

October 30, 2026

Hon. Juan Oscar Morales Rodríguez
Chairman, Senate Committee on Health
El Capitolio
P.O. Box 9023431
San Juan, PR 00902-3431

Dear Senator Morales Rodríguez and Members of the Committee:

On October 21, 2026, the Puerto Rico Senate Committee on Health issued a letter – under R. del S. 107 – seeking information regarding the proposed Star Academy pilot project in Puerto Rico.

NOLA Education provides these responses voluntarily and subject to all applicable rights, privileges and legal protections, which are expressly reserved.

We recognize the Puerto Rico Senate's oversight responsibilities and the importance of transparent procurement, lawful expenditures, and accurate public reporting. We ask that the Committee assess our conduct based on the evidence and distinguish the company's actions from decisions made within the government.

Our advocacy for the Star Academy educational approach does not displace our responsibility to answer questions about our efforts to expand the program to Puerto Rico.

ABOUT NOLA EDUCATION LLC

NOLA Education, a Louisiana limited liability company, manages the Star Academy program to improve the academic performance of public-school students falling behind in their studies, struggling with attendance, or at risk of not graduating on time. As you are aware, these situations drastically hurt a student's chances for the type of career that can provide a living for them and their families.

NOLA Education has been in business since 2017, and the Star Academy program has been operating since 2007. Our work spans 18 U.S. states and more than 120 sites where we teach core academic subjects through real-world applications connecting classroom concepts to careers.

Star Academy has received three Crystal Star Awards of Excellence from the National Dropout Prevention Center. Students in the program across 17 Louisiana sites were suspended 56% less, and the average attendance rate was over 90%. Consistently, average academic proficiency improved for students in Star Academy programs across states.

NOLA Education saw an opportunity to bring Star Academy to Puerto Rico to help students who had fallen behind academically reconnect with school and envision a stronger future. Our

outreach began during former Governor Pedro Pierluisi's administration, when we presented the concept in several meetings with Governor's Office officials, including Ciení Rodríguez, and members of the Puerto Rico House of Representatives and Senate. Although those discussions generated considerable interest, the initiative did not advance because the administration did not follow up. NOLA Education remained interested in demonstrating the program to the officials responsible for public education and exploring a pilot that could address the needs of Puerto Rican students.

INQUIRIES

It is important to our company that we correct any misunderstandings and inaccuracies about the success of Star Academies that have arisen in recent weeks. We therefore disclose the information contained in this letter, as requested. These responses reflect NOLA's present knowledge and the information available to it. Where exact dates, times, identities or documents remain to be confirmed, those limits are identified.

The company does not purport to authenticate another bidder's submission, account for government expenditures it did not administer, or characterize officials' private deliberations.

The proposed Star Academy pilot contemplated 25 schools, with capacity for 80 students at each site (or a total of approximately 2,000 students) and a specific grade to be determined, together with classroom equipment, instructional materials, and professional development for school personnel.

NOLA Education initially presented the Star Academy model to Puerto Rico officials on the dates listed in Response 1. We understood, based on conversations with Department of the Family and Department of Education staff, that they initially considered contracting directly for Star Academy because of the program's uniqueness and distinctive design, before deciding to issue an invitation to submit proposals.

Three facts should anchor this review:

1. The proposed project was valued at \$37.5 million over three years, the amount stated in NOLA Education's proposal (we have no knowledge of the basis for the \$38.5 million figure that appears in Department documents).
2. We did not draft the solicitation, select or compensate the evaluator, score any submission, or participate in the award decision.
3. We never received a draft contract, and no contract was ever executed.
4. NOLA Education did not receive any compensation or funding from the Government of Puerto Rico. The company did not implement the proposed pilot or deliver services under it.

The award was announced in January 2026. After months of no response to our communications with Department of the Family officials, NOLA Education was informed on May 19, 2026 that our work with Puerto Rico schools would not move forward.

As stated above, NOLA Education has no contracts with the government of Puerto Rico or any

school system in the territory. We have not received any compensation or funding from the Puerto Rican government or taxpayers.

More importantly, there has been significant confusion surrounding the federal determination regarding Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funding. The U.S. Department of Health & Human Services' Administration for Children and Families (ACF) – which administers TANF – indicated that components of Star Academy are allowable TANF expenditures when properly structured.

ACF specifically explained that a state using TANF for such a program should identify the components supported by TANF through an appropriate cost-allocation plan and describe how those components accomplish a TANF purpose. The question before Puerto Rico was therefore not whether Star Academy was categorically ineligible for TANF funding; it was how the program and the expenditure of TANF resources would be properly structured under federal requirements.

Federal law gives states and territories flexibility to fund programs that advance TANF's purposes, and the responsible agencies must document each program's eligibility and costs before those resources are committed. While several states have previously used TANF funds to bring in Star Academy, the program has been supported through a variety of funding sources, including state appropriations and competitive grants.

Regarding the questions posed by the Puerto Rico Senate Committee on Health, below are our responses:

1. *Initial Relationship-* Please clarify the timeline and specify the exact date when the professional relationship or communication between NOLA Education LLC (including its representatives or affiliates) and the Department of the Family of Puerto Rico, or any of its officials, first commenced.

A: NOLA Education LLC's initial contact with Governor Jenniffer González-Colón occurred on February 20, 2025 at a Republican Governors Association meeting in Washington, D.C. During that introductory exchange, NOLA representatives introduced Star Academy and discussed its potential to benefit Puerto Rican students whose education had been disrupted by Hurricanes Irma and Maria, earthquakes in the island's southwestern region, the COVID-19 pandemic, and other challenges.

During this discussion, Governor Jenniffer González-Colón expressed strong interest in Star Academy because of its potential to help Puerto Rican children who had fallen behind academically. She indicated that she wanted to explore an opportunity to bring a pilot to the island. NOLA Education presented Star Academy as a distinctive, integrated educational model combining proprietary instructional tools and resources, hands-on academic acceleration, and exposure to

approximately 25–30 career pathways – features that informed the Governor’s interest in exploring its potential implementation in Puerto Rico.

As a follow-up to the February 2025 introduction, a meeting was held on May 12, 2025 at the Puerto Rico Department of Education’s headquarters, with representatives from both the Department of the Family and the Department of Education.

During that meeting, NOLA Education LLC presented the Star Academy model and proposed pilot, discussed the needs of students attending significantly underperforming schools, and explained how the program could help students who had fallen behind academically regain progress and remain engaged in their education. The company also discussed students in schools that were significantly underperforming, and that would greatly benefit from participating in the Star Academy model.

A follow-up meeting was conducted on October 6, 2025 at the Department of the Family. Present were Secretary Suzanne Roig, ADSEF Administrator Ramón Burgos Bermúdez, Nicole Báez Ortiz, Juan Aviles Silvestry, Gisela Rodríguez Algarín, as well as NOLA Education representatives.

2. *Referral Source-* Please identify the individual, entity, or official who initially referred, introduced, or recommended NOLA Education LLC to the Department of the Family of Puerto Rico.

A: After the February 2025 meeting with the Governor in Washington, DC, members of the Governor’s staff – including PRFAA Director Gabriella Boffelli and Director of Government Affairs Gabriel Bravo – identified individuals to reach out to at the Department of the Family and Department of Education. Later, Governor’s office staff member Josman Betancourt coordinated some of the follow up.

3. *Executive Branch Communications-* Indicate whether NOLA Education LLC, or any of its representatives, held any communications (written, verbal, or electronic) with officials, advisors, or personnel at La Fortaleza (the Governor’s Office) regarding the Star Academy program or any potential contract. If so, please identify the individuals involved and the dates of such communications.

A: NOLA Education LLC and its representatives held communications with staff from Governor Jenniffer González-Colón’s office on several occasions in 2025. These include early February 2025 to identify whether there was a 10-minute window in the Governor’s schedule to meet her and introduce the Star Academy program, as well as other communications via email and phone with Gabriella Boffelli, Itza García, Josman Betancourt, and agency staff.

4. *Origin of Invitation-* Please describe how the invitation for the Department of the Family's delegation to visit New Orleans, Louisiana, originated. Specify who extended the invitation and the intended objectives of the visit.

