

March 27, 2018

Dear LFNO CEO Search Committee:

On May 29, 2018 I will watch proudly as the Sci High class of 2018 marches into their graduation ceremony. This will be the thirteenth graduation I have organized since Sci High re-opened after Hurricane Katrina. Every year is as inspirational and exciting as the first. In my time at Sci High I have had the unique opportunity to construct a community and grow a phenomenal school around a mission for open-enrollment speciality-programming. Similarly, what attracts me to Lycée Français de la Nouvelle-Orléans is your ambitious and admirable mission of providing high quality speciality-programing to any interested student in our city.

I plan on sending my son to an immersion school because I believe it is the only way to truly learn a language outside of living abroad. My immersion experiences living abroad as a young adult greatly shaped the person I am today and my educational philosophies. Due to its impact on brain development I believe that language immersion is perhaps the single best approach to increasing children's comprehension and synthesis skills for all areas of study. LFNO graduates not only have the advantage of being bilingual but are also well educated in the best of the American and the French systems. The needs of our world demand well-rounded and well-educated young adults who value their own cultures and also feel at home in the other languages and cultures of the wider global community.

In addition to my 25 years of personal study and interest in French language and Francophone cultures, I am passionate about supporting the historical and cultural significance the French language has in New Orleans. I know all too well how French has virtually been eliminated from the curriculum at public high schools around the city, thus increasing the urgency and importance of what LFNO brings to the educational landscape. LFNO indeed has a unique role in rekindling the relationship between the New Orleans and the French language and culture in the cities youngest citizens.

I see that LFNO is in a period of great momentum, poised for the next wave of success. The incoming CEO will lead the charge over the next five years as the high school is built out, the full PK-12 community coalesces, and the dream of a permanent home in the Priestly building becomes a reality. These are massive initiatives and amazing opportunities for LFNO in the educational landscape of our fair city. I am no stranger to challenges of this variety, as in the past ten plus years at Sci High I have worked diligently to move the school from a D to a B+ ranking, while supporting and growing speciality programing in STEM education, and advocating for the funding for a building our students deserve. In my current professional community I have demonstrated the ability to anticipate organizational needs and to develop initiatives that are imaginative, visionary and sound as a school grows into its full potential.

I am applying for the position of CEO of Lycée Français de la Nouvelle-Orléans because this position is well aligned to my strengths and it will be an exciting challenge. This opportunity is personally exciting because I strongly believe in the mission of LFNO and understand the gift it is to the New Orleans community. I am professionally excited because I believe I can make an important contribution to the future of LFNO. The new CEO of LFNO will pave the way for the young francophones of our city to achieve greatness in high school and beyond. It is a privilege to be considered for this valuable work. Thank you for considering me for the position of CEO of Lycée Français de la Nouvelle-Orléans.

Cordialement,

Chana Benenson

# Chana Benenson, M.A.

*Personal information redacted (address, phone, email)*

## **Professional Certifications and Credentials**

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Louisiana Department of Education, Educational Leader (Principal) Certification	2017-2020
Louisiana Department of Education, Level 3 Teaching Certificate English 6-12 and Spanish K-12	2014-2019

## **Education**

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Columbia University - Teachers College, New York/New Orleans  
M.A. in School Leadership  
July 2013

Earlham College, Richmond, IN  
B.A. in Comparative Languages and Linguistics - minor in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages  
December 2003

## **Educational Leadership and Teaching Experience**

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### **New Orleans Charter Science and Mathematics High School**

Principal

2017 to present

- Provide vision and effective leadership in the following areas:
  - **Organizational Leadership:** In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina I was an integral part of Sci High's reopening as a full day program and was the school's first Foreign Language Department Head. Throughout my 12 years at Sci High I have filled a wide variety of leadership roles and have participated in the creation of most of our organizational systems. As Sci High's success over the past 5 years demonstrates, I am skilled at setting clear vision, defining and implementing realistic and mission-aligned goals and motivating a strong team of educators.
  - **Instructional Leadership:** I work closely with my skilled instructional leadership team to guarantee that a high quality STEM education is attainable for all of our students. I ensure that academic instruction is aligned to the school's mission, its long-term vision and strategic goals. Knowledgeable and effective teachers are the key to our continued success. I support their work through my delegation and collaboration with mid-level leaders in the areas of: recruiting, training, curriculum development, observation and feedback, and professional development.
  - **Board Leadership:** I work in collaboration with the Advocates for Science and Mathematics Education, Inc. Board members to successfully lead the school. I report to the Board on the overall well-being of the school, keep the members informed of Sci High's successes and challenges, and gather valuable input and guidance from board members' professional expertise. We stay in close communication through meetings, phone, and emails. I also work on a daily basis with the director and the executive committee of the Foundation for Science and Mathematics Education Inc. (the Foundation).
  - **Operational Leadership:** On the business side of school, I ensure that appropriate faculty and staff carry out daily operations of the school in areas including transportation, food service, custodial/cleaning, student recruitment, governmental reporting, family communication, student culture and discipline, facility management, human resources, and safety.

