

2019-2020 NOLA Public Schools High School Credit Accumulation Compliance Review  
Grades 9-12



School:	NOLA-PS Representative:			
Date:	School Counselor:			
Grade:	Student Identifier:			
High School Compliance	IGP Acceptable Documentation (to be provided by school counselor)	Status at Review	Transcript/Schedule/SIS/STS Acceptable Documentation (to be provided by school)	Status at Review
Individual Graduation Plan Signatures	IGP is signed by all three required parties annually <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Student</li> <li>Parent</li> <li>Counselor</li> </ul>	<input type="checkbox"/> In Compliance <input type="checkbox"/> Not In Compliance <input type="checkbox"/> Not Available/Missing		
Jumpstart Graduation Pathway Selection (10 <sup>th</sup> -12 <sup>th</sup> Grades only)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Documented on the IGP</li> </ul>	<input type="checkbox"/> In Compliance <input type="checkbox"/> Not In Compliance <input type="checkbox"/> Not Available/Missing <input type="checkbox"/> Not Applicable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Verification Report showing diploma or career option coding in SIS/STS</li> </ul>	<input type="checkbox"/> In Compliance <input type="checkbox"/> Not In Compliance <input type="checkbox"/> Not Available/Missing <input type="checkbox"/> Not Applicable
Academic Support Plans (Applies to T9 Students Only)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>T9 students identified on the IGP</li> <li>T9 Academic Plan</li> </ul>	<input type="checkbox"/> In Compliance <input type="checkbox"/> Not In Compliance <input type="checkbox"/> Not Available/Missing <input type="checkbox"/> Not Applicable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Student Schedule</li> <li>Transcript including high school courses obtained (if applicable)</li> <li>List of remediation courses</li> <li>Verification of T9 students enrolled necessary remediation courses</li> <li>Verification of T9 students documented in the SIS/STS system</li> </ul>	<input type="checkbox"/> In Compliance <input type="checkbox"/> Not In Compliance <input type="checkbox"/> Not Available/Missing <input type="checkbox"/> Not Applicable
Individual Assessment Reports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Documented on IGP</li> </ul> Copies of the student's individual assessments <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>LEAP 2025,EOC</li> <li>ACT</li> <li>Work Keys</li> <li>CLEP</li> </ul>	<input type="checkbox"/> In Compliance <input type="checkbox"/> Not In Compliance <input type="checkbox"/> Not Available/Missing		

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• AP</li> <li>• ASVAB(If applicable)</li> </ul>			
<b>Course Selections and total credits</b>	Course selections and total credits are included on IGP for previous and current year.	<input type="checkbox"/> In Compliance <input type="checkbox"/> Not In Compliance <input type="checkbox"/> Not Available/Missing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• STS Transcript includes all previous and current courses.</li> <li>• Counselor/Data Manager must ensure all previous and current course selections are documented in STS.</li> <li>• Required completed courses are reflected on the student's transcript, including grade and credit earned.</li> </ul>	<input type="checkbox"/> In Compliance <input type="checkbox"/> Not In Compliance <input type="checkbox"/> Not Available/Missing
<b>Diploma Endorsement (if applicable)</b>	Diploma Endorsements are identified on the Individual Graduation Plan and supporting documentation is included in the students cumulative folder for the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community Service Logs/Letters</li> <li>• STEM Diploma Seal documentation</li> <li>• State Seal of Biliteracy documentation</li> </ul>	<input type="checkbox"/> In Compliance <input type="checkbox"/> Not In Compliance <input type="checkbox"/> Not Available/Missing <input type="checkbox"/> Not Applicable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data Manager must show evidence of diploma type and/or career option code on the student's record in STS.</li> </ul>	<input type="checkbox"/> In Compliance <input type="checkbox"/> Not In Compliance <input type="checkbox"/> Not Available/Missing <input type="checkbox"/> Not Applicable
<b>Gifted and Talented Courses (if applicable)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Documented on IGP</li> <li>• IGP including notation of gifted, AP, IB, or Cambridge courses</li> <li>• Current IEP on file</li> </ul>	<input type="checkbox"/> In Compliance <input type="checkbox"/> Not In Compliance <input type="checkbox"/> Not Available/Missing <input type="checkbox"/> Not Applicable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transcript includes notation of gifted, AP, IB, or Cambridge courses.</li> <li>• Verification that all that gifted and talented, AP, IB, or Cambridge students have been identified in SIS/STS system.</li> </ul>	<input type="checkbox"/> In Compliance <input type="checkbox"/> Not In Compliance <input type="checkbox"/> Not Available/Missing <input type="checkbox"/> Not Applicable
<b>Credit Recovery (Applicable to courses student has been unsuccessful in passing, not the initial attempt)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• IGP includes all credit recovery courses listed</li> </ul>	<input type="checkbox"/> In Compliance <input type="checkbox"/> Not In Compliance <input type="checkbox"/> Not Available/Missing <input type="checkbox"/> Not Applicable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Credits earned through Credit Recovery are easily identified on the student's transcript. The course and original grade must also be reflected on the transcript. (If applicable) Evidence of passing the associated EOC. (If applicable)</li> </ul>	<input type="checkbox"/> In Compliance <input type="checkbox"/> Not In Compliance <input type="checkbox"/> Not Available/Missing <input type="checkbox"/> Not Applicable



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SCHOOLS

# School district's new high school accountability director starts work at Kennedy

by MARTA JEWSON  
OCTOBER 7, 2019



NOLA Public Schools' West Bank headquarters. (Marta Jewson/The Lens)



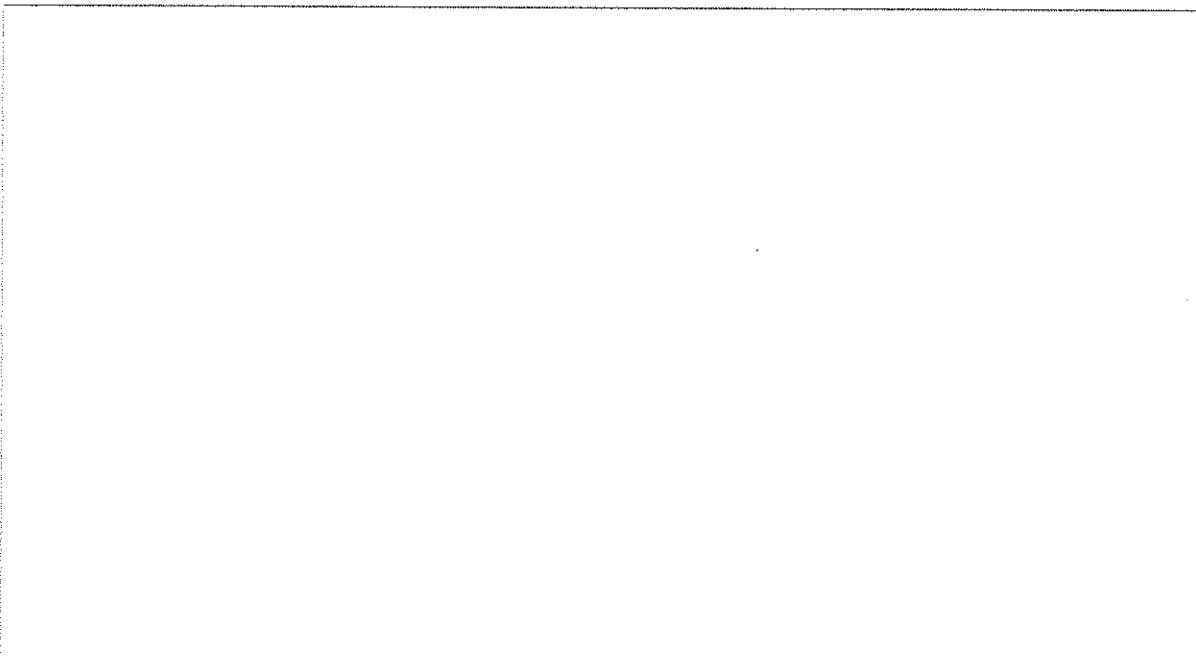
The NOLA Public Schools district has hired an Assistant Director of High School Accountability, a position created in the wake of the graduation scandal at John F. Kennedy High School last spring.

So it's no surprise that Max Daigh spent one of his first days on the job at Kennedy, reviewing student files last week.

The problems, first **alleged by a former employee** and eventually **fleshed out by contractors**, led to nearly half the senior class being unable to graduate on time. Many of the affected students **didn't learn they would need additional credits until June**, a month after they had been allowed to walk at the school's graduation ceremony.

The fallout sent dozens of students to unplanned summer school classes and led Superintendent Henderson Lewis Jr. to call for a citywide audit of all high school student records. Shortly thereafter the district began advertising for a new position — Assistant Director of High School Accountability. Daigh was hired for that position.

