Our Mission

The mission of Educators for Quality Alternatives is to provide struggling high school students with the skills, confidence, and experiences necessary to succeed in the education and career paths of their choice.

Our Schools

The NET Charter High School model was developed through researching highly effective strategies for young people who struggle academically or behaviorally in, or have been pushed out of, traditional schools. The NET: Central City opened in 2012 and The NET: Gentilly opened in 2017. Serving 150-175 students at each school, The NET model provides flexible daily class schedules and a year-round accelerated calendar. Every student has an individual graduation plan to support their unique strengths, growth areas, circumstances, and goals. The schools offer small classes, a restorative environment, intensive academic and behavioral interventions, and a vibrant internship program.
The NET: Gentilly Opens

In response to community demand, EQA opened its second campus in August 2017. The campus is in the Gentilly neighborhood, easily accessible by many families, including those in New Orleans East.

Within the first year, the school was full and 29 students graduated.

The NET: Gentilly is housed in a University of New Orleans building which has proved a perfect facility for the school. There is ample room for classrooms, the NOTEP construction program, and non-profit partner offices.

The NET: Gentilly’s founding staff was a carefully selected mix of NET: Central City veterans and new staff. We completed an intensive month-long training before opening.

Starting a school is always challenging and we are so proud of our staff for leading a strong first year!
Student Enrollment

City-wide data indicates that there are still far too many young people out of school in New Orleans. As leaders in this space, we believe we have a responsibility for connecting all young people with pathways to a diploma—even if that pathway isn’t with The NET.

In partnership with the other high-quality alternative programs, The NET launched a citywide recruiting initiative including bus campaigns, billboards, and a text-response number to connect students with multiple high quality educational options.

Enrollment was initially slow due to doubling our capacity with The NET: Gentilly, but by the end of the year both NET campuses met their enrollment goals.

While the vast majority of students graduate or stay enrolled, over 10% of students still drop off our roster. This signals to the organization that more needs to be done internally and externally to engage and support all young people.
Student Demographics

**Trauma & Toxic Stress**

As part of our intake process, NET counselors give our students the ACES assessment - a well-known assessment to identify students with trauma and chronic stress. One of the questions on the ACES is aimed at refugee or immigrant children - it asks: “have you ever lived in a war zone?”

95% of our students were born and raised in New Orleans yet 50% of them answer YES to this question because of the extreme violence and instability in their neighborhoods.

Students come to The NET for many different reasons. Some have been expelled from other schools or are returning from incarceration. Others are parenting, working full time, taking care of relatives, or have other adult responsibilities. Others have simply not found acceptance or inspiration at their previous schools.

Transgender Rights & Supports

The NET has been a welcoming home for both transgender students and staff since opening. In 2017-2018, the number of transgender and questioning students elevated our community's consciousness and we enshrined in policy at all levels protections for, supports for, and training about individuals of all gender identities.
Attendance

The strong attendance at the beginning of the year at The NET: Gentilly is a tribute to the new school’s orientation process and the culture of belonging and care the staff quickly established with students.

However, the lower attendance in the summer speaks to The NET: Gentilly’s need to inculcate the concept of year-round school among students and families.

The analysis of attendance bands illustrates the difficulty NET students have with attendance—less than 20% of students maintain optimal attendance for learning due to a range of factors such as:

- Lack of childcare
- Housing instability
- Financial responsibilities
- Family and neighborhood violence
- Depression, trauma, and other mental health issues

The NET’s investments in mental health counselors, staff training on trauma, homevisits, community partnerships - such as the on-campus Second Harvest Food Bank - are vital to addressing these attendance barriers.
**Academic Skill Growth**

The majority of students enter The NET working significantly below grade level in literacy and math:

While each student develops at his or her own pace, this data from the first semester of the NET:Gentilly provides a snapshot of typical growth in just one semester:

**Literacy Initiatives**

EQA hired literacy expert, Gretchen Bohlke, to train leaders and staff in a variety of literacy initiatives including independent reading, close reading, and vocabulary development.