- o **Financial Leadership:** I work closely with the Finance Director in their work of forecasting financial needs and resources, creating and managing a balanced budget, establishing and overseeing financial tracking and reporting systems both within the school and to outside entities such as auditors and for the purposes of governmental and grant reporting. In conjunction with other administrators, I ensure that the use of school funds and resources aligns with school goals and needs. I also work in partnership with the director of the Foundation on fundraising efforts that expand professional opportunities for teachers and STEM experiences for students.
- o **Community Leadership:** I represent Sci High to the New Orleans community. I work continuously in all possible community forums to promote and increase my students' successes. Our ability to attract students, teachers, staff and financial resources depends upon our reputation and relationships. Over the years I have developed strong connections with school boards, local educational institutions, leadership groups, advocacy organizations and community groups. I look forward to strengthening Sci High's relationships with local universities and industry partners.
- Identify and articulate Sci High's future for all stakeholders. Some of the current projects I am working on include planning for a new facility in the biomedical district of New Orleans, becoming our own district/LEA with the Louisiana Department of Education, increasing student access to high wage and high demand jobs through Career Technical Educational programming, and maintaining our position as the top open admissions public high school in New Orleans.

#### Co-Principal

2012-2017

- **Led Sci High from D ranking to B+ ranked status, where we have maintained under 2 points from an A ranking for 3 consecutive years.**
- Directly guided daily operations, facilities management, and student support departments.
- Hired and developed school staff with special emphasis on recruiting dedicated and skilled alums. **Maintained annual faculty and staff retention between 80-90%.**
- Worked closely with parents, students, community leaders and organizations to facilitate the needs of young people who face many difficult physical, emotional, financial and education challenges. As a result **Sci High's cohort graduation rate grew from 80% in 2015 to 87% for the class of 2016 (city wide rate of 72%).**
- Developed intervention models and policies for disciplinary and family crisis issues, **reducing Sci High's suspension rates from 25% in 2014 to 18% in 2016.**
- Other recognition earned during this time:
  - o Silver Medal by *US News and World Report*, 2014 and 2017
  - o Absolute Achievement, High School from OPEN (Orleans Parish Education Network), 2013 and 2018
  - o "Best Places to Work" by the *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, 2015
  - o Highest composite ACT (20) amount open-admissions New Orleans high schools, 2017
  - o Awarded \$35 million and highly desired land for construction of new facility

#### Dean of Students

2011-2012

- Directed the Student Services Department by setting and upholding fair expectations that resulted in successful students and a positive school culture.
- Developed school-wide student advisory structure and lessons.
- Initiated and executed student activities and school culture events, such as graduations, proms, field trips and positive behavior rewards.
- Designed and managed school wide behavior expectation and support systems.
- Introduced restorative approaches to behavioral management systems, supported by peer mediation program.
- During a time of leadership transition, served on Administrative Team.

## Teacher and Foreign Language Department Head

2006-2011

- Was hired as one of the first humanities teacher in Sci High's history. Taught French and Spanish levels 1-4.
- Administered department. Oversaw curriculum and instruction. Facilitated wide range of professional development activities.
- Trained teachers on objective aligned assessments and student growth tracking.
- Mentored new teachers.
- Served as faculty representative on board for Foundation for Science and Mathematics, Inc.

## Walter L. Cohen High School

2004-2005

### Teacher

- **Taught French** and English.
- Served as school sponsor for the LA GEAR UP program and assistant cheerleading coach.

