

**“Not the kids’ fault – at all”
A Mother’s Story about Her Children’s Education after
Hurricane Katrina
By Angela Morgan¹**

Before Katrina, I had six kids who went to school in New Orleans. Nadia was in the 11th grade and went to Cohen High School. Joseph was in the 8th grade. Joshua [was] in the 7th. They went to Woodson Elementary School. Jermaine was in the 6th. Jenica was in the 4th. Justin was in 3rd grade.

I liked the schools they attended. I mean basically I had been dealing with the school for a while because one of my kids has ADHD (attention deficit hypertension disorder). They would call me a lot to come to the school because of his behavior before he started seeing the doctors and stuff. So I was automatically going to the school volunteering. So, I mean - far as the school -everything was alright. You know, nice and everything. But after the storm it’s something else -- it’s a disaster.



¹ Angela Morgan was one of the initial plaintiffs in a lawsuit filed by the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund to assure that all New Orleans k-12 students have school to attend in New Orleans. A copy of the Complaint filed can be found at http://www.naacpldf.org/content/pdf/boisseau/BoisseauVPicard_NOLA_Complaint.pdf.

After the storm, we went to Texas and then – that was in Houston – and then from there we went to Atlanta. We were in Texas for like almost a month. I was in Atlanta for like 'bout three months – three going on four months. A lady from Texas helped me go Atlanta. She got some tickets for me to go.

When we got to Atlanta, I enrolled the kids into school there. They were in school for like – I'd say almost 2-3 weeks. Then, they started having problems with the children saying that they didn't belong there and stuff like that. I started hearing a lot of things that was going on so I actually took the children out of school and moved back to Louisiana and eventually put them in school in Avondale. That was in 2006.

I only stayed in Avondale for two to three months. My kids had the same problems there -- being harassed by other kids in Avondale. We moved from Avondale back to New Orleans, back to where we were living - at the B.W. Cooper Housing Development. We moved back here, I think, the week that school started.

Since Hurricane Katrina, there's not just one school system anymore – it's like all of these different school systems and charter schools and special schools, and it gets so confusing. There's no one number to call just to get the basic information. So a lot of folks really don't know what to do. Nobody is giving us information. Now my kids are attending schools in different school districts and in different parts of town. Two of them go to schools across the river in Algiers, and that's a long distance from where I stay. And then when they finally got back to school, they were not able to get into their right grades. It was even worse for my son, Joseph.



Shandrelia

Age 10

I registered Joseph, a special education student, with the Recovery School District in November 2006. He was assigned to go to Wicker Elementary School and was told that a bus service would be provided for him. But it took months for them to get a bus for Joseph. We live uptown and Wicker Elementary is way downtown, about two miles away. We don't have a

car and no other reliable means of transportation. I was just stuck. I called *every* day asking about the bus, but nothing happened. So Joseph was unable to attend school until transportation was provided. It took the Recovery School District two months to get a bus for Joseph. I was upset for Joseph -- it was so hard to see my son fall behind in school. I was also upset about what might happen. It's against our lease for kids not to be in school and running around all day at the B.W. Cooper housing complex. But the folks at the school didn't seem to care.

The bus service wasn't provided until mid-January 2007. I was really happy at first. But on the first day Joseph showed up for school, the principal called me and asked me why was Joseph out of school for so long. I explained to her that I had been around here and been there moving between cities after the storm, but when we moved back to New Orleans they didn't have a bus. The principal told me that I had to *walk* - that I should have walked - all the way from where I'm staying to downtown and walked him to school and back every day. Really it's not the kind of distance that a child should be walking. So I was real upset. The principal threatened to call child protective services. She treated me as if I had done something wrong when all was trying to do was get my son into school.

Then they told me they didn't have any more space at the school. The principal said, "we don't have a spot for him." I asked the manager at the B.W. Cooper to talk to the principal to explain that my children had to get into school. But the principal said she didn't want to hear that. None of that. She said she would call me back to see if they had a spot for him, but never called back.

Meanwhile, the principal told me to go to the RSD office on Poland Avenue in New Orleans to find another school for Joseph. So I went over there right away. But when I got there the staff told me they didn't have a spot for Joseph at *any* school in the city and they said they would put him on a waitlist. I told them he was in special education, but it didn't matter to them. I was so hurt that they were keeping my son out of school after all we had been through. It's just not right for kids with special needs like Joseph.

I saw a lot of other parents trying to register their children, too. And they were all upset. The staff kept on telling them that the kids would have to go on a wait list. They took people’s names and phone numbers and said they would call when spaces became open. But they couldn’t even say when that would be. Those people didn’t even call me to let me know what was going on until we sued them to get Joseph into school. It took all of that just to make them do what they should have done in the first place.

Now, all of my children are in school, but they are really, really behind because of the storm and because of us moving from here and there and not having the school system give my kids the education they needed. I think they are almost like two years behind in school now. That’s, that’s too far behind. They’re getting big now and in classes with much younger children. And Joseph missed even more time because they would not let him into school for so long. Because of all that lost school time he’s being kept back *again* this year, and it really disgusts him to have to repeat the same grade. All this didn’t have to happen. The worst thing about it is that the kids suffer, but it really is not the kids’ fault – at all.