Daigh's job is to ensure students are properly accumulating credits at the district's charter schools. He previously worked as a teacher through Teach for America in Missouri and later as a Manager of School Performance for the Louisiana Department of Education.



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For the last two years he's worked as a **regional director** for the California Charter School Association, according to his online resume.

At first glance, Daigh's experience doesn't quite match the counselor-expertise heavy job description the district posted in July.

The job description said the person selected would serve as a "**resident expert**" in Louisiana high school credit accumulation.

It **asked candidates** to have a current Louisiana teaching certificate and the ability to become a guidance counselor. Daigh doesn't have a Louisiana teaching license or authorization, according to state records. It said applicants with at least five years experience as high school guidance counselors were preferred. It doesn't appear from state records that Daigh has the appropriate Louisiana state credentials to be a guidance counselor. Daigh could not be reached for comment on this story.

NOLA Public Schools Communications Director Tania Dall released a statement in response to The Lens' questions about Daigh's experience.

"NOLA-PS found a candidate with previous experience that our Leadership Team felt would do a great job in this role," the statement, attributed to NOLA-PS, read.

The statement said the district had to speed up its timeline this summer to be ready to review schools in the fall.

When the job description was originally posted, the district assumed that the new assistant director would have to design an "audit tool" to evaluate high schools. But the district instead developed the tool on its own.

“Thus, the scope of the work of this role expanded to include execution of the tool,” the statement said. That includes a “heavy focus on accountability, in addition to analyzing trends to determine, and develop training and resources to assist schools in meeting the requirements.”

On Tuesday, Daigh and his new supervisor, Chief Portfolio Innovation and Accountability Officer **Kelli Peterson**, reviewed Kennedy student files using **the new** “credit accumulation compliance review,” the district’s name for the audit tool.

The review includes a check of how many credits a student has, whether they’ve earned those credits through traditional or remedial courses — one of the issues at the **center of the Kennedy graduation scandal** — and which of several state diplomas they are seeking. Students must also have a state-required “Individual Graduation Plan” that is signed by their parent, counselor and student themselves.

It calls for the student’s name and name of the district employee who determines whether or not the several aspects of the students file are “in compliance,” “out of compliance,” or somewhere in the middle.

The district oversees 24 charter high schools and two so-called “contract high schools.”

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**MARTA JEWSON**

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SCHOOLS

# Some Kennedy HS students move on, others still working toward diplomas

by MARTA JEWSON  
DECEMBER 23, 2019



Dwayne Crenshaw's Class of 2019 memorabilia sits on a keyboard in his Grandmother's dining room. He and his grandma both question how class rank was calculated as Crenshaw had held the salutatorian spot until shortly before graduation. On graduation day, emails show school employees also had questions.



In a way, Dwayne Crenshaw was one of the lucky members of the John F. Kennedy High School class of 2019. Unlike dozens of other Kennedy students, when he walked at graduation last May, he actually graduated.

As a result of pervasive mismanagement, about half the members of the class of 2019 were found ineligible to graduate on time, though the majority didn't find that out until about a month after the graduation ceremony. More than half a year later, some are still trying to finish high school. Some finished, but months later than they had expected.

Some experienced a bit less disruption to their lives. They got their diplomas over the summer and, in many cases, just finished their first semester of college. Crenshaw is in that group.

That's not to say he looks back fondly.

"I feel like I have completely washed my hands of the school. I do not affiliate myself with them," he said of his high school. "They could have handled it more professionally and handled it with more empathy."

Crenshaw had planned to attend North Carolina A&T State University in the fall. But he's home in New Orleans, attending the University of New Orleans with in-state tuition assistance through the Taylor Opportunity Program for Students (TOPS) scholarship.

**"They could have handled it more professionally and handled it with more empathy."**

— DWAYNE CRENSHAW

He had worked to be at or near the top of his high school class, hoping to earn a college scholarship so as not to be a financial burden on his grandmother, Tanya Scott. But he believes miscalculated grade point averages may have inaccurately dropped him to fourth in his class rather than earning the title of salutatorian. He and Scott believe

that caused him to **miss out on scholarship opportunities**. Attending school out-of-state would have cost too much money without them, he said.

Kennedy classmate Asia Stepter had likewise hoped to go to North Carolina A&T State University. But she said her financial aid decisions were delayed because her diploma was late due to a classwide transcript review. (Some Kennedy students were **still waiting** for diplomas mid-August when many colleges start classes.) Without the aid, Stepter said she had to stay in-state.

She attended Louisiana State University and said her first semester went well, other than starting classes a week late due to the delays.

“I’m fine with LSU. It ended up working out,” Stepter said. “I’m living on campus.”

### **Timeline of the Kennedy scandal**

Problems at Kennedy surfaced last spring when a former employee **alleged that administrators were inappropriately changing grades**. Before the end of the school year, the charter group’s CEO **Michelle Blouin-Williams was placed on leave and later resigned**. Kennedy’s charter board, the New Beginnings Schools Foundation, and the NOLA Public Schools district, which oversees Kennedy, launched investigations.

But the most damning details weren’t revealed until after the charter school’s May graduation. A week later, **five Kennedy administrators left** when the New Beginnings board received “**strong evidence of improper conduct**.”

One month after that, about **half the students in the class** learned they hadn’t been eligible to graduate, though many — including 69 who walked at graduation — were initially led to believe they had successfully completed high school.

Over the summer, **dozens of students scrambled** to complete make-up courses. That prompted **a lawsuit from students** who said they were harmed, missed financial aid or enrollment deadlines or lost scholarship opportunities. A state report found the school **had**

**improperly used credit recovery courses** and concluded special education services at the school were inadequate.

In mid-July, New Beginnings **voted to surrender both of its charters** — for Kennedy and Pierre A. Capdau Charter School — at the end of the 2019-2020 school year. Kennedy's building was **quickly assigned to KIPP New Orleans Schools**, and eventually InspireNOLA was selected to run Capdau.

A car parked at Xavier University's Convocation Center in May 2019 for Kennedy High School's graduation ceremony is covered in Kennedy blue and gold "Miss J.F.K Class 2019 Ariel" it reads.

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In August, state education Superintendent John White **granted waivers to a small group of Kennedy students** who were one credit or less away from graduation “**due to administrative error** on the part of John F. Kennedy High School.”

A months-long investigation from NOLA Public Schools was wrapped up in a slim five-page report in September. **The report concluded** that a review of the initial allegations was “ultimately inconclusive” but that a second grade changing incident revealed bigger problems at the school. New Beginnings has yet to release the results of its own investigation.

In late October, **a judge dismissed the Orleans Parish School Board from the students’ lawsuit**. Despite overseeing the charter school, the district argued it has nothing to do with the charter group’s student records. New Beginnings and the Louisiana Department of Education are still defendants.

### **A different outlook**

When The Lens first interviewed **Crenshaw and Scott in July**, newly hired New Beginnings CEO Kevin George said the charter group was recalculating student grade point averages. Emails obtained by The Lens shortly after graduation show administrators were **concerned about the accuracy of grade point averages** up to and **on the day of graduation**.

Crenshaw’s grandmother said though he’s doing well in college, the family still wants answers from George.

“I spoke to him in July, they said they were working on them. And I called him last month but he never returned my phone call,” Scott said in a December

interview. “I just want to know, what’s the solution for it? The children worked hard for that status. What are you going to do to right the wrong?”

Asked last week whether grades were still being recalculated, George wrote via email that he couldn’t comment citing pending litigation.

“They’re going to sweep that under the carpet like everything else. It’s unfair. It’s not right. It’s hurt a child,” Scott said. “Dwayne is different now. He says that all the time.”

We asked Crenshaw how the spring revelations and summer uncertainty affected him.

“This for instance taught me you can work so hard for something and still not get it,” he said. “It doesn’t have to be your fault. It can just be the way things are.”

**“What are you going to do to right the wrong?”**

– TANYA SCOTT

In a summer interview when he expressed similar sentiments, his grandmother told him then that he couldn’t give up.

Crenshaw credits College Track, a non-profit that helps guide high school students through the college application process and transition to campus, with helping him finish strong and having the skills to navigate college.

Crenshaw said he’s enjoyed classes at UNO this fall and doesn’t look back to Kennedy much. Though the two things he’d like to see is an acknowledgement from the charter group and district superintendent and perhaps, if possible he said, financial assistance for him and his classmates’ college expenses.

“I didn’t feel like they made an effort to fix anything,” he said. “I haven’t even been apologized to from anybody and an apology goes a long way.”

### **Some students still working**

New Beginnings officials have regularly provided updates on the number of class of 2019 students who have received their diplomas and those who are still working toward them. Responding to an inquiry from The Lens, George declined to provide updated numbers last week, again citing pending litigation. Nor did he provide the New Beginnings board a full accounting at its meeting last week.

