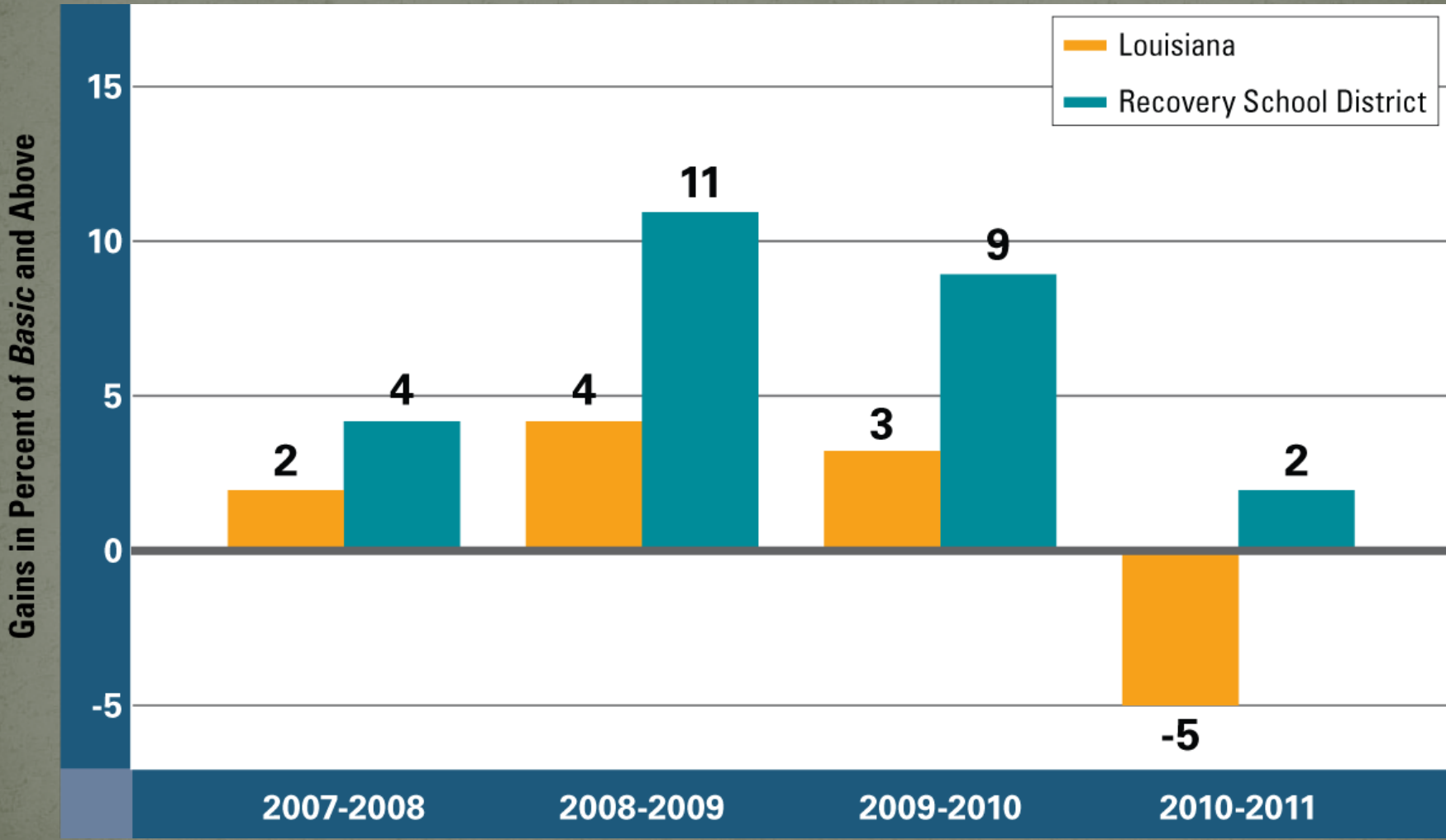


Recovery School District – New Orleans

Percentage of Students Scoring *Basic* and Above on the GEE

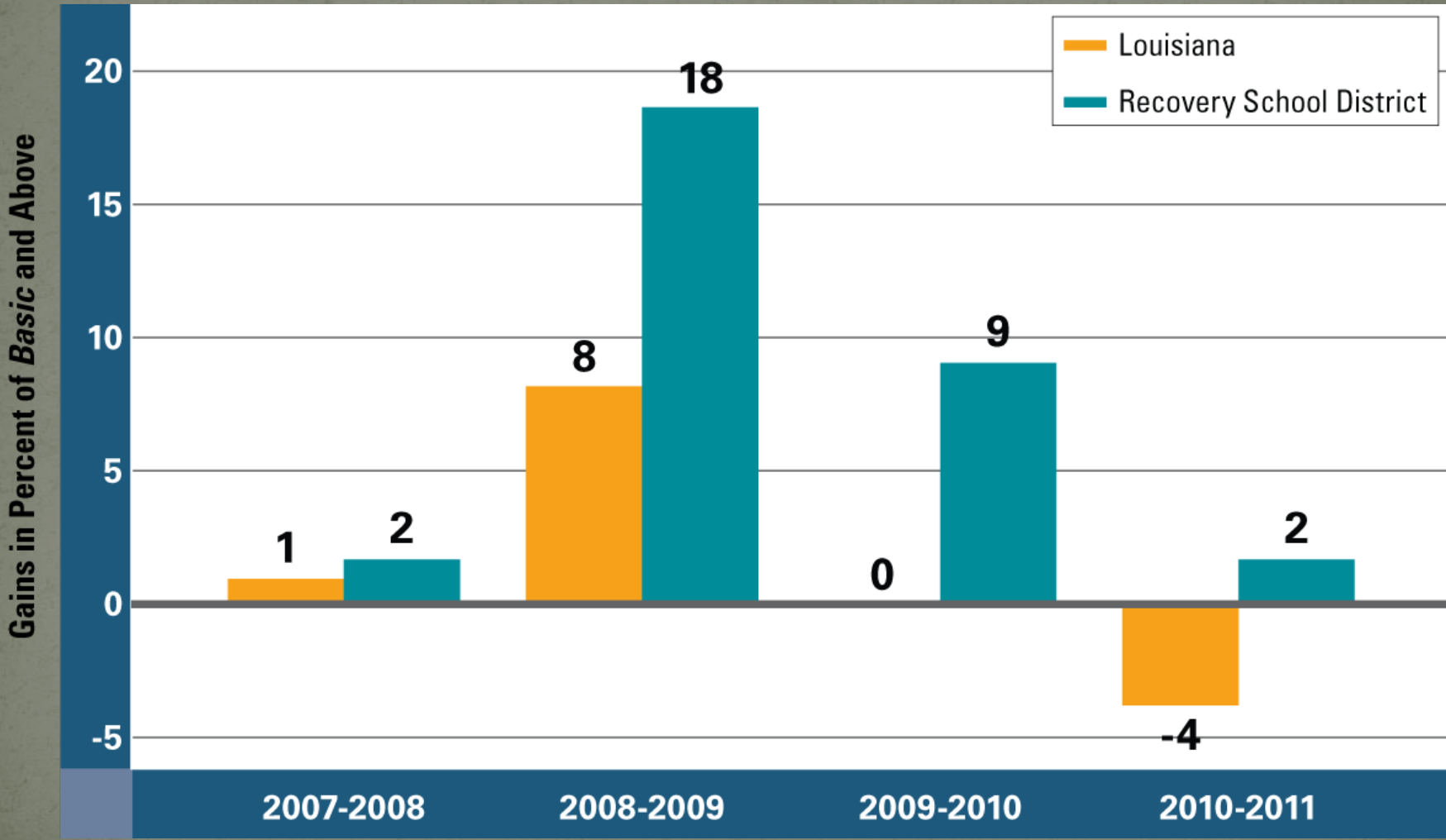