A: In early November 2025, Secretary Suzanne Roig Fuertes contacted NOLA Education to request a visit to schools where Star Academy was operating; the location remained to be determined at that stage. Our staff subsequently determined that Louisiana was the most appropriate location. We then proceeded to draft a sample itinerary of school site visits and related meetings. The purpose was to allow Puerto Rico government officials to observe instruction, speak with educators and students, review the model, and assess its suitability for Puerto Rico.

5. *Delegation Attendees-* Please provide a list of all officials from the Department of the Family who were present during the New Orleans trip. Additionally, identify any companions, independent contractors, or non-governmental personnel who accompanied the official delegation.

A: In addition to NOLA Education representatives, the Puerto Rico delegation included:

1. Secretary Suzanne Roig Fuertes (Department of the Family)
2. Juan Avilés Silvestry (Department of the Family)
3. Nicole Báez-Ortiz (Department of the Family)
4. Josman Betancourt (Office of the Governor)
5. Gabriel Bravo (Puerto Rico Federal Affairs Administration)
6. Rossy Santiago Velázquez (Department of Education)
7. Dina Romero Arias (Department of Education)

NOLA's records of the visit, including sign-in sheets, the transportation manifest and restaurant headcounts, reflect the seven persons listed above as the Puerto Rico delegation and no other individuals. No person named Linnette Martínez Ruiz appears in NOLA's records of the visit.

6. *Itinerary and Activities-* Provide the official agenda, itinerary, and a description of the activities carried out during the visit from December 7 to December 10, 2025. Please include any available email correspondence or documentation verifying these arrangements.

A: The substantive part of the program took place on December 8–9, 2025. The Puerto Rico delegation flew in on December 7th in the late afternoon/early evening and departed the morning of December 10th. Activities included presentations at NOLA's headquarters, observations of operating Star Academy classrooms, discussions with school and program personnel, and visits involving White Castle High School and East Iberville High School. Meals and

local shuttle transportation are itemized in Response 7.

The final agenda was:

December 7, 2025

Arrivals, with no scheduled activities.

December 8, 2025

Executive van transportation throughout the day

- | | |
|------------------------|--|
| 09:00A – 09:45A | Breakfast at the Star Academy Office |
| 10:00A – 12:00P | Live interactive session with students and teachers walking through Star Academy module |
| 12:00P – 02:00P | Lunch at Saint John, 715 St. Charles Avenue |
| 02:30P – 03:30P | Strategic conversation with Richard Hartley, former Education Policy Advisor to Gov. John Bel Edwards, on the evolution of Star Academy in Louisiana |
| 03:30P – 04:30P | Program design session with Education & Curriculum Team and Puerto Rico delegation |
| 06:30P | Dinner with Star Academy staff – Arnaud’s |

December 9, 2025

Executive van transportation throughout the day

- | | |
|------------------------|--|
| 08:30A | Hotel pick-up |
| 10:00A – 11:30A | Visit to White Castle High School |
| 12:00P – 01:15P | Lunch |
| 01:30P – 03:00P | Visit to East Iberville High School |
| 03:00P | Depart East Iberville (approx. 1.5-hour return to hotel) |
| 6:30PM | Dinner with Star Academy team at Restaurant R’evolution, Royal Sonesta |

December 10, 2025

No scheduled activities. Puerto Rico delegation departed in the morning.

Email correspondence confirming these arrangements is attached.

7. Coverage of Expenses- *Detail what specific expenses were covered or facilitated under the terms of the invitation (e.g., meals, lodging, transportation, or logistics) and clarify whether NOLA Education LLC directly funded or arranged any of these components. Provide evidence or receipts of the expenses incurred.*

A: NOLA Education LLC covered the following expenses associated with the delegation's December 2025 visit: meals, local transportation, refreshments and delegation materials.

The transportation and meal expenses itemized below covered a group between 13-20 people at any given time. In addition to the seven members of the Puerto Rico delegation, the group included NOLA Education representatives.

Receipts are attached; items marked as estimated have no receipt and are valued as described below.

At no time did any member of the Puerto Rico delegation advise us that we could not pay for their food, beverage, and transportation expenses.

- **DINNER DATES, LOCATIONS, AND COSTS**

As stated above, a dinner was held at Arnaud's on December 8, 2025, at a documented cost of \$2,956.75.

On December 9, 2025, a group dinner was held at Restaurant R'evolution at the Royal Sonesta, at a documented cost of \$1,997.35.

- **PAYMENT/EXPENSE ACCOUNTING**

NOLA Education LLC covered the following expenses:

Expenses covering both days

Shuttle service provided by Pro Driving Services: \$5,407.50.

****Due to the size of the group and the distances to be driven (1.5 hours from New Orleans headquarters to Star Academy programs in several other schools), it was logistically easier for the group to travel in a shuttle bus (like the one pictured below).***



Monday, December 8, 2025

- Catered breakfast provided by Legacy Kitchen: \$901.90.
- Fifteen promotional bags (but only seven bags – one each – for members of the PR delegation) that included:
 - Aunt Sally's pralines (estimated \$4.50 per item)
 - Mardi Gras beads (estimated \$1.50 per item)
 - Branded promotional items from existing trade-show inventory: T-shirt valued at \$10, pen valued at \$1.50, and notepad valued at \$3.
 - Café Du Monde beignet mix ((estimated \$5.52 per item)
- Lunch at Saint John, 715 St. Charles, in a private dining room for 16 guests: \$1,170.00.
- Drinks before dinner at Sip Wine Bar: \$33.72.
- Dinner at Arnaud's in a private dining room: \$2,956.75.

Additional contents included Spanish-language brochures with Louisiana and Arkansas inserts, a thank-you card signed by John Alvendia, and an activity card.

Tuesday, December 9, 2025

- Refreshments for the White Castle and East Iberville visits, including doughnuts, fruit, juice, snacks, and ice: \$186.51.
- Lunch at Dixie Café at Houmas House/Great River Road Museum: \$450.00 estimated, based on 18 guests at approximately \$25 per person.
- Group dinner at Restaurant R'evolution at the Royal Sonesta: \$1,997.35.

Following the visit

- Thank-you cards sent to the delegation: \$32.91.

Total documented charges and reimbursements: \$12,774.75.

Additional estimated costs: \$750.30.

Combined documented expenses and estimated costs: \$13,525.05.

8. Official Dinner Details- Regarding the dinner meeting held during the trip, please provide the following details for our records:

- a. The exact date and time of the dinner, as well as the name of the restaurant where it took place.
- b. Clarification on who covered the costs of the dinner, along with copies of the corresponding receipts, invoices, or payment records.

A: On December 8, 2025, a dinner meeting was held at Arnaud's around 6:30pm. NOLA Education LLC covered the expenses of that dinner. At no time did any member of the Puerto Rico delegation advise us that we could not pay for their food and beverage expenses.

9. Additional Expenses- State whether NOLA Education LLC covered, reimbursed, or subsidized any other expenses for the visiting officials during their stay. Please provide supporting documentary evidence.

A: Apart from the items disclosed in Response 7, no other expenses were covered, reimbursed, or subsidized by NOLA Education. In addition, our company did not pay for airfare or lodging for anyone from the Puerto Rico delegation.

10. Contractual Discussions- Summarize the core topics and matters discussed during the trip regarding the potential implementation of the Star Academy educational program in 25 public schools in Puerto Rico.

A: Discussions addressed the educational model and the potential implementation of a 25-school pilot: Classroom instruction, academic acceleration, student engagement, career-connected learning, school staffing and training, and adaptation to Puerto Rico's educational and workforce needs. Officials observed active classrooms, spoke with educators, school administrators, and Star Academy staff, and identified and considered program results.

By observing active classrooms, meeting with school/program leaders and champions, and reviewing measurable data outcomes, the delegation gained a clear understanding of how Star Academy integrates academic acceleration, student wraparound services, and community partnerships to drive improved attendance, completion rates, and long-term student success.

11. Corporate Registration- Identify the individual who filed the registration documents or the legal representative responsible for registering NOLA Education LLC in Puerto Rico on December 10, 2025.