However, in October, George told board members that seven Kennedy students were still working toward a diploma. He said the school could not locate six other seniors from last year.

George did tell board members at a meeting last week that some class of 2019 students returned recently to take end-of-course exams. He also said it seemed like the current class of students didn't understand the ramifications of the state-required tests.

Some of the students who still need credits to earn their diplomas enrolled at other high schools, while some returned to Kennedy.

One of them is Tayler McClendon, a current senior, who spent months last school year doing work before and after school in an attempt to graduate a year early, something her mother said the school's counselor encouraged her to do. But days before graduation, she said she found out those classes wouldn't count because she didn't take them in the presence of a certified teacher. McClendon is the lead plaintiff in the lawsuit against New Beginnings.

**“She is back there but she’s not handling it well.”**

– DARNETTE DANIELS

Her mother, Darnette Daniels, said her daughter is struggling back at the school she thought she'd graduated from last May. Daniels said via text that her daughter is seeing a therapist.

“She is back there but she’s not handling it well,” Daniels wrote in a text message.



TJ Jones aged out of the school but didn't receive a diploma. TJ, who has bipolar disorder, was **sent home** to finish a semester of school while at Kennedy, which could violate federal special education law, a civil rights lawyer told The Lens in August.

"That was illegal for them to send him home, he's got an IEP," his mother, Nicole Jones, said, referring to his Individual Education Program which outlines education plans for students with disabilities.

Nicole Jones moved to St. Bernard Parish but said her son remained in Orleans Parish with a relative. She maintains that her son should have been eligible for school at Kennedy because he didn't move with her.

"The school has never called back," Nicole Jones said. "I guess because he made 19."

George declined to comment on Jones' standing.

"This is not his fault he didn't get those credits," Nicole Jones said "They should have made sure he got them."

## **District changes**

Last summer, NOLA Public Schools Superintendent Henderson Lewis Jr. called for a criminal investigation at the school and **announced a citywide audit of high school student records**. The Lens later confirmed that audit would cover about **five percent of high school student files**.

We asked NOLA Public Schools a host of questions about their new high school auditing program, what they were finding and whether they'd seen any trends in conducting the reviews thus far and what they were doing to ensure no other students experienced problems similar to Kennedy's class of 2019.

In December, we received a two sentence statement in response. "NOLA Public Schools is currently in the process of auditing our high schools and reviewing data. We will share an update on our findings before the next phase of this work."

**“I believe that it’s right that they closed.”**

– SEMAJ ALLEN

New Beginnings will cease operations as a New Orleans school operator at the end of the school year, as it turns over its two charters to two other groups.

Class of 2019 graduate Semaj Allen got her diploma — in August, several months late — and is working in

New Orleans.

“There’s not much I can say about it,” she said. “I believe that it’s right that they closed.”

She said the experience there was “discouraging” but she’s moved on.

The work at Kennedy appeared far from over earlier this fall. As of October, 68 of the Gentilly high school’s approximately 135 current seniors needed to make up credits to graduate on time this spring. At a meeting that month, George said about 50 of those students are regularly attending remedial courses provided by the school. The school was auditing all student transcripts at that time.

## **Class of 2020**

At a board meeting last week, George said the school is closely tracking the class of 2020.

“We cannot have any missteps,” he said.

The school created a graduation tracker to monitor required classes, state end-of-course exams and whether any students must make up credit for failed classes, he said. In January, each student will learn if they’re on track to graduate on time.

“We want to make sure that we don’t miss a thing,” George said.

**“We cannot have any missteps.”**

– KEVIN GEORGE, NEW BEGINNINGS CEO

At the same time, KIPP New Orleans Schools, which will run Kennedy next year, is preparing to take over the school this summer. KNOS has hired a principal for next year and is working with current Kennedy staff, Director of Communications Curtis Elmore III wrote in an email to The Lens last week.

“After an extensive and rigorous selection process, KNOS selected Joseph Jones as the next Principal of John F. Kennedy High School and Alnita Porea as our newest Leader-in-Residence for the 2020-2021 school year, respectively,” he wrote.

Porea currently works for New Beginnings.

At last week’s meeting, George also told board members graduation is a week later this spring, scheduled for May 26.

“I pushed it back as far as I could without going into June,” he told board members. “Two weeks before that, if you are not finished with credit recovery, you are not graduating.”

George said district staff are at Kennedy every day and they have separate senior files. He also expects the state will review senior transcripts later this school year.

“This will be the most scrutinized class of kids, I think, in modern U.S. times.”

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SCHOOLS

# Majority of Kennedy HS seniors 'on track' to graduate on time, CEO says

by MARTA JEWSON  
FEBRUARY 27, 2020



John F. Kennedy High School at Lake Area on Paris Avenue in Gentilly.



The majority of John F. Kennedy High School seniors are “on track” to graduate with their peers this May, the charter group’s CEO Kevin George told board members last week. But about 30 percent of the school’s seniors must make up courses or state exams in addition to their normal course work.

The report comes nearly a year after a former employee **publicly questioned suspected grade inflation** at the Gentilly high school — an allegation that eventually led to **multiple investigations** uncovering myriad problems. That included the revelation that **half the class** of 2019 had been ineligible for diplomas — even though they’d been told they graduated.

One of those students, a plaintiff in a lawsuit against the school, has been forced to retake a full year’s coursework. Her mother told The Lens that the teenager has lost her motivation , and she worries that she won’t qualify to graduate this year.

“This senior class is probably going to be the most scrutinized senior class anywhere, ever,” George said, echoing a statement he’s made several times over this school year. “Our job, I feel, has been to make sure that parents and kids know what they need to do, when they need to do it and the supports that we’re providing for them.”

The students who are on track, George said, don’t have any additional makeup work to do in order to graduate with their peers.

“Just pass your courses, don’t miss school and you’ll be fine,” George said, as he informed board members of the measures his team is taking to ensure students complete their requirements and that parents know their child’s status — **both of which were issues last spring**.

Administrators at Kennedy are even going so far as to send a letter home via certified mail to students in danger of failing to qualify for a diploma.

“We’re calling it an ‘in danger of failing’ letter,” George said, noting it will spell out any requirements the students are lacking.

“Because anyone who doesn’t make it, we know they’re going to the media.”

## Making up course credits



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In the meantime, many students are enrolled in credit recovery courses — a program that allows them a second attempt at earning credit for a course they previously failed. Students take the courses online under the supervision of a teacher. Credit recovery courses **were improperly supervised last year**. And some students were placed in an online course not to make up a failed class — which the program was supposed to be used for — but to **take it for the first time**. At least some of the students who took those courses last school year didn't earn credit for them.

This school year, 142 students have completed or are currently taking credit recovery at Kennedy. That's about 25 percent of the Gentilly high school's students. Of those students, 68 have earned a credit through the program. It's unclear exactly how many students need credits and how many credits each student needs. Of the 142 students who enrolled in credit recovery this year, 99 of them were seniors, George said, about 80 percent of the 123-student senior class.

George said students work at their own pace through the course material.

"Some kids will take 18 hours, some will take 55 hours," George said. "Kids who really want to can get their credits back."

Of the school's 123 seniors, George said about 70 percent are on track to graduate, meaning they don't need to makeup any additional credits or missed days of school. "They are on track unless they fail a course."

The other 30 percent of students in Kennedy's class of 2020 fall into three different categories: They still need to pass one or more required state exams,



still need to pass one or more courses for credit or both. George said all students who still need one of those items to graduate have been assigned a mentor. He said he is personally mentoring three students.

George said the NOLA Public Schools district has created student files for each senior to separately track their progress. District staff are still frequently on site at the school, a relatively rare occurrence in New Orleans' all-charter system. George said the school and the district regularly compare the sets of student files.

### **A 'repeated' senior year**

Darnette Daniels is the mother of a student who **filed a lawsuit** last summer on behalf of her daughter. Last school year, when her daughter, Tayler McClendon, was a junior at Kennedy, her counselor encouraged her to take online courses to try to graduate a year early.

Her work to graduate a year early was unique, but the online courses she was taking to work toward her diploma were the same improperly supervised program other students were using. The extra courses she completed during her junior year didn't count.

Daniels said her daughter would often stay up until midnight working to complete graduation requirements.

Now, she says, her daughter is distraught. "She screams, 'I did this shit already,'" Daniels wrote in a text message.

Daniels said it's been hard to keep her daughter focused and she feels like the teenager is giving up.

"I don't know if she's going to complete this year," Daniels wrote, adding that Taylor seems to be "giving up and don't care anymore."

Other families **have since joined Daniels' suit**, and the plaintiffs are seeking class-action status on behalf of the class of 2019 and current Kennedy students.

