

Three charter groups win grant money to expand in New Orleans | NOLA.com

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Three **charter school** groups have won a total of \$2.3 million to help cover the cost of adding or taking over schools in the next year as the state continues the process of turning over traditionally-run schools to independent nonprofits.



Susan Poag / The Times-Picayune

Pre-K students sort out their eggs in March 26 2010 after an Easter egg hunt at Harriet Tubman Elementary School in Algiers. Crescent City Schools, a charter management organization that will take over the school next fall, was awarded a grant to help with expenses.

KIPP New Orleans Schools, FirstLine Schools and Crescent City Schools will get federal grant money doled by the nonprofit group New Schools for New Orleans. It is the first round of grants, known as i3 awards, that will go out over five years totaling \$28 million, plus \$5.6 million in matching funds from private donors.

The grants will help charter groups, which already manage more than two-thirds of the city's schools, with the cost-intensive process of adding a new campus.

Winning these types of grants can be critical because new charters often start out with just one or a few grades of students and build from there. Since the state provides education funding

on a per-student basis, that means new schools are often covering high fixed costs _ paying for employees who provide cafeteria service or coordinate special needs programs _ with a relatively small allocation.

Two of the charter groups that won grant money, FirstLine and Crescent City, will be trying to turn around existing schools that are underperforming, a job that also involves big costs, like teacher training and new text books.

KIPP has approval from the state to start up two new primary schools in the city starting one grade at a time, adding to seven existing KIPP schools here. It does still waiting for specific building assignments from the state's **Recovery School District**.

One group that applied for the grant, Educators for Quality Alternatives, didn't get funding because

NSNO has set aside only a few slots for groups that haven't already established a track record.

"We've being very, very rigorous with new operators," Neerav Kingsland, NSNO's chief strategy officer, said. "We're not taking a lot of risk here."

In the first round of grants, they decided to go with Crescent City. The group's first shot at running a school will be the takeover of Harriet Tubman Charter School in Algiers. The Algiers Charter School Network **lost** the right to manage the school back in January after failing to meet academic and financial benchmarks.

NSNO evaluated Crescent City's application based on "intense" interviews with the group's leaders. They looked at detailed plans in areas including, school design, curriculum, instruction, and leadership experience.

In the case of KIPP and FirstLine, they had test scores from existing schools to help decide if the groups should receive money for expanding. NSNO has hired Stanford University's Center for Research on Education Outcomes, or CREDO, to analyze state data and show which charters are improving results the fastest. Both KIPP and FirstLine were able to demonstrate that their students are improving at a significantly faster rate compared with students in schools run directly by the Recovery School District.

Charter groups applying for i3 funding have to meet other criteria as well. They cannot have selective admissions requirements. And if they are taking over an existing school, they must allow students in the grades they will serve to attend the charter.

That means, for instance, that students at Harriet Tubman will not have to apply to Crescent City for a slot there, only notify the school that they intend to stay. Rather than taking on just one grade at a time, Crescent City will continue running the school from kindergarten through the eighth grade.

FirstLine **has also committed** to taking any student who already attends Joseph S. Clark High School, where it is likely to take over management beginning with the 2011-2012 school year pending final approval from the RSD.