Every humanities and English classroom instituted a daily Independent Reading component. Thanks to donations of hundreds of beautiful, engaging and relevant texts, students had a plethora of options to choose from.
Standardized Test Results

During the 2017-18 school year the Louisiana Department of Education launched a series of new high school exams. While covering approximately the same courses, the content and format of the exams was substantially different making year-to-year comparisons less appropriate. That said, three things stand out:

- Scores improved at Central City 4% over the previous year
- Gentilly maintained strong scores despite it being its first year
- Scores improved significantly in Math and dipped in English compared with previous years. This is most likely due to a combination of curriculum and instruction changes in math and exam changes in both math and English.
Internship Program

Between the two schools students participated in nearly **250 internships**. Close to half were at the new campus, a tribute to Internship Coordinator, Charmaine Harris, who quickly built an engaging and successful program. Charmaine not only lead the program but also served as an internship mentor for NET and other students on the city Superintendent’s Student Advisory Council.

Internships are transformational opportunities for students to earn credit and experience working in their areas of interest and learning in the “real world.” Intern mentors are community members who share their expertise, wisdom, and social capital with NET students, often developing relationships which last long after graduation.

**Shavonte Thomas** has had several internships, but it is her current one at Chakra Dance Theater which has transformed her approach to life, school, and her future plans. Along with performing, she is studying the history of the African Diaspora with an emphasis on Haitian dance and folklore. Shavonte says of her mentors, mother-daughter pair Mama Baderinwa and Chemmy Blackman: they don’t “seem like an internship to me anymore, it’s more like family.”
NOTEP

One of the great benefits of our new campus in Gentilly is that our construction program could expand from a single classroom to a full, stand-alone, program serving The NETs and other Orleans Parish schools.

Directed by Adam Bourne, The NET’s former construction teacher, New Orleans Technical Education Provider (NOTEP) provides “Empowerment through Work and Education.” NOTEP classes follow the nationally recognized NCCER curriculum.

Approximately 40 NET students took part in Construction, Carpentry, and Electrical classes with 21 earning industry-based credentials.
School Culture: “The best thing about the NET is that they never give up on me, [even] when I give up on myself”

Maintaining the school culture at The NET: Central City with new leaders and building a culture at The NET: Gentilly from the ground up was a challenge. The new school met another challenge when there was a drive-by shooting outside the building. But student survey responses prove the success of The NET’s relationship-based, restorative model:

- 87% of students responded “I like this school”
- 87% of students felt more successful than at their previous school
- 94% of students said they had at least 1 staff member to talk to

- “Even though I’ve been here for [only] 2 months, I’ve found my place here quicker than I expected.”
- “I like that the teachers, students, and staff are always there for me and help me up when I fall down.”
- “I love that The NET stays on top of me because I personally feel that there’s no one in my corner who really cares if I go to school.”
- “I like how small the classes are and how well the teachers work one on one with me and other students.”
Non-Academic Growth

More than 50% of NET students struggle with behavioral and mental health issues and more than 80% have a history of truancy. Thus while academic growth is The NET’s mandate as a school, there are many other areas of development that the school values.

Developing communication and conflict resolution skills, building self-determination and internal regulation are goals of all components of The NET’s classrooms. Growth is evidenced through data including:

- Staff used Restorative Practices when confronting misbehavior over 90% of the time.
- 70% of students made progress on the goals they developed with their counselors.
- 85% of students upheld their end of mediation agreements.

Student Self Reported Growth:

- My Academic skills have Improved: 98%
- My Behavior has Improved: 98%
- My Attendance has Improved: 92%
- My Effort has Improved: 97%
Graduation

56 students graduated in 2017-18 from the NET’s two campuses.

Graduation is always an emotional affair for students, families, and faculty. For our students, crossing the stage was not always a given - their journeys to graduation have been long, fraught, and have required tremendous courage and persistence. Each graduation is an individual and collective triumph—proving our students’ talent and tenacity.

Christie Kieschnick, The NET’s founding Next Steps Coordinator and leader of all things senior, organized her most important graduation ever in June 2018. Not only was it our largest ceremony—31 students—but her own daughter Renni Kieschnick was a graduate!
NET Alumni & Next Steps

While budget cuts required us to scale back the Next Steps program, NET staff continue to offer support to alumni and alumni continue to stay in touch.