The school has pushed graduation as late into the school year as possible, George said. It will be held on May 26. George said the school will hold what he called a “May-mester,” a two-week mini-semester when students can catch up on anything they still need to qualify for a diploma. Still, he hopes students don’t need to utilize that time period.

“But we’re telling kids, take care of business now, ‘You don’t want to be one of the last seniors scrambling on campus to finish up.’”

After the scandal, amid a series of investigations last spring and summer, the school’s governing nonprofit group — the New Beginnings Schools Foundation — **voted to surrender the charters** for Kennedy and its other school, Pierre A. Capdau Charter School, at the end of this school year. **Kennedy will be run by KIPP New Orleans Schools next year** and InspireNOLA will take over Capdau.

Between Oct. 1 and Feb. 1, the state’s two official enrollment count days, enrollment at Kennedy dropped from 629 students to 584. Meanwhile, Capdau added about two dozen students, helping to offset the overall network’s financial loss in per-pupil state funding.

Last week, the board also approved an increase in a contract with EnRiched Schools, a company that provides teaching staff for schools. Kennedy has been unable to fill two teaching positions, George said. Now, those positions will be filled by EnRiched staff. The contract increased from \$70,000 to \$110,000.

The charter board adjourned last week after a 25-minute executive session to discuss the ongoing lawsuit against the school.

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## MARTA JEWSON

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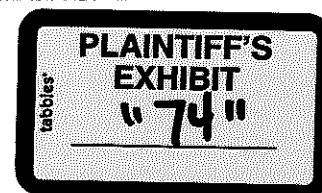
SCHOOLS

# A year after graduation scandal, Kennedy High's governing board prepares to shut down

by MARTA JEWSON  
APRIL 17, 2020



John F. Kennedy High School at Lake Area on Paris Avenue in Gentilly.



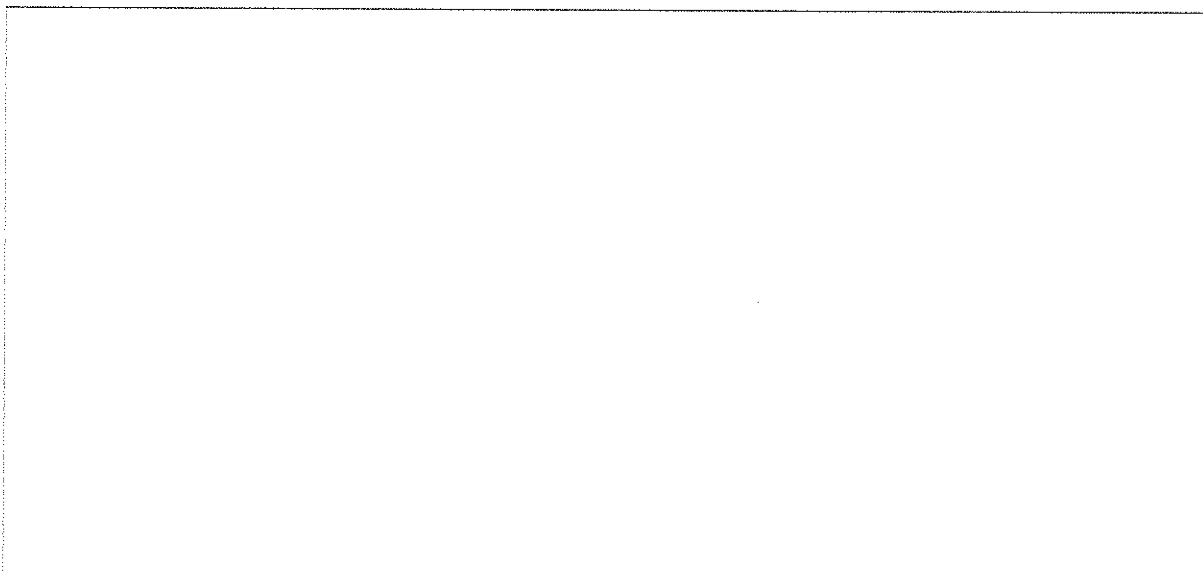
A year after John F. Kennedy High School's **graduation scandal** was beginning to unfold, the class of 2020's graduation ceremony has been plagued in a much different way — they won't be able to have one, at least not in-person.

It's a story that's unfolding across the nation as schools remain closed to slow the spread of COVID-19. In Louisiana, Gov. John Bel Edwards this week ordered the state's public schools — which have been closed since March — to **remain closed until the end of the academic year**. The state is urging school districts to continue to educate students using take-home packets and online classes, but physical gatherings — on-campus classes, sports and graduation ceremonies — have been cancelled.

“The North Star for us this entire year was working to graduation,” Kevin George — CEO of the New Beginnings Schools Foundation, which runs Kennedy — told New Beginnings board members at Thursday night's meeting.

“Graduation was just— Man we were so looking forward to that,” he said, noting he doesn't foresee a situation in which such a gathering could be held before July.

After the scandal in 2019, when about **half the senior class** learned a month after their graduation ceremony that they had not been eligible to graduate, the New Beginnings board voted to surrender Kennedy and its other school at the end of this school year, effective June 30.



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KIPP New Orleans Schools will take over Kennedy on July 1. InspireNOLA will take over New Beginnings' other school, Pierre A. Capdau Charter School.

George said he and his staff are still working on ways to celebrate their seniors.

"Some kids are still in danger (of not graduating)," he told board members, based on how the students were doing in mid-March when schools statewide first closed. They have all been notified, he said.

Of the senior class, 22 seniors still needed to pass a state required end-of-course exam to graduate. But the Louisiana Department of Education and orders from Gov. John Bel Edwards have waived that requirement for seniors this year.

This spring, with dozens of requirements waived, districts get to decide if students are eligible to graduate or move on to the next grade.

"Everyone else has second chances," George said referring to younger students. "For them, this is it."

The last day of school for seniors is April 30.

"So then we move into credit recovery mode, May 1 through May 15," he said. "If you still don't make it there. You'll have summer school to get it done."

The NOLA Public Schools district, which had staff members on site at the charter after the scandal, is still monitoring the school, according to a district statement.

“NOLA-PS is continuing to monitor the progress of students by reviewing student records as they complete coursework remotely. NOLA-PS and New Beginnings Charter Schools are in communication with each other to assure that the class of 2020 are meeting graduation requirements.”

After the scandal at Kennedy the district put a new system in place to audit high schools' student records.

The New Beginnings board voted to move up the last day for students at Capdau. It will be a week earlier than planned, now on May 15. George said this was necessary to allow staff to transfer student files to the schools' new operators and get laptops and hotspots back from students, all of which has to be done in a coordinated, safe, process with the virus still spreading, he said.

The organization expects to spend about \$450,000 in close-out costs between July and December. That includes a required audit, staff time, legal costs — the charter group faces **several lawsuits** — and possible insurance coverage.

New Beginnings reworked its bus contract with A&S Transportation, George told the board. The contract amount has been reduced to cover only bus driver salaries.

He said the charter group consulted with its lawyers and the state on the reworked deal. George said they wanted to help staff get through the pandemic.

Board president Raphael Gang said the organization, which is shutting down over the summer, is in a “unique position” to do that.

“I think to the extent that it's possible ... we should be doing what we can to buffer our community from the worst effects of this situation,” Gang said.

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**Some Kennedy HS  
students move on,  
others still working  
toward diplomas**

