



Kathryn McCabe

A graduate of the Academy of Notre Dame in Villanova, Pennsylvania, Katie McCabe majored in Urban Studies at Penn and sub-matriculated to earn a Master's degree in Public Administration at the Fels School of Government. During her first two years at Penn, she pursued her interest in the causes/effects of urban poverty by working as a student director of LIFT, a community resource center in West Philadelphia, and as an intern in the office of City Councilwoman Maria Quiñones-Sánchez. She subsequently developed a strong interest in urban education and its power to strengthen communities. For the past two summers, she taught middle school students through the Philadelphia Freedom Schools program (2010), and worked in New Orleans for the Community and Policy team of the Recovery School District (2011). She spent her junior and senior years working at the Student Success Center of University City High School as a special project manager to create and implement college and career curricula. To learn more about university-community collaborations, she worked to develop Academically Based Service Learning classes at the Wharton School through the Netter Center Student Advisory Board, and coordinated six service trips across the country as a board member of Penn Alternate Spring Break. Finally, she served as the co-chair of the Civic House Associations Coalition, a student board that advises Penn's student-led community service groups. She has earned the 2012 Keller Award for Community Service from the Netter Center and been elected to Phi Beta Kappa for her work.

CAPSTONE PROJECT

Examining the Wave of Reform: Community Involvement in the Post-Katrina New Orleans Public Education System

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Elaine Simon, School of Arts and Sciences, Urban Studies Program

Community involvement is fundamental to the sustainability of any major reform efforts involving public education systems. This capstone project examines the nature of community involvement in a city at the forefront of national education reform: New Orleans. The post-Katrina efforts of the Recovery School District to solicit community input offer a unique opportunity to examine three elements of community input in the New Orleans urban education system. These three elements are: divides in approaches to reform among the actors in the city's urban education system; the undemocratic design of the city's state-operated school district; and, the local historical, socioeconomic, and institutional factors unique to New Orleans. Understanding the interactions between these three elements of the city's urban education system will better prepare leaders to develop and facilitate more democratic and sustainable methods of community involvement at the federal, state, district, and school levels.

My analysis of the relationships among these three elements resulted in four important findings. First, I have concluded that after Hurricane Katrina, a divide formed in New Orleans public education between the supporters of community-based education reforms and market-based reforms. The second is that the post-Katrina public education system of New Orleans, largely under the control of the Recovery School District, provides limited, implementation-focused opportunities for community involvement in the public education system. Third, divisions in the New Orleans urban education community and lack of democracy within its education governance system has resulted in a disproportionate amplification of the voices of upper class, politically connected individuals, and high-capacity organizations in the New Orleans public school system. Yet, simultaneously, several factors have converged to create an environment in which new, democratic methods of district- and school-level community involvement in the New Orleans public school system can be further developed and institutionalized.