NET alumni are:
- Attending 4 year colleges
- Attending community colleges
- Completing trade & training programs
- Working full time

While most are still in New Orleans, a few have left the city—we have alumni in Nevada, Colorado, Florida, Texas, California, and beyond!

Our very first enrollee, Kendrell New, and her partner, another NET graduate, Charles Hanley, stop by to visit with their young son.

Two alumni, Kibriah Jackson and Avery Aldridge, get a visit from their principal in Reno, Nevada where they are working for Tesla.
Faculty & Staff

The adults in the building are by far the most important resource at The NET. By design, each staff member is chosen for their alignment with the mission, their skillfulness in building transformational relationships with our students, and their commitment to meeting each student where they are.

The Education Research Alliance for New Orleans (ERA) of Tulane University completed a city-wide survey of faculties’ experience in schools across the city. NET staff scored the school above average in every category.
Staff Spotlight: Amber Zu-Johnson

Amber joined The NET in 2015 as an Operations Assistant at The NET: Central City. She now leads at The NET: Gentilly as Data and Enrollment Coordinator.

Along the way, she has dramatically improved our data management, the enrollment process for families, become an invaluable support to our principals, and even taught our History of Hip Hop class!

A native of New Orleans, Amber balances her many hours at The NET with advocating for political candidates who champion our young people, researching history, and visiting every zoo in the country.

At The NET, every adult in the building must be a mentor for our young people and Amber is no exception—regardless of what her title or job description might be at any given moment, Amber will drop everything to talk to a student, check on their progress, give them a quiet place to study, and remind them of their potential—and their responsibility—to be amazing.
New & Growing Partnerships

The NET's growth in 2017-18 led to new and growing community partnerships. Just a few highlights include:

The Beautiful Foundation: Provided mentoring, health, and self-esteem groups with NET female students.

Children’s Bureau: Provided a full-time mental health counselor on-site at The NET.

NOVAC: Donated design consulting, curriculum, and teacher training for the launch of The NET’s first Digital Media program

YouthForce NOLA: Provided funding and strategic support for CTE programming
**Operations**

After many years of productive partnership with FirstLine Schools, EQA transferred back-office support to 4th Sector Solutions. 4th Sector serves schools in New Orleans and nationally and provides finance, accounting, human resources and benefits administration, and data support.

**Facilities**

For the new school, EQA signed a ten-year fixed rate lease with the University of New Orleans (UNO).

The UNO building needed little initial renovation but did require The NET to install a fire suppressant system and bring the building up to ADA code.

EQA signed a second three-year lease with the option to buy at its Central City location.

Through the support of Façade reNEW, the Tulane City Center, and the New Orleans Redevelopment Authority, The Central City location got a beautiful facelift.

**Finance**

As it has since inception, EQA ended 2017-18 with an unqualified audit and a healthy fund balance.

Despite starting a second campus, unexpected facilities costs, and a very late-year drop in state funding, EQA maintained balanced budgets and a positive financial outlook.
Fundraising & Community Support

EQA raised approximately $600,000 for the opening of The NET: Gentilly. It is particularly meaningful that the vast majority of start-up funding came from local foundations which have watched The NET grow, have come to trust our work with our students, and thus were excited to support our expansion.

We are very grateful for the generosity and advocacy of all those who made The NET: Gentilly possible:

BOOTH-BRICKER FUND

Keller Family Foundation

RECOVERY School District

The RosaMary Foundation

YouthForce NOLA
In Memoriam

Tyris James was killed on January 30, 2018. Tyris brought a big smile to school every day and is missed by all his teachers and fellow students.

Tyris’ brothers and friends continued at The NET: Gentilly more determined than ever to graduate and fulfil their goals for themselves and for him.
#NET Enough!

On March 14th, NET students joined millions of young people across the world by organizing a walkout against gun violence, garnering support from their community and positive news coverage.

For many students, this topic is very important as they have lost family members, friends, and classmates to guns. Addressing gun violence in New Orleans is a priority to ensuring a better future.