A: As part of its market expansion and as part of due diligence, NOLA Education LLC learned that in order to do business in Puerto Rico, it needed to register a local affiliate. The company identified and contracted Salvatore Casale, a local

attorney with vast experience in corporate registrations and business law, to register the company's affiliate in Puerto Rico. The registration referred to in the Committee's question is dated December 10, 2025.

It is important to note, to correct inaccuracies in the media and comments from committee members, that NOLA Education is an established Louisiana-based education company with almost 10 years of operation. The Star Academy program has been in operation since 2007. The company's Puerto Rico affiliate was registered as part of the company's expansion efforts.

The registration date does not represent the age or experience of the underlying company. Its qualifications should be assessed against the requirements of the solicitation.

12. *Agency Guidance-* Clarify whether any official or employee from the Department of the Family suggested, instructed, or assisted NOLA Education LLC regarding the timing or process of its corporate registration in Puerto Rico.

A: NOLA Education states that neither Secretary Suzanne Roig nor any other Puerto Rico government official suggested, instructed, or assisted the company regarding the timing or process of its Puerto Rico registration. NOLA undertook that step as part of its own market-entry preparations, with assistance from the attorney identified in Response 11.

Star Academy dates to 2007. NOLA Education LLC was formed on July 12, 2017, to acquire and grow the program. The December 2025 Puerto Rico registration concerns entry into a new jurisdiction; it is not the inception of the educational model or the Louisiana company.

13. *Request for Proposals (RFP)-* Please state how and when NOLA Education LLC was invited to participate in the Request for Proposals (RFP) or bidding process for this program.

A: NOLA Education LLC was invited to participate through an email from the Puerto Rico Department of the Family to Chief Operating Officer Jay Wehrer transmitting the Request for Proposals for the proposed Star Academy pilot project. Exhibits are attached.

14. *Advance Information-* Clarify whether any advance, non-public, or preferential information regarding the upcoming RFP or proposal criteria was shared with NOLA Education LLC during or immediately following the New Orleans trip.

A: During the December 2025 trip to Louisiana, the Secretary communicated to NOLA Education staff that they would be issuing a request for proposals, and that we and other companies/entities/organizations would be sent information

with all relevant requirements and submission date.

NOLA Education received no evaluation criteria, scoring methodology, evaluator identity, or information about other invitees before the invitation was issued. The Department has stated that the invitation went to 45 vendors drawn from a Department of Education list.

More important, NOLA Education did not draft the solicitation, select or compensate the evaluator, score any submission, or participate in the award decision.

15. Post-Award Correspondence- Please provide a summary or copies of all communications exchanged with the Department of the Family subsequent to the notification of the contract award on January 20, 2026.

A: Following the January 20, 2026 award notification, and before notice of the award cancellation, NOLA Education LLC received only one communication from the Department of the Family.

In it, Secretary Suzanne Roig advised that ADSEF officials had submitted a letter to the federal Administration for Children and Families (ACF) regarding the use of TANF funds for the Star Academy project, and that they were awaiting a response. She asked whether NOLA Education LLC could assist in obtaining that response. This communication did not involve the review or negotiation of contract terms.

16. Contract Review- Indicate whether NOLA Education LLC reviewed, drafted, or discussed any preliminary drafts of the \$38.5 million contract, and identify the specific officials with whom these terms were negotiated.

A: The proposed Star Academy pilot had a value of \$37.5 million, the amount stated in NOLA's proposal.

NOLA Education LLC submitted a response to the RFP and was later announced as the company selected for the award. Department of the Family officials did not provide us with a preliminary or final contract for review or negotiation.

In addition, following the award notification, the Department of the Family did not respond to NOLA Education's communications concerning contract terms until notifying us via email that the award had been rescinded. No contract was executed.

NOLA did not retain Advocacy Solutions LLC or attorney Carlos M. Limardo Ortiz (as incorrectly reported in local media) and did not participate in or receive the Department's October 2025 analysis of payment options.

17. Agency Interactions- Specify whether your communications regarding the contract terms were held directly with personnel from the Family's Socioeconomic Development Administration (ADSEF), or exclusively with central Department of the Family officials.

A: NOLA Education LLC discussed the Star Academy pilot project in meetings with Department of the Family officials, including then ADSEF Administrator Ramón Burgos Bermúdez, ADSEF legal counsel Gisela Rodríguez Algarín, and Department of Education officials. Following the award notification, the Department of the Family did not respond to NOLA Education LLC's communications concerning contract terms or otherwise communicate with the company until notifying it that the award had been rescinded.

18. Prior Educational Services- State whether NOLA Education LLC has had any prior or concurrent business relationships, contracts, or professional dealings with the Department of Education of Puerto Rico. If applicable, please briefly detail those services.

A: NOLA Education has never entered into a contract with any government agency, school or school district in Puerto Rico to provide goods or services. It has received no compensation or funding from the Government of Puerto Rico.

NOLA will continue to respond to the Committee and to the other authorities reviewing this matter. We respect the Committee's oversight role and ask that our company's participation be assessed on the record provided.

Respectfully submitted,

John Alvendia
Chief Executive Officer
NOLA Education, LLC

SUPPLEMENTAL STATEMENT BY NOLA EDUCATION, LLC

NOLA Education submits this statement on matters raised publicly that fall outside the Committee's questions. It is limited to facts within the company's knowledge and records.

1. THE STAR ACADEMY PROGRAM'S RECORD

Star Academy has operated since 2007 and NOLA Education, LLC since 2017. The December 2025 filing registered the company to do business in Puerto Rico as part of its market expansion efforts. The Star Academy program operates in 18 states at more than 120 sites.

Local media and some committee members have pointed to a recent Wall Street Journal NOLA Education article on Star Academy and its success. We dispute portions of the article's characterization of Star Academy because they do not adequately distinguish among whether schools implemented the program, how participating students performed, and whether disagreements between government entities affected implementation.

In West Virginia, for example, NOLA designed and equipped classrooms and supplied the hardware, software, instructional materials and resources necessary to operate Star Academy. According to NOLA personnel who conducted follow-up visits, some schools did not implement the model as planned, and staff found program materials stored in a closet rather than being used for instruction. That distinction matters: The delivery of equipment does not establish that students received the intervention. Where the model was not implemented, disappointing school results cannot reliably establish that Star Academy's instructional approach failed.

In other jurisdictions, NOLA's concern involves how results were reported. Schoolwide or grade-level averages did not separately identify the performance of Star Academy participants. An overall decline can coexist with improvement among participating students. The aggregate figures may accurately describe the broader student population while failing to show what happened to students receiving the intervention. Using those figures alone to characterize Star Academy's effectiveness can therefore produce a misleading conclusion.

In another jurisdiction, disagreements between state leadership and local school districts complicated implementation. Those circumstances require examination of what was authorized, what schools actually delivered, and which students received the program before attributing the outcome to Star Academy itself.

We welcome rigorous scrutiny of its costs, implementation and results. That scrutiny should examine the students actually served, the instruction they received, their academic growth and an appropriate comparison group. Positive participant results deserve recognition, while implementation shortcomings and unfavorable findings deserve examination. Neither a program's reputation nor its effectiveness should be decided through incomplete implementation records or data that cannot isolate participating students' outcomes.

2. FEDERAL GUIDANCE ON THE USE OF TANF FUNDS

A March 4, 2026 review by the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services' Administration for Children and Families (ACF), addressed to ADSEF – and now part of the Senate's public file – found that some components of Star Academy make the entire program allowable. It requested clarification on others and set conditions, including a cost-allocation plan, a TANF plan amendment, and a purpose-by-purpose justification. ACF has stated that components of the intervention described in that inquiry are allowable TANF expenditures when properly structured and submitted. It never concluded that TANF dollars could not be used for this program.

3. PRICE AND SCOPE OF THE PROPOSAL

The \$37.5 million proposal covered three years at 25 schools, or \$1.5 million per site. It included classroom furniture and technology, curriculum and software licenses, consumable supplies, training for school personnel, and five Puerto Rico-based staff for oversight and support.

4. NOLA EDUCATION'S ROLE IN THE PROCUREMENT PROCESS

NOLA Education presented the Star Academy model to Puerto Rico officials, responded to the Department of the Family's December 30, 2025 invitation, and received the selection notification dated January 20, 2026. It did not design the solicitation, select or compensate the evaluator, score any submission, or take part in the selection decision. We do not have any relationship with LAP Consulting Group and had no knowledge of the identity or content of any other submission to the RFP. NOLA Education did not ask or press any government official to approve or sign a contract.