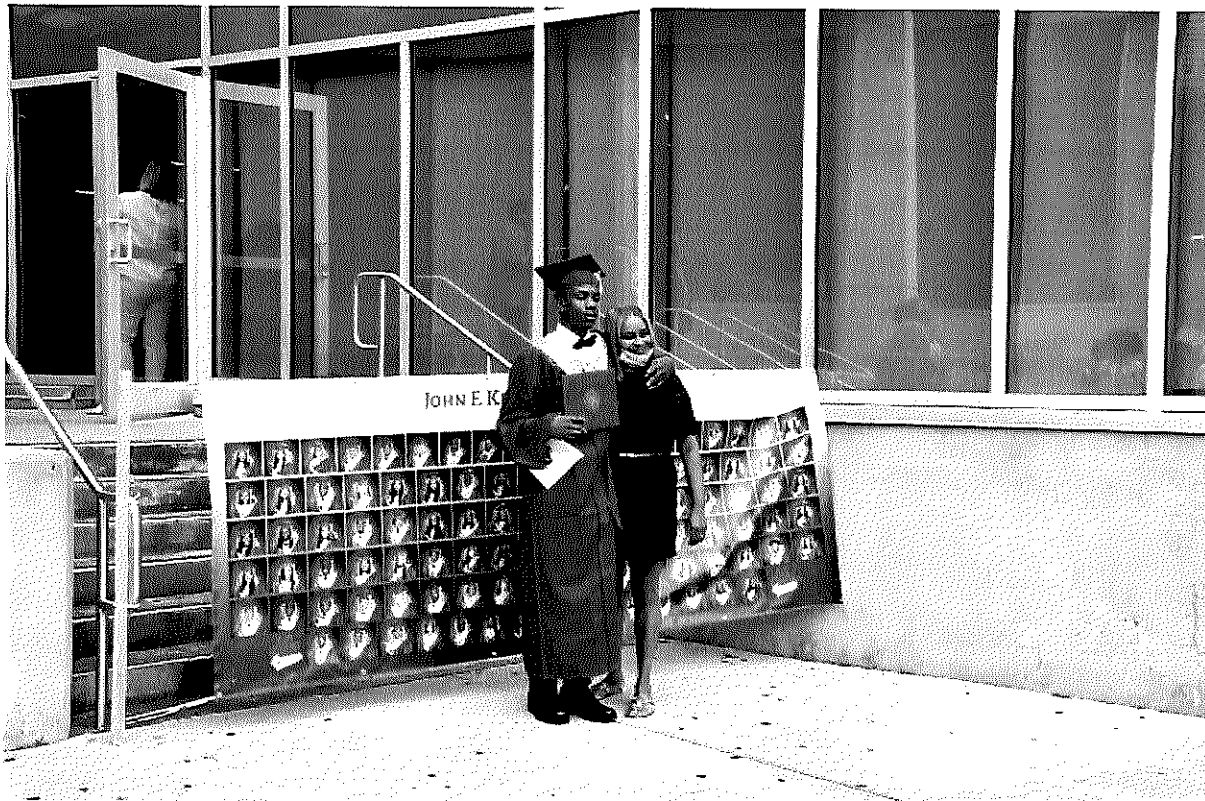
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CORONAVIRUS

# Cap, gown and mask: Kennedy HS seniors graduate in small ceremonies

by MARTA JEWSON  
JUNE 2, 2020



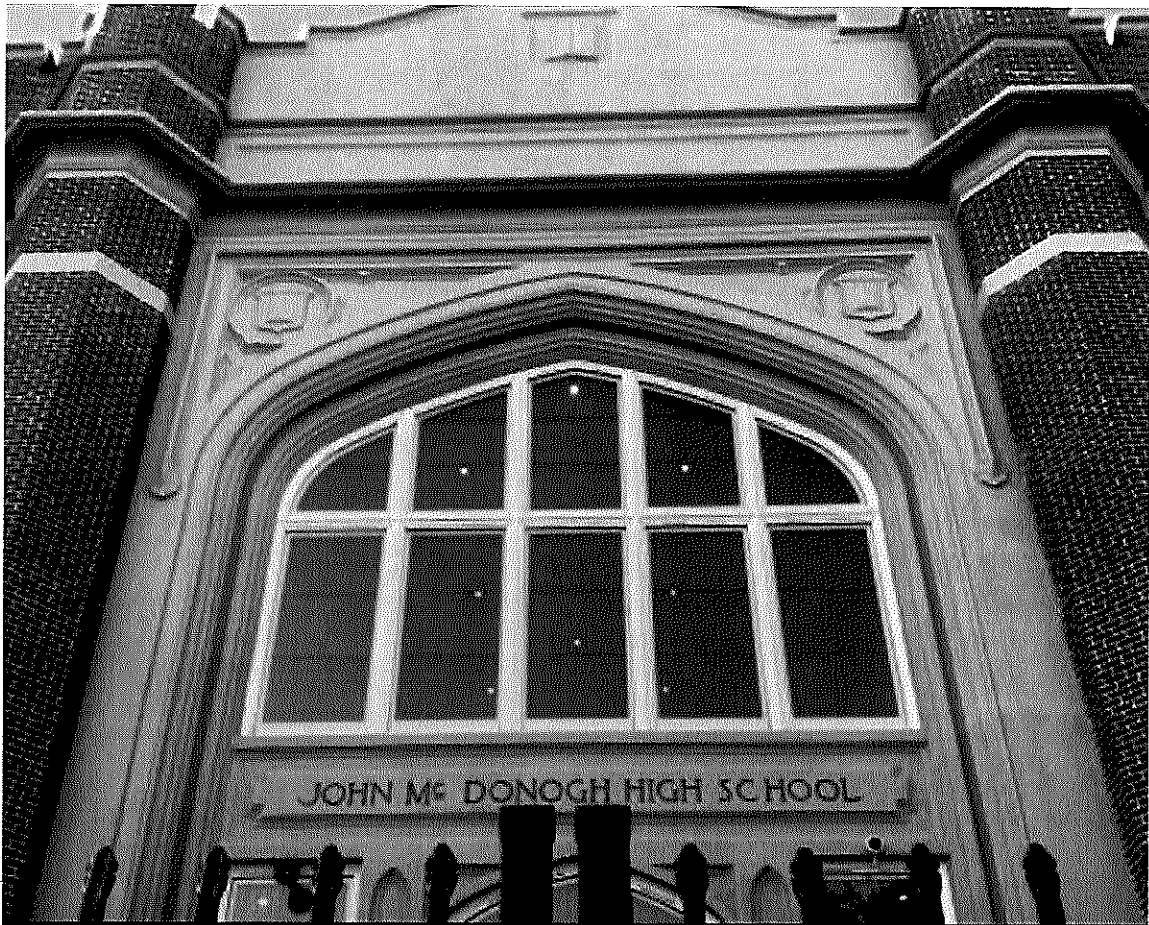
A John F. Kennedy High School senior holds up his diploma in front of a banner of his peers at a socially distant graduation that took place over the first three days in June to help stop the spread of coronavirus. (Marta Jewson/The Lens)



Clad in caps, gowns and face masks, dozens of high school seniors from John F. Kennedy High School gathered Tuesday to walk one-by-one into the school's black box theater to receive high school diplomas from their principal, after a global pandemic cancelled their traditional commencement.

Their ceremony, which stretched over three days so people could keep their distance as the state and nation continue to battle the virus, was one of **many creative graduations this spring**.

The moment was not only significant for graduates and their families, but for a new team of Kennedy administrators, showing their year's worth of concerted effort to ensure the graduation scandal of 2019 did not happen again. Last year, half of the senior class learned one month after graduation they hadn't **actually been eligible for a diploma** and were forced to attend summer school or repeat the school year. The fallout resulted in administrative turnover, investigations at the local and state level, **more in-depth reviews of student transcripts** and forced the NOLA Public Schools district to keep its own set of student records on Kennedy students.



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This year, about 93 percent of the students in the class of 2020 were **cleared to graduate**. There were 114 names in the commencement program, out of a class of 123.

This spring brought another challenge for Kennedy students and staff: a pandemic that shuttered public schools for the last two months of the year and robbed the class of 2020 of traditional senior rites of passage, like prom, spring sports seasons and graduation. Still, Kevin George, the CEO of Kennedy's charter group, the New Beginnings Schools Foundation, said a celebration must go on.

"We just felt it was so important to have that symbolic nature of walking across the stage, hearing your name called, having some loved ones here to be able to hear and cheer you on, So that's why we wanted to do something like this," George said Tuesday. "We knew we wanted to have their name called. We wanted to have that diploma presented to them. We wanted to have that picture taken with them, and that's why it was so important to hold this ceremony like this. It's been well received and well worth it."

Principal Alnita Porea described similar sentiments in a letter to families.

"It's important for these students to have this moment because graduation, in and of itself, is a milestone but particularly for this group of seniors," Porea said. "Their high school experience has not been traditional in any way, but these young people have persevered. The least we can do is to give them a moment with their cap and gown in front of their families."

The mini-ceremonies began as students met staff outside the building. Three administrators met students and advised they could bring six family members in, some families had to leave friends or family outside. Six mask-wearing

family members could join in the six chairs spaced out in the theater, provided they passed temperature checks at the door.

“Pomp and Circumstance” was playing on a loop, and yellow and blue flowers lined the stage. George, Porea and the school counselor for seniors read each student’s name and presented their diploma to family applause and cheers.

Then they left the theater and a staff member wiped down each chair between every graduate and the administrators used hand sanitizer.

As Myron Braden left the school with his family, they posed for pictures in front of a banner of his classmates.

“It just feels good, and I’m just blessed. I just have to continue my journey and make bigger moves. I made it. I’m done. I’m happy it’s over with,” he said. “On to the next chapter.”

“We’re just happy he did it,” a family member said. Braden said he did it for his family.

Nearby, Jerald Jenkins was adjusting his regalia and preparing to walk into the school with his family.

“I mean, it could have been better than it is right now, but I’m enjoying my time,” he said.