Gains in Students Performing at *Basic* and Above



GEE - Math

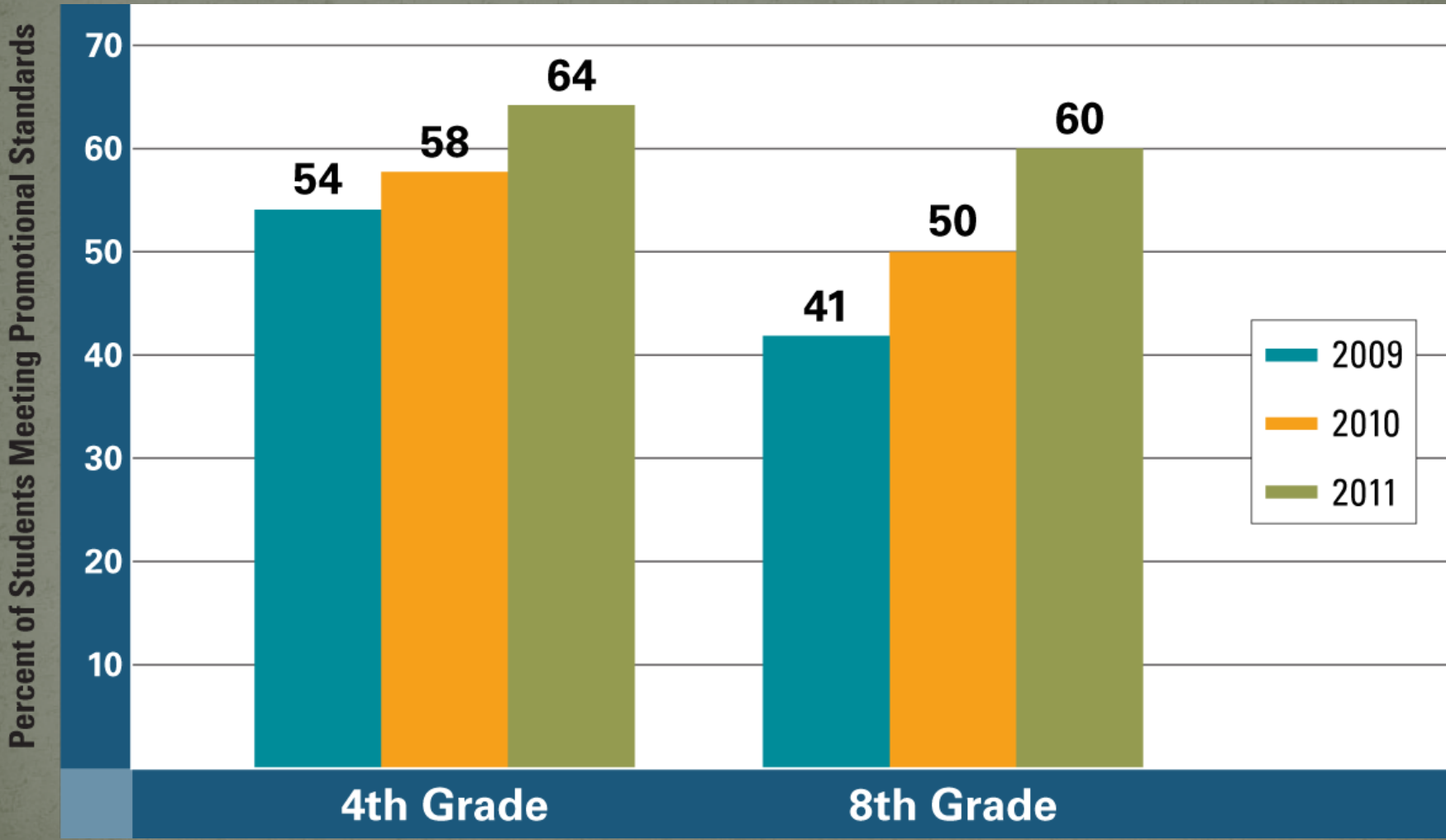
Gains in Students Performing at *Basic* and Above



**Percentage of Students in 4th and 8th
Grades Meeting Promotional