5. REPRESENTATION AND POLITICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

NOLA Education's only Puerto Rico counsel was attorney Salvatore Casale, retained for corporate registration purposes only. NOLA did not engage Politank, Linnette Martínez Ruiz, Advocacy Solutions LLC, or attorney Carlos M. Limardo Ortiz. Neither NOLA Education nor its officers have made political contributions to any Puerto Rico candidate or officeholder.

Star Academy Data Analysis Report
Vicksburg-Warren and George County School Districts, Mississippi
(28 June 2017)

Introduction/Background

This analysis provides results on 225 youth from George County (n = 186) and Vicksburg-Warren (n = 39) School Districts in Mississippi who completed the Star Academy Program (SAP) after they had met eligibility criteria indicating they were at-risk for early dropout (had been retained at least 1 year). The SAP has a strong track record of success and has served thousands of students in 35 districts across 9 states. The program serves students who have been selected for retention in 8th grade. The following year, students enter the program targeted at helping the students to overcome the effects of retention by accomplishing 2 years of credit in the single year. Cumulative results from past use of the program indicates that 75% of the students are promoted to 10th grade, about 20% are promoted to 9th grade and less than 5% are retained. The benefits to these students, their families, and society as a whole cannot be overstated.

As most educators are aware, retaining students is a practice linked to a stronger tendency to drop out of school before graduation. A report from the Alliance for Excellence in Education (AEE) cites that, in 2006, if there were a 5% increase in male high school graduation rates in Mississippi, the state would recognize an additional \$197,900,000 in economic benefits stemming from crime-related savings and annual additional earnings. Naturally, to increase the chance of graduating, reducing the harm from the damaging effects of retention must be addressed. In other words, students are significantly more likely to graduate from high school if they can do so in 4 years as opposed to the 5 or more years required when students have been retained.

Recent data from the U.S. Department of Education states that 77.6% of Mississippi students graduated from high school within four years, based on data for the 2013-2014 school year (Institute of Education Sciences (IES), 2015). The same report found that the national number, by comparison was 82.3% for the same school year and yet in some Mississippi districts, the rate has been as low as 45%. The Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) (2016) reported 2008-09 cohort graduation rates in individual districts ranged from 92.2% to 45.2% and dropout rates

ranged from 38.7% to $\leq 5\%$. From this same cohort, the two school districts that are in the current study had dropout rates of 10.2% (George County) and 23.7% (Vicksburg-Warren) (MDE). For the SAP to be deemed successful in these districts, a large percentage of the program's students would have to have met the goal of being promoted to the 10th grade in the year following the SAP.

Results

The results are provided in the form of answers to crucial questions about the program's success. As the results demonstrate the SAP was highly effective in helping the majority of students accelerate 2 grade levels in 1 academic year. These findings were true whether the students were male or female, black or white. Specific details are provided below.

Q1. How many Star Academy students in the George County and Vicksburg-Warren School Districts and what overall percentage of them accelerated 2 grade levels after participating in the program?

A1. In the George County School District, utilizing data from 186 students (26 cases had missing values), the percentage of students who accelerated 2 grade levels during the program was 79.6% (148 of 186 students). In the Vicksburg-Warren School District, utilizing data from 39 students (1 case had missing values), the percentage of students who accelerated 2 grade levels during the program was 89.8% (35 of 39 students). As found in other districts, the program is quite successful in helping students in the program accomplish this strong level of performance.

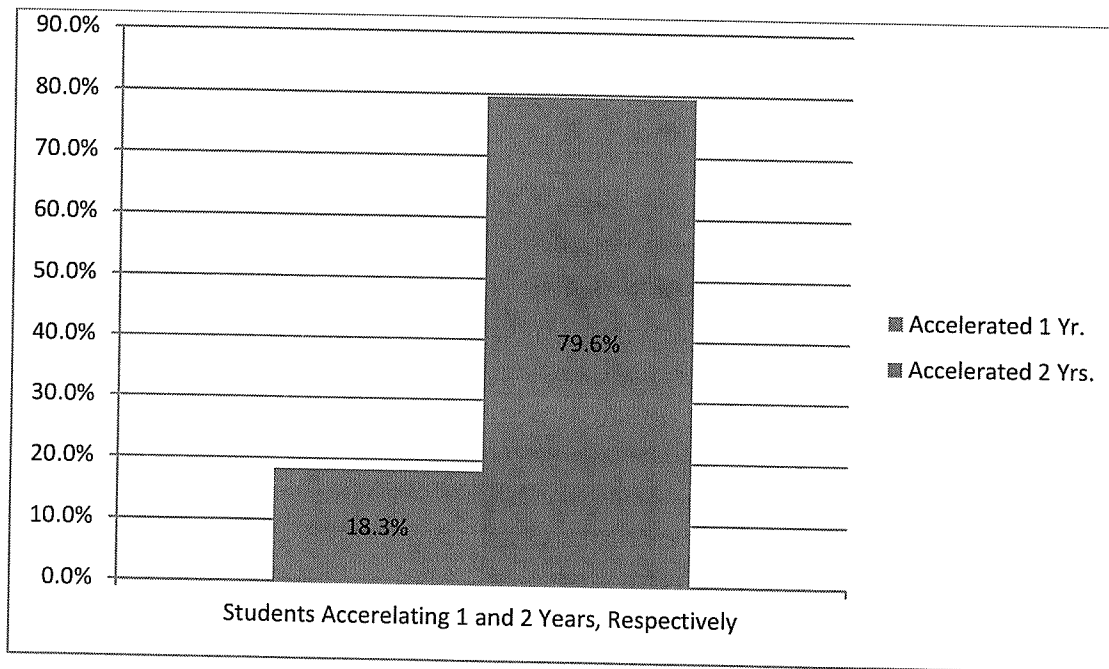
Q2. How many Star Academy students in George County and Vicksburg-Warren School Districts and what overall percentage of them accelerated 1 grade level after participating in the program?

A2. In the George County School District, the percentage of students who accelerated 1 grade level during the program was 18.3% (34 of 186 students). Less than 1 in 5 students accomplished this average level of academic acceleration. In the Vicksburg-Warren School District, the percentage of students who accelerated 1 grade level during the program was 5.1% (2 of 39 students).

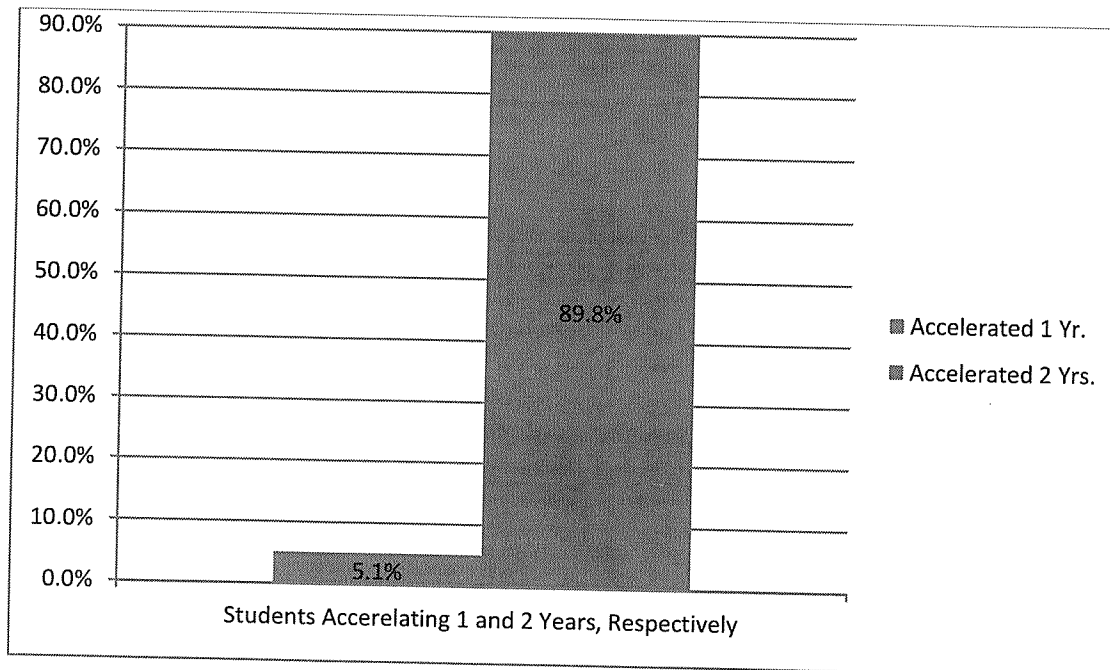
Note: In the George County School District, 2 students were accelerated 1.5 years.