His mother was relieved he’d still have a diploma presented to him.

“I’m glad he still gets to experience it,” she said. “Even though it’s not as large as it should have been, I’m ok with it.”

The diploma presentations were recorded and will be sent to families at a later date.

“I give total credit to Ms. Porea and her team,” George said. “They’ve done an amazing job making sure we were safe and took the proper precautions.”

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**State grants graduation waivers to 8 Kennedy HS students**

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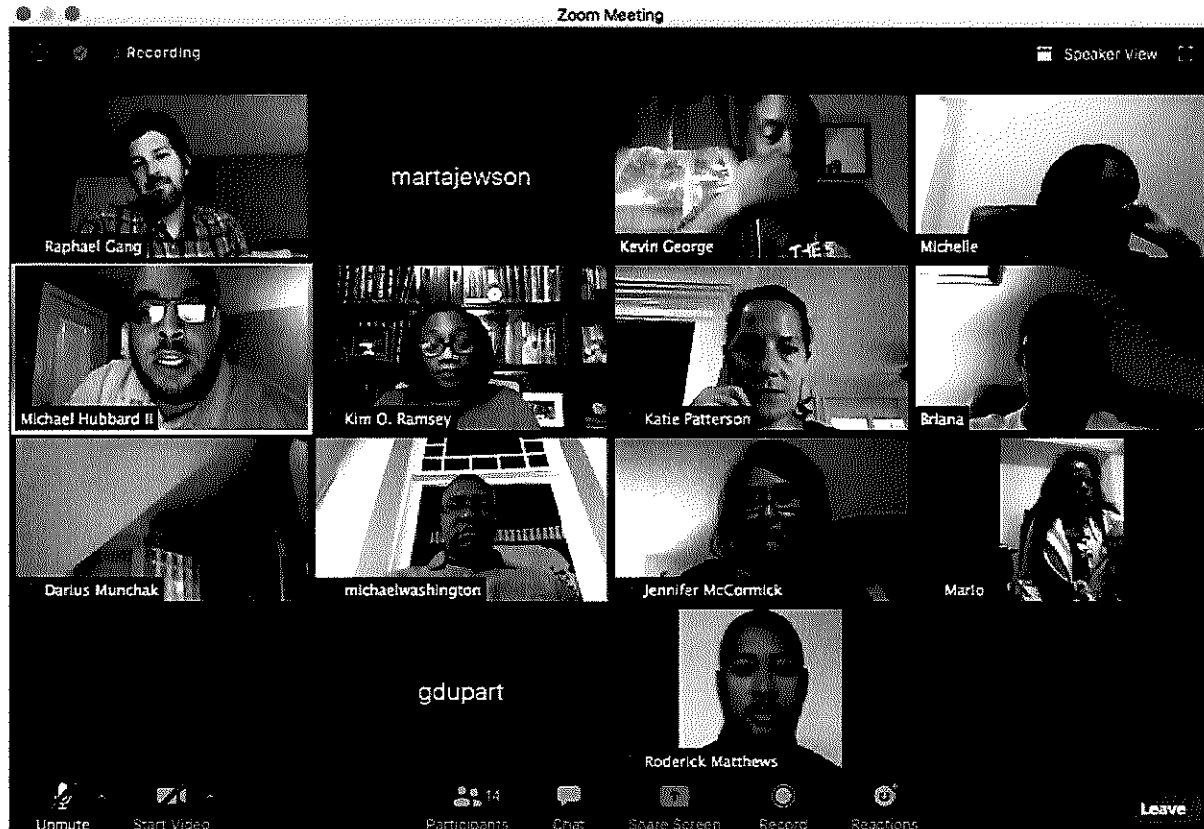


Menu

SCHOOLS

# One year after Kennedy HS graduation scandal, New Beginnings charter group votes to dissolve

by MARTA JEWSON  
JUNE 5, 2020



The board of New Beginnings Schools Foundation met virtually to dissolve the organization.



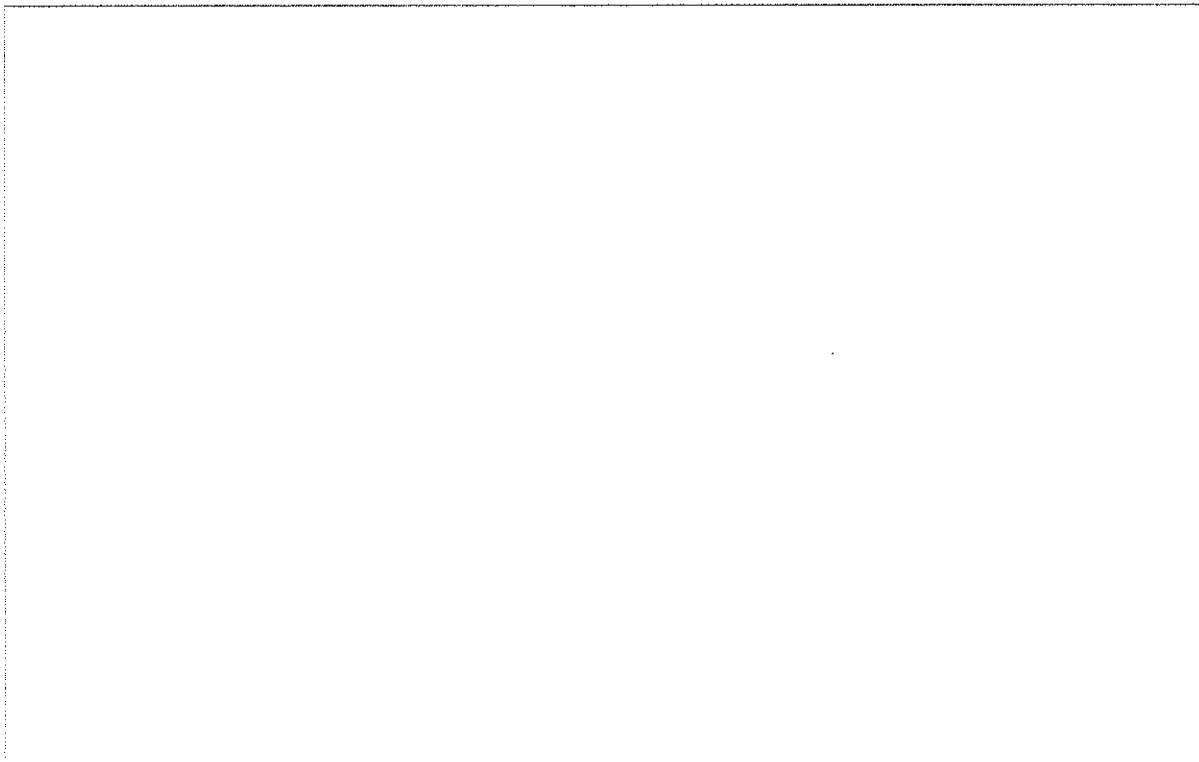


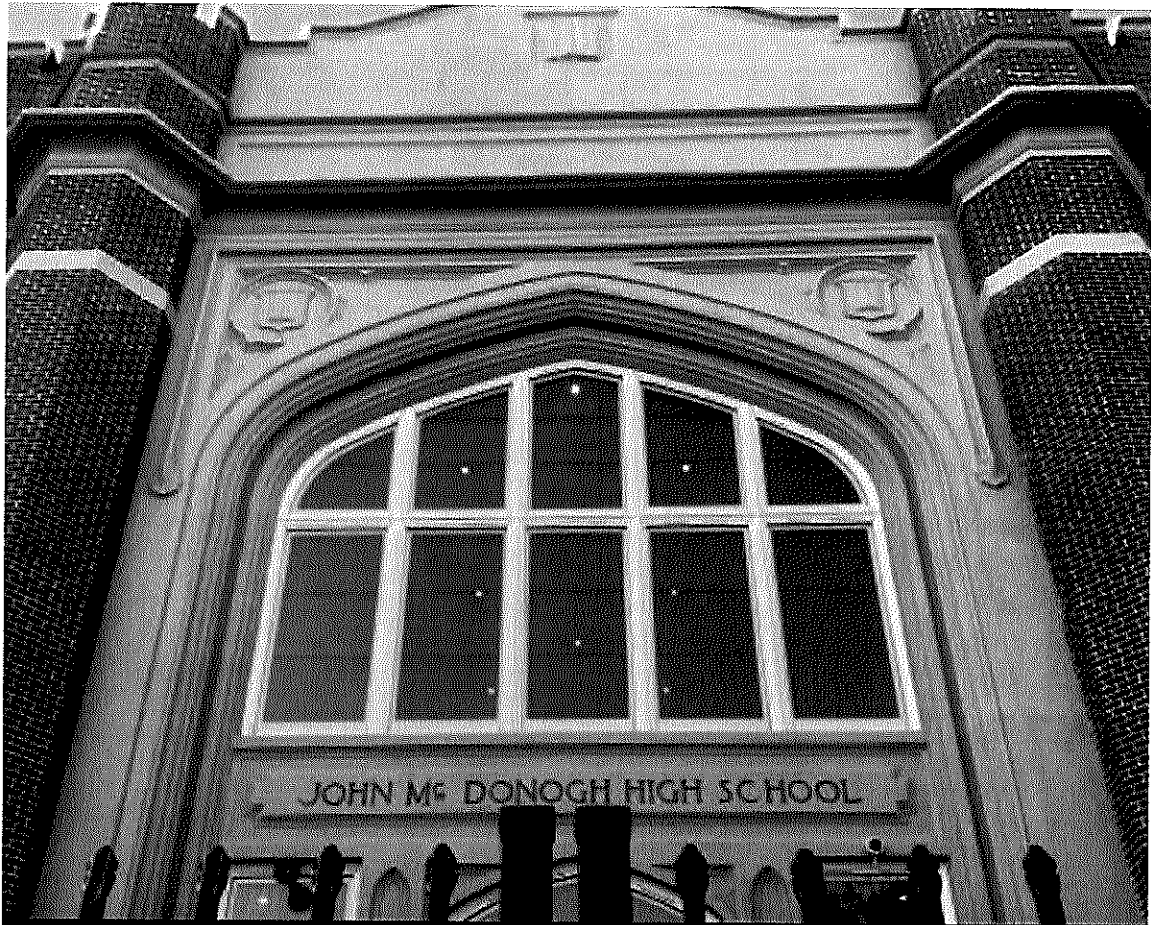
One year after a graduation scandal rocked John F. Kennedy High School, its independent nonprofit operator, the New Beginnings Schools Foundation, quietly and succinctly voted in a pandemic-allowed virtual meeting to dissolve the organization.