## **Professional Development and Practice**

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### Seminar Leader and Mentor, TeachNOLA, New Orleans, LA

April 2005 - January 2011

Recruited, interviewed, assessed, trained and mentored teachers for New Orleans charter schools.

### Content Seminar Leader and Mentor, The New Teacher Project, New Orleans, LA

August 2007 - May 2011

**Trained first year K-12 foreign language teachers in content, pedagogy and instructional skills.**

### Aspiring Leader, School Leadership Center, New Orleans, LA

October 2008 - April 2009

Participated in seven-month program to expand my school leadership skills.

### Fellow, Leading Educators, New Orleans, LA

May 2009 - May 2011

Selected as mid-level leader by a now national organization. Developed educational leadership skills in two-year program.

### Additional professional development courses:

Crisis Prevention and Intervention

Trauma-Informed Practices

Suicide Prevention

Regulating Emotions and Student Behavior

New School Design

Conflict Resolution

School Finance and Budgeting

Leadership Decision-Making

Education Law

Understanding State School Performance Scores

State Testing Updates

Emotional Intelligence

Diversity Issues in Education

Building Strong Faculty Teams

Best HR Practices for Small Organizations

School Culture and Behavior

### Additional professional experience:

Assistant Director, Girls Inc., Indiana

### **French Teacher, Lac du Bois, Minnesota**

English Teacher, Fun Language International Ltd., Bangkok, Thailand

English Teacher, Escuela Taller, Valencia, Spain

Proficient in Spanish and French

Travelled or lived in the following countries:

**Switzerland**

Guatemala

Israel

Brazil

Spain

Colombia

India

Dominican Republic

Thailand

Ecuador

Palestine

Greece

MARY ZERVIGON  
1033 Joliet Street  
New Orleans, LA 70118

April 18, 2018

To Whom it May Concern:

It is my pleasure to provide this letter of recommendation for Chana Benenson as she seeks an educational leadership role in your institution. Ms. Benenson has worked at New Orleans over the 12.5 years I She has at every level of this institution shown the utmost integrity and commitment to the students and teachers she served and to the school.

Ms. Benenson and her administrative team worked hard this year, moving the school from under OPSB to becoming a separate Local Educational Agency, which included meeting numerous district level compliance expectations with a relatively small administrative staff. This transition occurred with little to no external support or guidance, however it has gone surprisingly smoothly due to Ms. Benenson's strategic planning and organizational leadership.

Based on her commitment to open-enrollment schools that offer high quality educational opportunities, Ms. Benenson has also worked tirelessly in the areas of faculty and student recruitment and retention, Special Education programming, and securing the resources needed for a new state-of-the-art school building.

Sci High is in a time of transition and the Advocates Board has decided to move in another direction in terms of leadership, thus this is an appropriate time for an amicable parting of ways with Ms. Benenson. I have no hesitation in recommending her as a strong and committed educational leader whose strengths have been appreciated over the years and will surely lead to great success of another organization.

In closing, the Advocates Board and the larger school community are so grateful for Ms. Benenson's extensive tenure as both teacher and leader and her presence at Sci High will surely be missed. Ms. Benenson is an effective educational leader whose deep commitment and enthusiasm have been much appreciated at our school.

Sincerely,



Mary Zervigon  
Board Chair

1. As a type 2 charter school in Louisiana, LFNO is required to serve at least 60% economically disadvantaged students. We currently have 42.8%.
  - a. How do you propose reaching out to and recruiting economically disadvantaged students and families?

*While every parent wants their child to attend the best possible school, some families are limited to selecting schools that provide transportation or are close to their home due to financial limitations. Thus, providing free bussing for any student who lives outside of a one mile geographical radius of the school will be the largest singular factor to increase access for more economically disadvantaged students to benefit from the excellent education offered by LFNO. After seeing the bussing RFP on the website and speaking to some LFNO parents I am excited that a free bussing service is set to begin for the 2018-19 school year.*

*A secondary approach to increasing the enrollment of economically disadvantaged students would be purposeful recruiting of future families. This could be done through LFNO flyers sharing the benefits of an immersion education given directly to childcare facilities and organizations that support families receiving government benefits. Additionally, it would be powerful to do door-to-door visits with the neighbors within a mile radius of the Priestly building, sharing flyers and invitations to LFNO info sessions and celebrations. This would allow the neighbors to learn more about the school as the eventual move-in date approaches, while also increasing the number of advocates who are encouraging their friends and family to send their child to LFNO for the excellent French immersion education as well as the supportive and inclusive community atmosphere.*

- b. Beyond merely getting them registered as students, what tactics might you deploy to ensure parents feel welcomed into and part of the LFNO community?