Graphic representation of these results appears on the next page. In cases where the percentages do not equal 100, *single* cases of 3 years' acceleration or 0 years' acceleration (or both) have occurred.

Percentage of George County School District Students Accelerating 1 and 2 Grade Levels



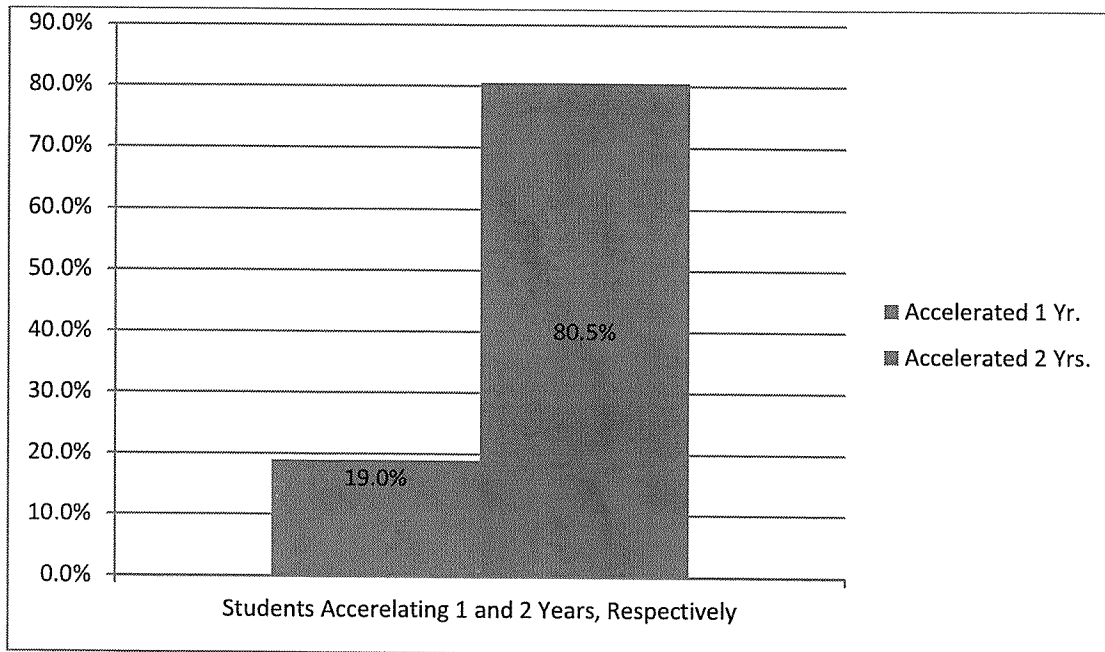
Percentage of Vicksburg-Warren School District Students Accelerating 1 and 2 Grade Levels



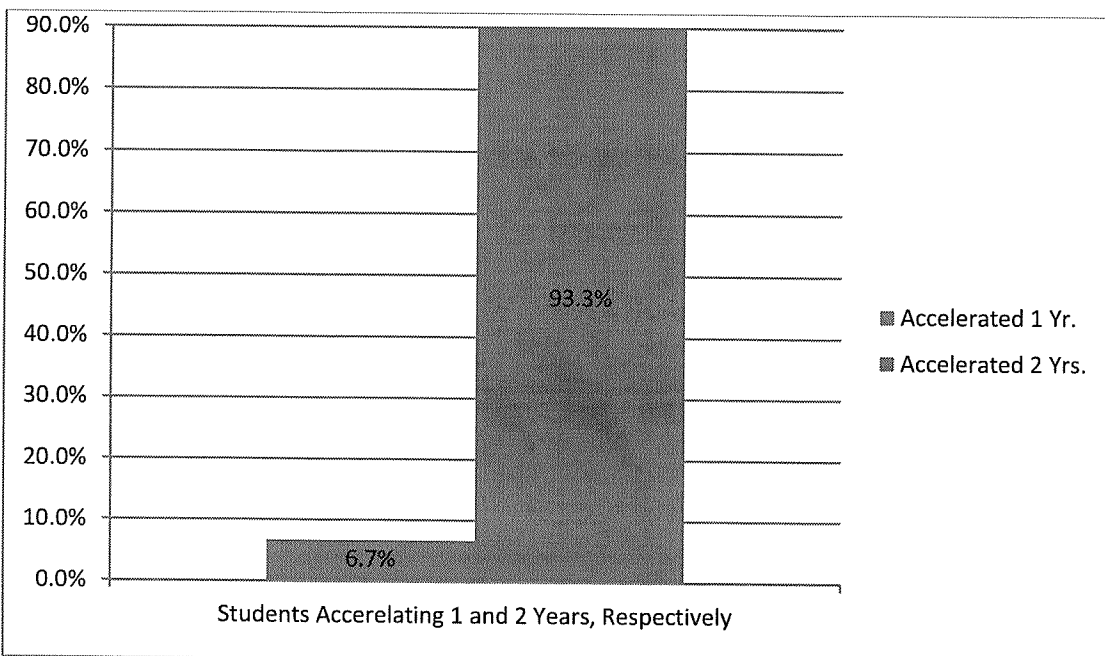
Q3. What was the grade acceleration like for students in different ethnic groups in the school districts of George County and Vicksburg-Warren?

The percentage of White and Black students accelerating 2 years and 1 year during the Star Academy Program year is displayed below.

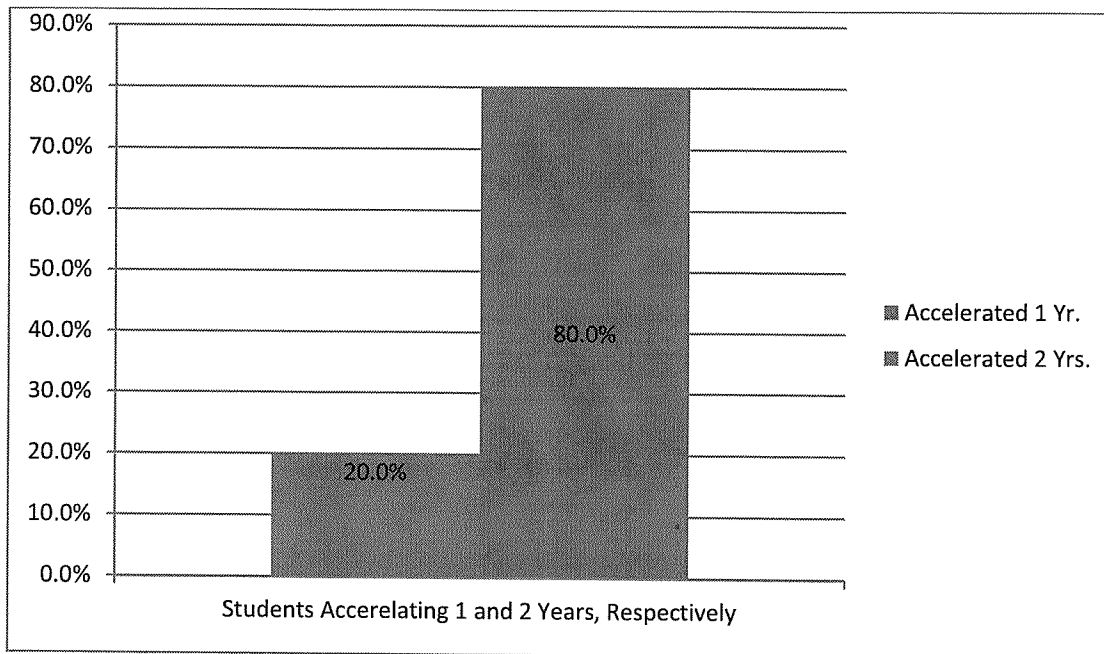
White Students in George County School District