Standard Increased Significantly
Between 2010 and 2011**

Recovery School District – New Orleans

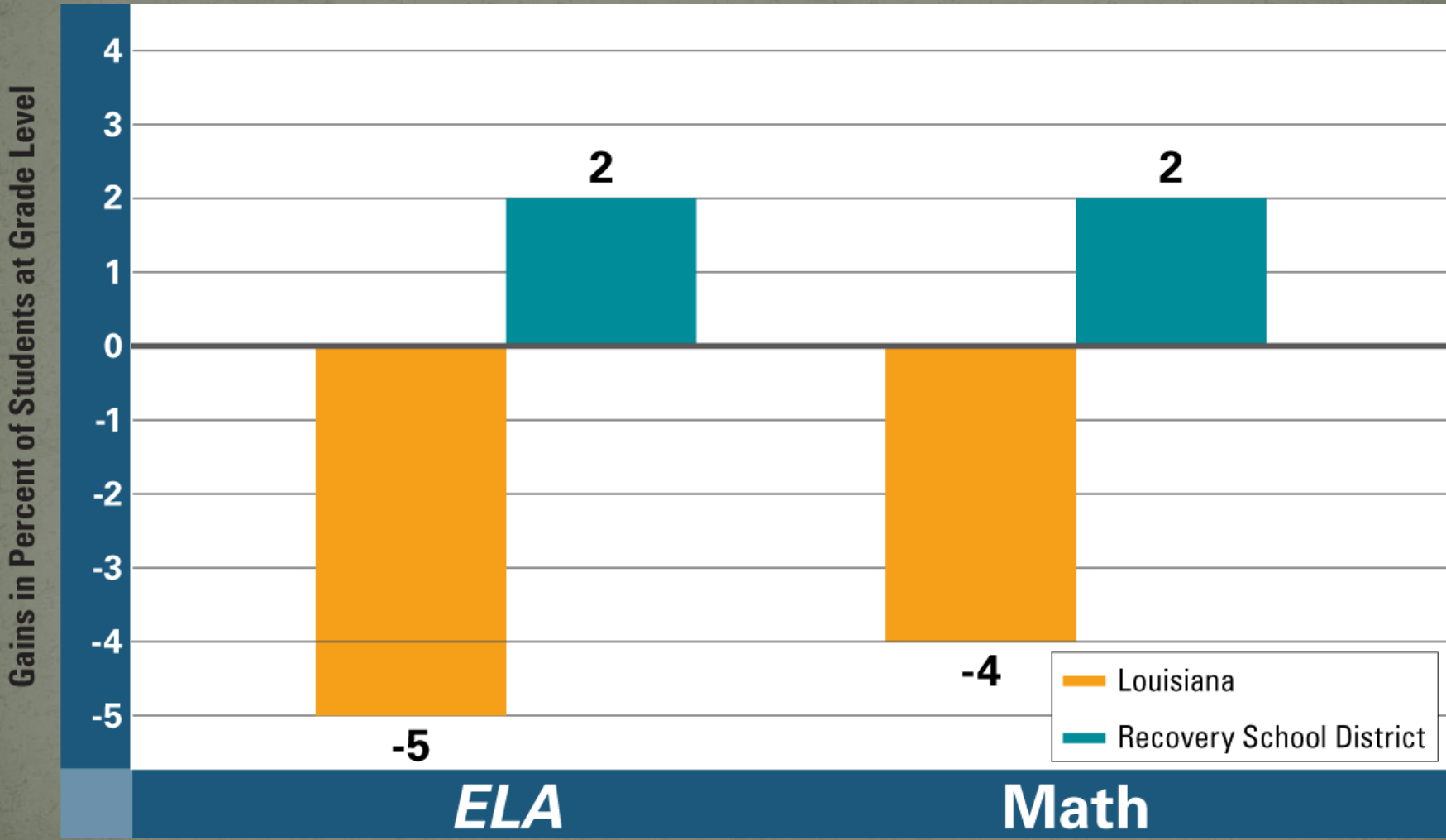
Percentage of Students Meeting Promotional Standards