*Naturally, parents are thrilled to get their children into LFNO for the excellent French education they will receive, however I can imagine that many of these parents do not speak French and it is vital that the parents have a myriad of opportunities to engage with their child's education despite the language barrier.*

*The most basic of approaches to increase the school and parent connection is to create and regularly distribute print and internet resources. These publications can be as general as family newsletters and as specific as notes from a teacher directly to one family about their child's recent accomplishments. Going hand in hand with print and internet resources are regularly scheduled drop in sessions at school to give parents a summary of what their child is doing in school and reminders as to how they can engage and support their student.*

*A fun idea to further engage all parents is hosting French lessons for parents in the evenings or weekends, allowing them to learn French while also socializing with other LFNO families. Parents could pay based on a sliding scale and it would give them an opportunity to acquire some basic French skills as well as build a toolbox of “homework help” and “scholastic” French phrases.*

*Another approach to helping make parents feel involved and invested in the LFNO community is to create systems for students to share about their education with their parents. Students can be trained on how to lead a weekly conference with their parent to explain what they are learning in school to their parent using a mix of French and English. A developmentally appropriate guided framework for these weekly conferences would encourage a deep level of synthesis for students as they summarize and reflect on their ongoing learning. Such student led conferences would allow for a non-French speaking parent to be included and informed about their child’s education and they would inevitably pick up on key French phrases that would help the family bond over shared experiences.*

2. As a public school, LFNO must serve a wide variety of students with special needs.
  - a. Describe your approach to Special Education, including serving the needs of all students and maintaining compliance with the complex law.

*I am a passionate advocate of creating an inclusive educational environment that meets the educational and social needs of all learners. Meeting student learning needs by following IEPs is legally mandatory, and doing so in an inclusive environment as is beneficial for all students growth as individual learners and for the classroom community as a whole.*

*I believe the inclusion approach to Special Education aligns well with the philosophies of immersion education in terms of being authentic, experiential, and community focused learning experiences. Both the SPED inclusive and foreign language immersive learning environments surround the students with the content, allowing wide variety of learning styles to thrive with resources to help move each individual and the class as a whole toward the learning objectives.*

*Inclusive environments improve not only the educational outcomes of SPED students but also of their general education peers because of the thoughtfulness with which all lessons and activities are approached. When teachers are trained and supported in meeting their students’ IEP needs they generally will go above and beyond the baseline of most special education laws.*

*That said, it is undeniable that an experienced and detail oriented Special Education Coordinator is needed to ensure compliance with state reporting in SER and appropriate management of the evaluation process, IEP development and case-management, and all related service providers. Participating in state webinars and in person sessions at the state supervisors trainings is vital for the SPED Coordinator to stay up to date on changes in SPED*



*regulations that support students path to graduation, such as Act 833. Additionally, it is extremely beneficial for a SPED Coordinator to join professional development organizations such as SELF (Special Education Leadership Fellowship) to learn about best practices across the country and build a cohort of local peers.*

- b. How do you tackle added challenges of including services for French language acquisition needs for students, maintaining services while students partake in LFNO's Thinking Outside the Classroom external classroom experiences, and ensuring teachers can attend the Special Education meetings for their students?

*I have experienced students with autism and intellectual disabilities who struggled in their core classes excel with very little support in foreign language classes when they first encounter the material in high school. Two of the many factors I see for this anomaly are that foreign language classrooms by nature rotate through a wide variety of learning styles, and that SPED students are entering a more equitable learning environment if the language is new to all students equally.*

*In many ways the structure of LFNO's Thinking Outside the Classroom serves as a great tool to help reinforce classroom instruction for SPED students who may internalize the concepts better through kinesthetic, first-hand, and repetitive field experiences. Prioritizing an inclusive SPED educational setting, maintaining meaningful external classroom experiences, and allowing time for teachers to attend IEP meetings are all important and achievable expectations for a highly effective public school. To achieve these and the other goals relative to the mission of LFNO to adequately prepare all students to matriculate into excellent local and international colleges is all a matter of resource allocation, one of the most important skills of school leadership.*