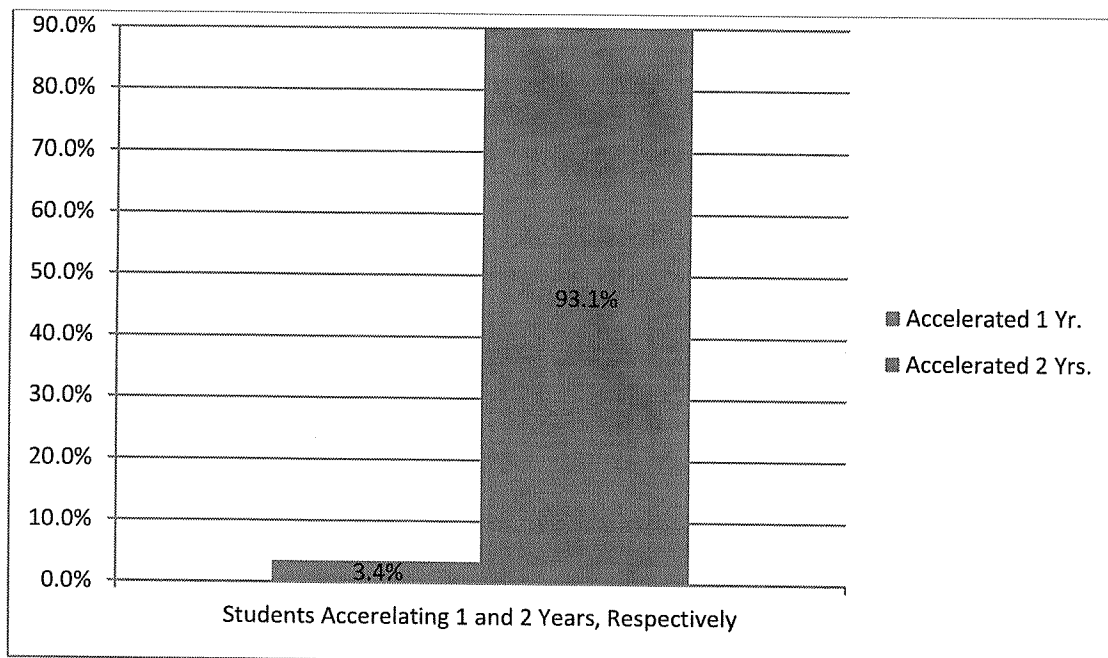
Black Students in George County School District



White Students in Vicksburg-Warren School District



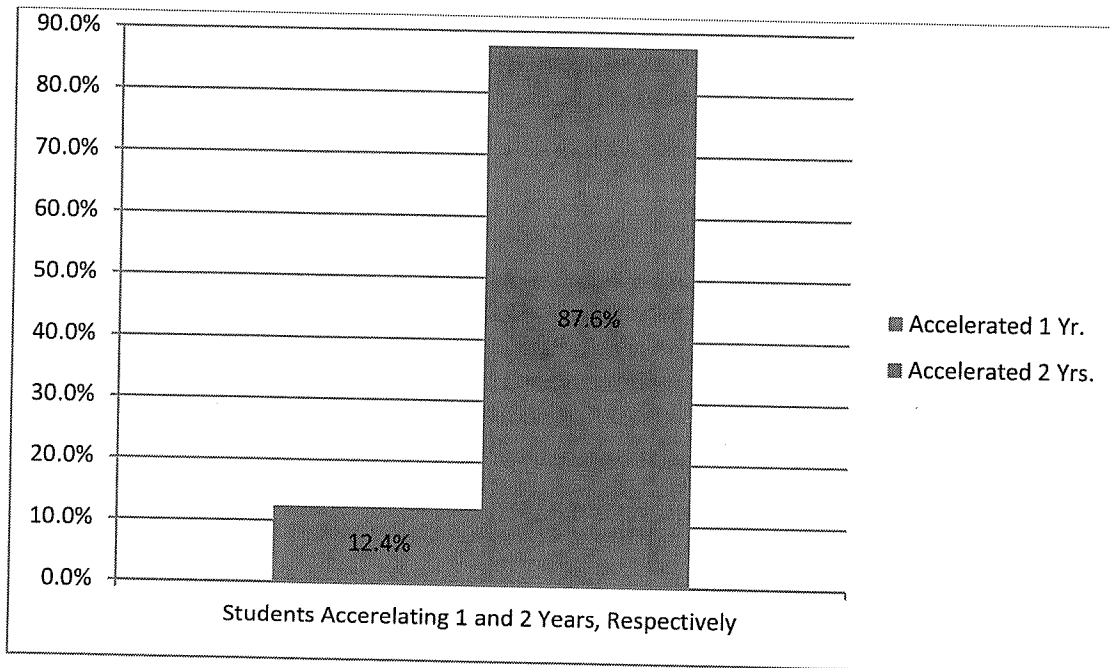
Black Students in Vicksburg-Warren School District



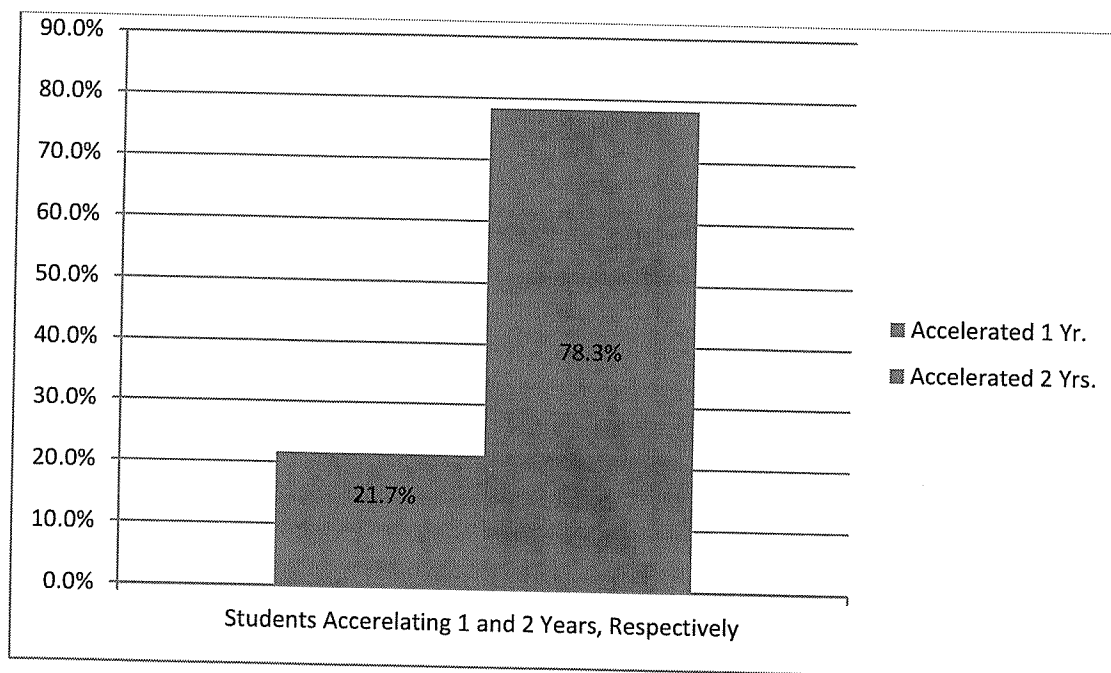
Q4. What was the grade acceleration like for male students versus female students in the George County and Vicksburg-Warren School Districts?

The percentage of Male and Female students accelerating 2 years and 1 year during the Star Academy Program year is displayed below.