Kennedy and the charter group's other school, Pierre A. Capdau Charter School, will remain open under new charter operators.

The Thursday night vote was a long time coming. As mounting evidence grew in the graduation scandal last summer, the nonprofit decided **to surrender its contracts for Kennedy and Capdau** when this school year ended. Investigations had revealed that half of the graduating class hadn't been eligible for a diploma — something the students learned a month after graduation.

Kennedy students hadn't been offered proper courses. They were enrolled in classes without proper supervision — which meant they didn't count for credit. And while some investigations found the **initial allegation** of improper grade changes unbelievable or inconclusive, **new issues** arose during the course of those investigations, including a **second grade altering scheme**.





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The CEO resigned and five administrators **were dismissed** last spring. One **sued the organization** last week.

Failed Kennedy students spent the summer making up credits or had to re-enroll for a second senior year. The NOLA Public Schools district superintendent **called for a criminal investigation** and **ordered a review** of high school student records citywide.

On Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, amid the COVID-19 pandemic, **the school hosted individual mini-ceremonies** for graduating seniors and up to six family members.

On Thursday, the board met virtually to dissolve the organization.

After a few updates and a brief executive session, New Beginnings' board chairman Raphael Gang reconvened the group for the final agenda items.

"We're moving into our new business, which is in some ways our last business," Gang said.

The organization, founded in April 2004, was the first to run a Recovery School District charter in New Orleans' takeover and education reform era. It assumed control of Pierre A. Capdau School in 2004, one year before Hurricane Katrina helped facilitate the city's transformation to the **first major American city with no traditional schools**.

The two resolutions on Thursday, to **dissolve the nonprofit** and appoint Gang as **its liquidator** on a pro bono basis, both passed unanimously.

A few New Beginnings staff members will stay on to transfer student records and public records, as will the charter group's lawyer Michelle Craig.

**Financial management contractor** EdOps will continue doing finances and **law firm Adams and Reese** was hired to dissolve the organization for \$35,000. Carr, Riggs and Ingram will perform the group's **final audit**.

The charter group is currently facing several lawsuits, a few of which **relate directly to the graduation scandal**.

On June 30, the group's contract for both schools will expire. Kennedy will transfer to KIPP and Capdau will go to InspireNOLA.

#### Related

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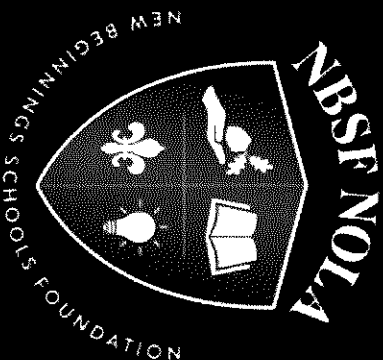


**NBSF NOLA**  
NEW BEGINNINGS SCHOOLS FOUNDATION

# WE'RE CLOSED

- As of June 30, 2020, New Beginnings Schools Foundation no longer exists as a CMO (Charter Management Organization). Schools that were under our management are now under the operation of new CMOs- John F. Kennedy High School is now under the management of KIPP New Orleans Schools and Pierre A. Capdau at Avery Alexander is now under the management of InspireNOLA.

We thank you for being such valued partners during our operational years, and we are grateful for the opportunity to have served so many children in our New Orleans community.



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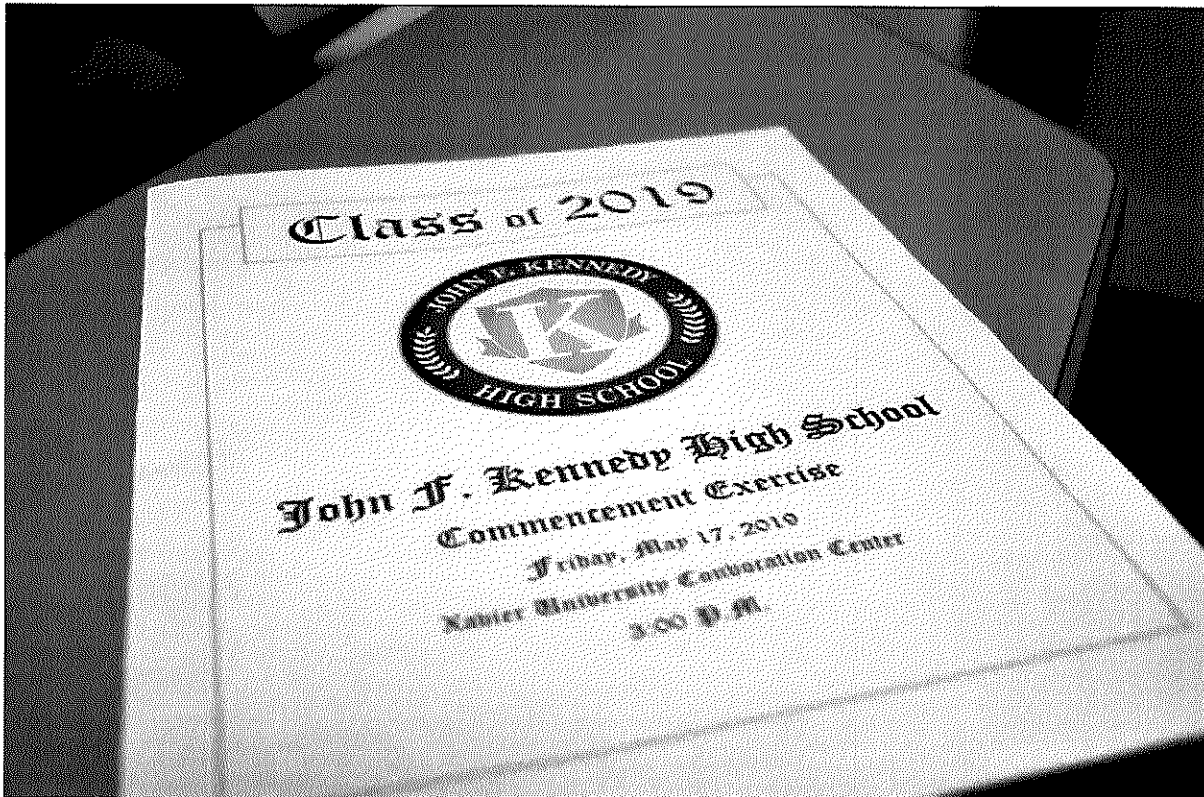
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SCHOOLS

# State grants graduation waivers to 8 Kennedy HS students

by MARTA JEWSON  
AUGUST 23, 2019



A program from John F. Kennedy High School's 2019 graduation, which took place amid an investigation into grade inflation at the Gentilly high school.