**Despite Declines in the Percentage of
10th Grade Students Scoring Basic
and Above Statewide, the RSD
Achieved Marked Growth in 10th
Grade ELA and Math Scores
Between 2010 and 2011.**

Recovery School District – New Orleans

Gains in Percentage of 10th Grade Students at Grade Level



Despite Our Progress, Still the Majority of Our Students Are Not at Grade Level.

We Must Achieve Universal Growth to Ensure Every Student Has the Opportunity to Attend a World-Class School.

Today's Results Confirm What the People of New Orleans Have Always Believed – That Goal is Achievable.

RSD Comparisons

- *Pre Katrina* (< 8/2005)– New Orleans schools had 62,000 children attending; about 90% poor; about 94% African American. *Today* – about 37,000 children in New Orleans schools (about 26,000 children in the RSD; about 11,000 in the Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB)).
- *Pre Katrina* – 2/124 schools were charter schools in New Orleans. *Today* - about 51/66 RSD schools are charter. When combining RSD and OPSB schools 63/83 or 76% of the schools in New Orleans are charters.

RSD Comparisons

- *Pre Katrina* - TFA and The New Teacher Project could barely get a toehold in the District. *Today* - >30% of teachers are TFA/TNTP. NLNS also in New Orleans now.
- *Pre Katrina* – New Orleans school district was declared to be one of the lowest performing in the state and the country. *Today* – New Orleans (either RSD alone or RSD/OPSB combined) is no longer worst in the state (62/71) or the country. At DPS of 83.2 is near BR (86.2) and Jefferson (88.2) and on the rise.
- CREDO Report shows that charter schools outperform traditional public schools in LA in 15/16 categories

Challenges

- There was/is no precedent or proven model to follow. It was/is an experiment in governance of an educational school system.
- Katrina – made it more difficult than necessary
- Decentralization brings many challenges:
 - Maintaining quality across the district;
 - Maintaining compliance across the district;
 - Confusion for parents and community who are habituated to a centralized school district;
 - Enrollment

Challenges

- Competition can breed unhealthy environment;
- Transportation costs high in an open enrollment environment;
- Converting a district office to a capacity building enterprise vice a command and control entity;
- Shutting down schools is difficult;
- Doing it in bits and pieces while doable is very challenging;

Critics

- We're cooking the books;
- The numbers are misleading due to changing populations;
- Charters schools don't represent the community;
- Charter schools deviously self select;
- Parents are mandated to participate in charter schools activities or their children are dismissed;
- Per pupil expenditures very high;

Critics (con't)

- Lack of transparency into district and school operations due to decentralization and large numbers of charters;
- Lack of accountability of state officials;
- Democratically elected people are not in charge of the schools; and
- Special needs children are not being served.
- Privatizing public schools; and
- Takes money away from traditional public schools.

Conclusion

- Is it in the best interests of all of the children to keep doing what we've been doing?
- Parents initially showed a deep skepticism for charter schools, but now the believers predominate;
- RSD is not perfect, but shows great promise for turning around chronically low achieving schools at scale;
- RSD is a model for how 21st century school districts can and should be operated.