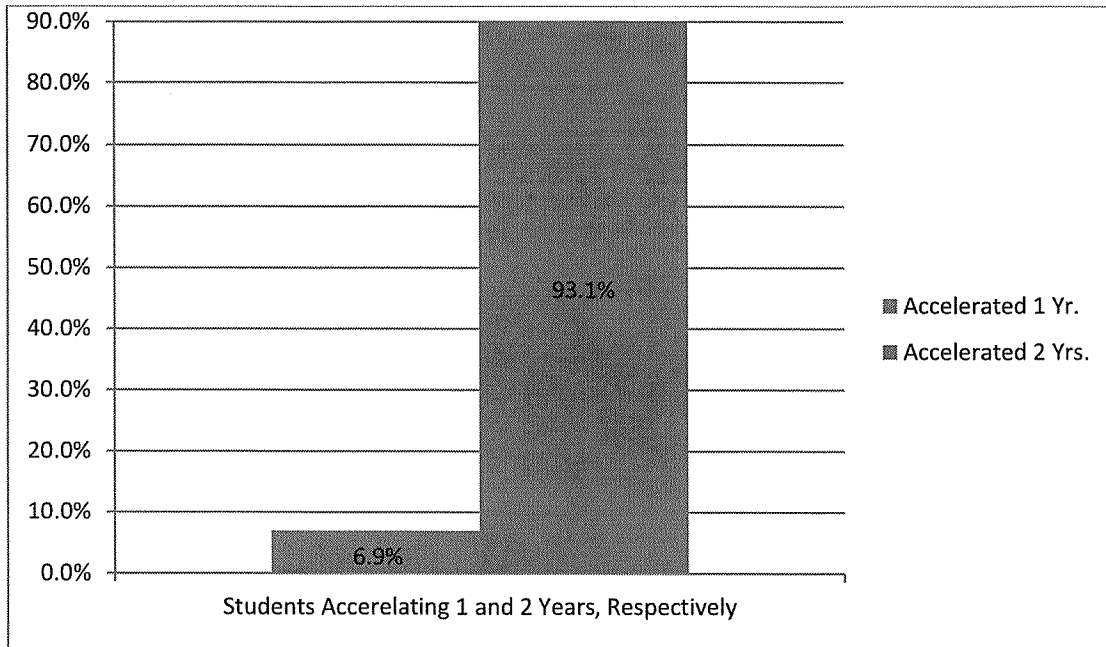
Female Students in George County School District



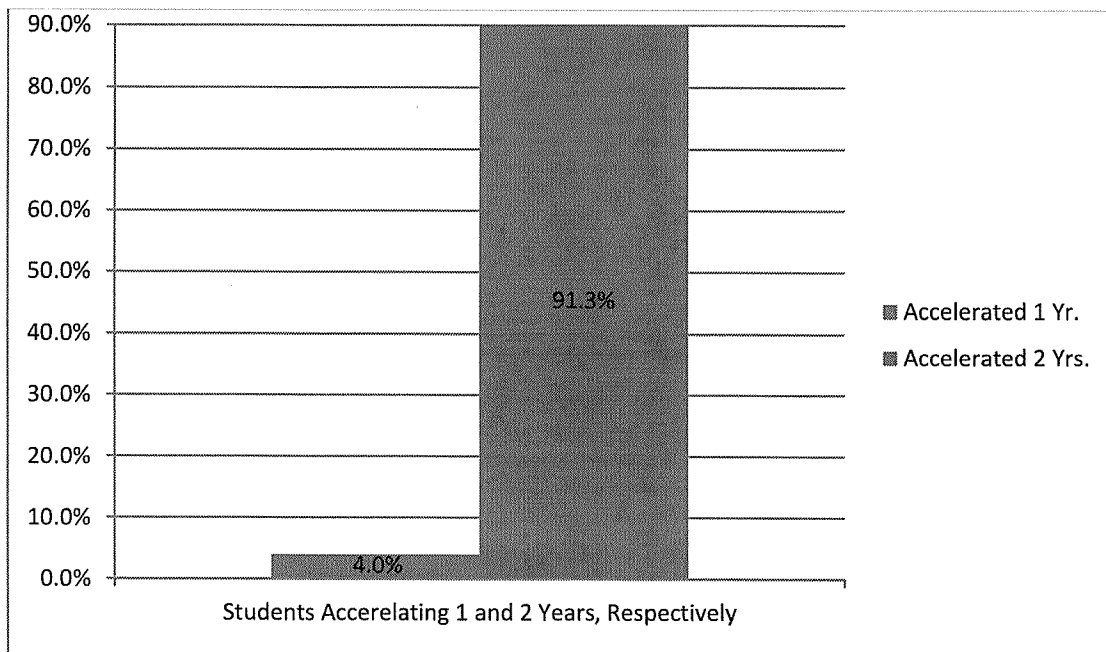
Male Students in George County School District



Female Students in Vicksburg-Warren School District



Male Students in Vicksburg-Warren School District



Q5. What number and percentage of the 2 districts' students in the Star Academy Program had passing grades in the various academic areas for the Fall, 2016 and Spring, 2017 semesters?

A5. George County Fall, 2016

English/Language Arts. A total of 97.3% of students received passing grades in ELA.

Math. A total of 97.8% of the students received passing grades for Math.

Science. A total of 98.9% of the students received passing grades for Science.

Social Studies. A total of 97.3% of the students received passing grades in Social Studies.

George County Spring, 2017

English/Language Arts. A total of 89.2% of students received passing grades in ELA.

Math. A total of 91.9% of the students received passing grades for Math.

Science. A total of 95.1% of the students received passing grades for Science.

Social Studies. A total of 92.4% of the students received passing grades in Social Studies.

Vicksburg-Warren County Fall, 2016

English/Language Arts. A total of 89.7% of students received passing grades in ELA.

Math. A total of 92.3% of the students received passing grades for Math.

Science. A total of 92.3% of the students received passing grades for Science.

Social Studies. A total of 97.4% of the students received passing grades in Social Studies.

Vicksburg-Warren County Spring, 2017

English/Language Arts. A total of 84.6% of students received passing grades in ELA.

Math. A total of 79.5% of the students received passing grades for Math.

Science. A total of 74.4% of the students received passing grades for Science.

Social Studies. A total of 100% of the students received passing grades in Social Studies.

Respectfully submitted,

Jamie G. Wood

Jamie G. Wood, Ed.D.
Research & Educational Psychologist

References

- Alliance for Excellent Education. (2006, November). Healthier and Wealthier: Decreasing Health Care Costs by Increasing Educational Attainment. Washington D.C. Retrieved from <http://all4ed.org/wp-content/uploads/HandW.pdf>
- Institute of Education Sciences. (2015). *Table 1. Public high school 4-year adjusted cohort graduation rate (ACGR), by race/ethnicity and selected demographics for the United States, the 50 states, and the District of Columbia: School year 2013–14*. Retrieved from National Center for Education Statistics:
http://nces.ed.gov/ccd/tables/ACGR_RE_and_characteristics_2013-14.asp
- Mississippi Department of Education. (2016). *Dropout/Graduation Rate Information*. Retrieved from Mississippi Department of Education:
<http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/ODPCSA/DGRI/2008-2009-dropout-graduation-rate-information>

PUERTO RICO DELEGATION VISIT TO LOUISIANA

DECEMBER 7-10, 2025

Hosted by NOLA Education/Star Academy

PURPOSE

To provide the Puerto Rico delegation – led by the Secretaries of the Department of the Family and Department of Education, as well as Governor’s office representatives – with a focused and immersive experience demonstrating Star Academy’s accelerated, mastery-based model and its impact on re-engaging over-age, academically behind students.

By observing active classrooms, meeting with school/program leaders and champions, and reviewing measurable data outcomes, the delegation will gain a clear understanding of how Star Academy integrates academic acceleration, student wraparound services, and community partnerships to drive improved attendance, completion rates, and long-term student success.

This visit will directly inform Puerto Rico’s evaluation of the 25-school pilot project implementation of the Star Academy model, offering insight into how the program will be adapted to the island’s educational, cultural, and workforce needs while supporting both student recovery and family-centered success.