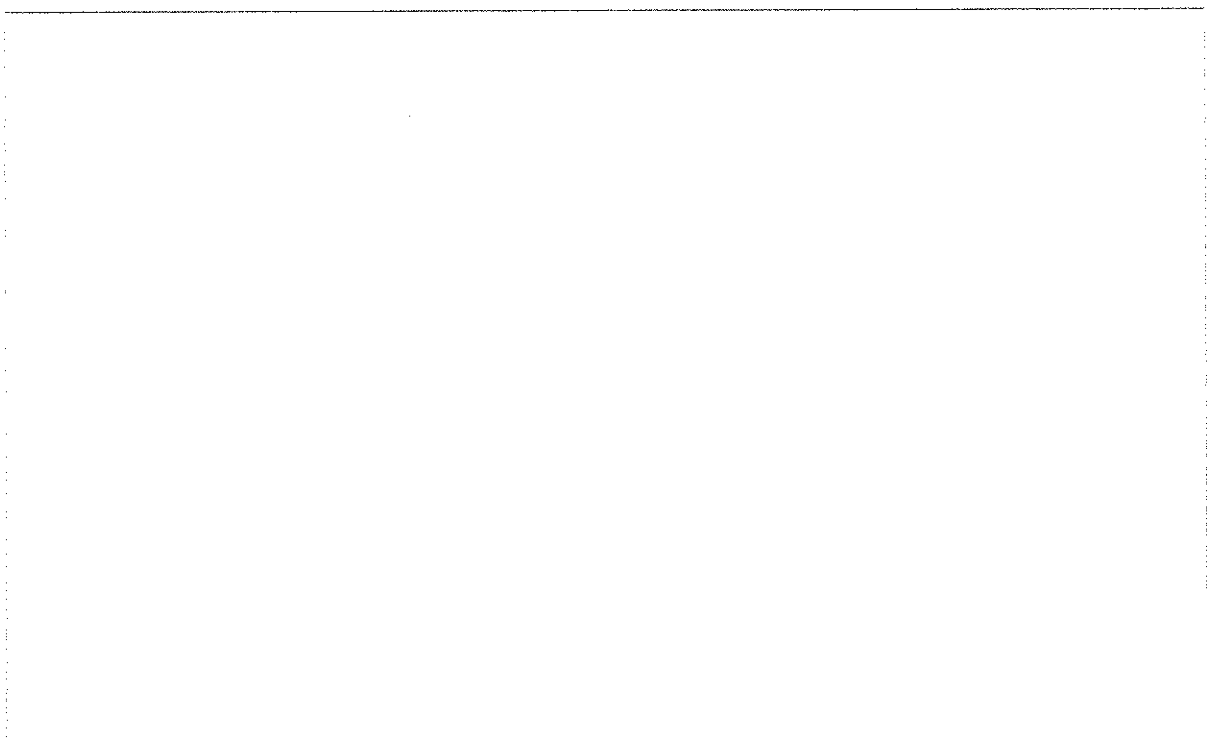
Eight John F. Kennedy High School students with less than one credit needed to earn a diploma were granted waivers by the Louisiana Department of Education on Thursday, allowing them to graduate from high school.

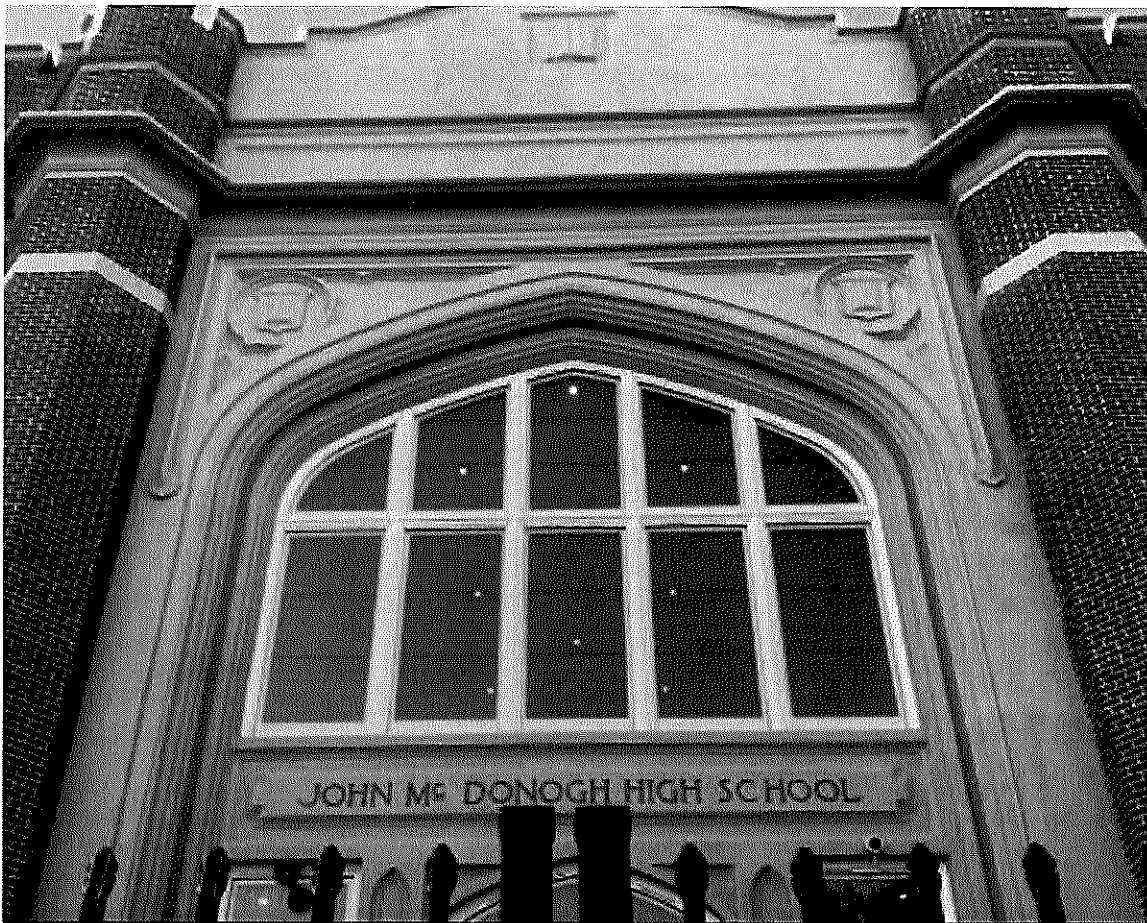
The waivers were approved “due to administrative error on the part of John F. Kennedy High School, with the understanding that an action plan has been developed to prevent the situation from reoccurring in the future,” **reads a Thursday letter** from Department of Education Superintendent John White to Kevin George, CEO of the New Beginnings Schools Foundation, the charter network that runs Kennedy.

George **requested the waivers** for the eight students on Thursday. They were granted the same day. In his letter to White, George detailed individual problems each student faced due to Kennedy administrative failures and errors.

**For example**, one student was “never assigned Health during (their) high school career.”

Two students took courses in an “unapproved, unauthorized online learning program.”





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Another student “failed .5 unit of United States History, and the John F. Kennedy High School administration failed to reassign the student in the course,” according to the state’s letter granting the waivers. That student was .5 units shy of graduation eligibility.

Four students were assigned to take credit recovery courses — intended for students who have already failed a class — for courses they had not previously taken. Credit recovery courses are reserved for students who have failed said course.

The eight students were part of a group of about 90 students from the class of 2019 who didn’t meet graduation requirements this spring. That was just over half of the 2019 senior class. Many of the students didn’t find out they were ineligible for graduation until **weeks after they walked across the stage** at the Gentilly high school’s May commencement.

The waivers, while a route to a diploma, come with a caveat: students accepting them could be ineligible for TOPS college scholarships, **George told The Lens last month**. It’s unclear how many of the eight students may have been seeking the scholarships. The students are not identified by name.

New Beginnings board president Raphael Gang said the school worked with each of those students and their families to ensure they understood the potential conflict with TOPS eligibility. Gang said the students asked New Beginnings to submit the waiver requests on their behalf.

The graduation problems at Kennedy led to internal, district and state investigations. **The state found** Kennedy misused a credit recovery program — one of the problems outlined in George’s waiver request written this week. The charter group isn’t likely to release their internal investigation due to

criminal investigations, New Beginnings board president Raphael Gang told **WWL-TV last month.**

NOLA Public Schools Superintendent Henderson Lewis Jr. said Thursday the district's report "is in its final stages and will be released soon."

The New Beginnings board surrendered their charter last month, effective at the end of the 2019-2020 school year. On Thursday, Lewis announced KIPP New Orleans Schools would run Kennedy next year.

He also said 40 Kennedy students had met graduation requirements over the summer and nine students had returned to local high schools. Three of those students returned to Kennedy. About a half-dozen more students are seeking waivers from the state.

"That leaves 29 students who must complete various requirements to be eligible for graduation," Lewis said.

*Update: This story was updated with comment from New Beginnings after publication.*

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