DELEGATION

- Suzanne Roig Fuentes – Secretary, Puerto Rico Department of the Family
- Eliezer Ramos Parés – Secretary, Puerto Rico Department of Education
- Gabriela Boffelli – Executive Director, Puerto Rico Federal Affairs Administration
- Josman Betancourt González – Special Assistant to Governor Jenniffer Gonzalez-Colón
- Senior Advisors and Program Directors to Department of the Family and Department of Education

DATES

December 7-10, 2026

DESTINATION

New Orleans, Louisiana

ARRIVAL DATE

December 7, 2025

DEPARTURE DATE

December 10, 2025

ARRIVAL AIRPORT

Louis Armstrong New Orleans International Airport (MSY)

- Delegation arrives at MSY, private transportation provided to Hotel Theo

ACCOMODATIONS

Hotel Theo New Orleans, Tapestry Collection by Hilton

Location: 535 Gravier Street
New Orleans, LA 70130
Tel: (504) 527-0006

MONDAY, DECEMBER 8, 2025

Executive van transportation throughout the day

- | | |
|------------------------|--|
| 09:00A – 09:45A | Breakfast at the Star Academy Office |
| 10:00A – 12:00P | Live interactive session with students and teachers walking through Star Academy module |
| 12:00P – 02:00P | Lunch (Location: TBD) |
| 02:30P – 03:30P | Strategic conversation with Richard Hartley, former Education Policy Advisor to Gov. John Bel Edwards, on the evolution of Star Academy in Louisiana |
| 03:30P – 04:30P | Program design session with Education & Curriculum Team and Puerto Rico delegation |
| 06:30P | Dinner with Star Academy |
| Overnight: | Hotel Theo |

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 9, 2025

Executive van transportation throughout the day

- | | |
|------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 08:30A | Hotel pick-up |
| 10:00A – 11:30A | Visit to White Castle High School |
| 12:00P – 01:15P | Lunch |
| 01:30P – 03:00P | Visit to East Iberville High School |

03:00P Depart East Iberville (approx. 1.5-hour return to hotel)

6:30PM Dinner with Star Academy Team and Dr. Cade Brumley, Louisiana State Superintendent of Education

Overnight: Hotel Theo

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 10, 2025

TBDAM Hotel Departure to Airport

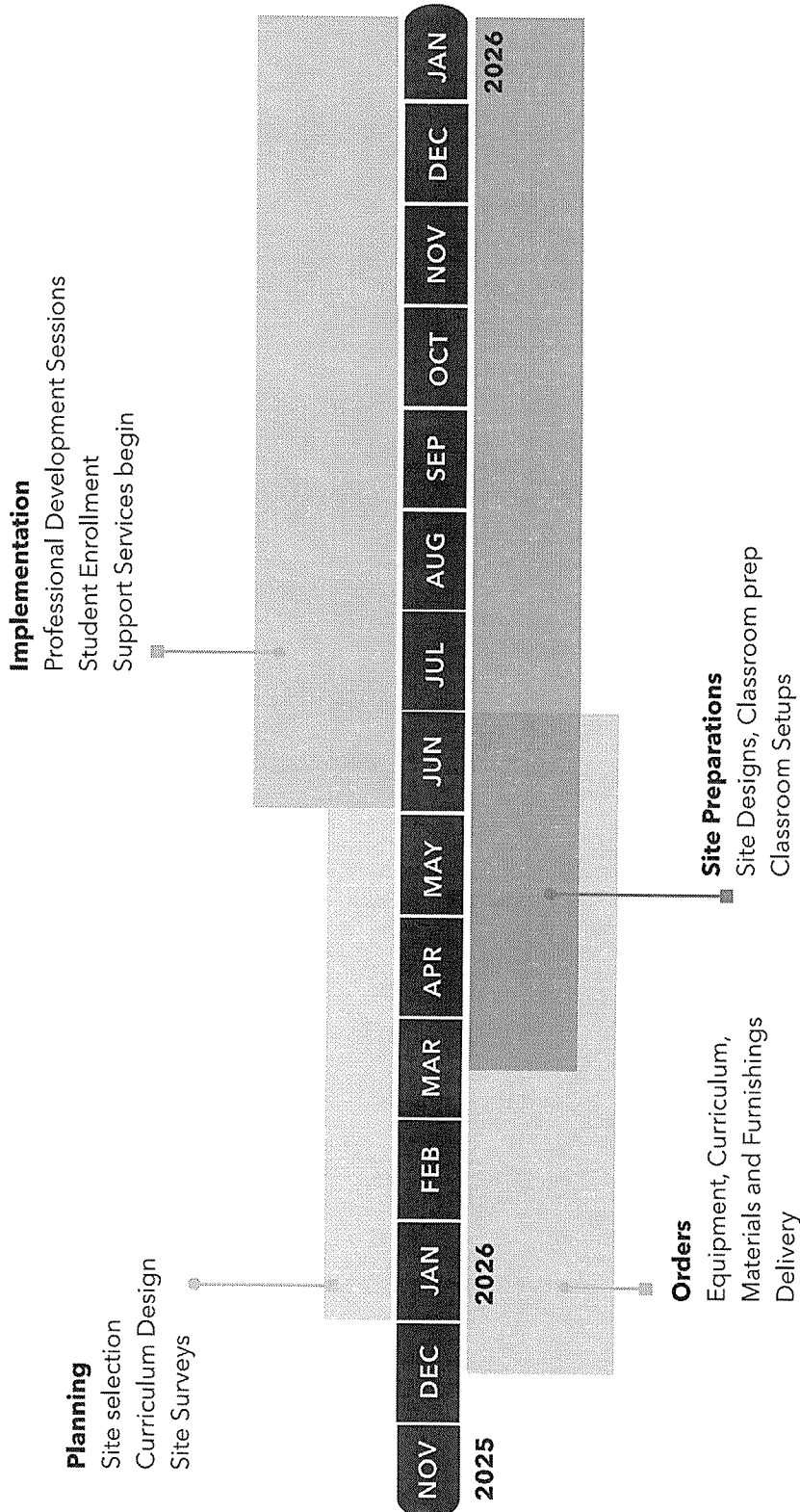
Location: Hotel Theo New Orleans, Tapestry Collection by Hilton
535 Gravier Street
New Orleans, LA 70130
Tel: (504) 527-0006
Transportation from Theo Hotel to Louis Armstrong New Orleans International Airport (MSY) provided by NOLA Education

LOGISTICS & SUPPORT

- Executive van transportation
- English/Spanish interpretation available
- Business casual for daytime sessions
- Business attire for dinners

STAR ACADEMY ESTIMATED PROJECT TIMELINE

Nov 2025



DRAFT

Exhibit A: Delegation Expense Receipts

NOLA Education, LLC. Response to R. del S. 107, Questions 7 and 8
Puerto Rico delegation visit to Louisiana, December 8-10, 2025

Exhibit	Date	Item	Amount	Page
A-1	Dec 8-10, 2025	Ground transportation, Pro Driving Services	\$5,407.50	2
A-2	Dec 8, 2025	Breakfast at NOLA's office, Legacy Kitchen	\$901.90	3
A-3	Dec 8, 2025	Lunch, Saint John (deposit receipt)	\$400.00	4
A-4	Dec 8, 2025	Drinks before dinner, Sip Wine Bar	\$33.72	5
A-5	Dec 8, 2025	Dinner, Arnaud's (card statement)	\$2,956.75	6
A-6	Dec 8-9, 2025	Refreshments, Mary Lee Donuts	\$32.74	7
A-7	Dec 8-9, 2025	Refreshments, RaceTrac (ice)	\$6.44	8
A-8	Dec 8-9, 2025	Refreshments, Rouses (fruit)	\$25.74	9
A-9	Dec 8-9, 2025	Refreshments, Walmart (juice)	\$13.01	10
A-10	Dec 8-9, 2025	Refreshments, Walmart (snacks)	\$108.58	11
A-11	Dec 9, 2025	Lunch, Dixie Café at Houmas House	\$305.00	12
A-12	Dec 9, 2025	Dinner, Restaurant R'evolution (Royal Sonesta deposit)	\$2,000.00	13
A-13	Dec 4-5, 2025	Gift bags, Aunt Sally's pralines	\$65.98	14
A-14	Dec 7, 2025	Thank-you cards, FedEx Office	\$32.91	15

Exhibit A-3 is the deposit toward a lunch total of \$1,170.00. Exhibit A-12 is the deposit for a dinner whose final cost was \$1,997.35 after a \$2.65 refund. The amounts listed are what each receipt shows.