

CHARTER LEADERS OF COLOR **MATTER.**

Terri Williams

Principal,
Robert Russa Moton Charter School



I was born and raised in New Orleans, LA, and was a teacher in New Orleans prior to Hurricane Katrina. After the hurricane, I evacuated to Texas, where I received my Masters in Education Administration from Lamar University and taught sixth grade English Language Arts (ELA) at Ortiz Middle School for six years.

While teaching in Texas, I kept a pulse on what was happening in the education space back in my hometown of New Orleans. With many New Orleans public schools failing, the state began turning these schools over to independent groups that created charter schools. For me, personally, I wanted to be a part of the rebuilding and rebranding of public schools in New Orleans. I wanted to help children in my hometown.

The national New Leaders for New Schools program had just come to New Orleans, and I applied and was accepted. The purpose of the program was to train principals across the United States to lead in urban settings. I worked at the Fannie C. Williams school, first as Principal Intern, then as Assistant Principal, and then as Chief Academic Officer. I joined Roberta Russa Moton Charter School in 2008, as Principal.

DATA DRIVES GAINS

Roberta Russa Moton was an F school when I took over. It is now a D school seeing continuous increases. We were one of three schools in New Orleans with the highest increases in both ELA and math from the 2017–2018 to the 2018–2019 school year, with a 7% gain in ELA and a 14% gain in math. Our enrollment also increased by 100 students this year.

At Roberta Russa Moton, we put the safety and social-emotional wellbeing of our students first. To this end, we use Positive Behavior Intervention System (PBIS) as a tool to use data to inform our work with students on a social-emotional level. PBIS rewards students for kind and respectful actions, encouraging deliberate kindness. A student can earn points for helping another student, for instance, but would lose points for ridiculing someone. Students and parents have 24/7 access to PBIS scores online, and every month, students with enough points get to participate in a reward activity, such as bowling or Game Day. Children without enough points attend a social-emotional learning block that is not punitive but asks them to be reflective. PBIS scores are increasing. In August 2019, 54% of students were eligible to participate in the reward activity. In December 2019, 80.5% of students were eligible.

Personalized learning is another important component of academic and social-emotional growth. Our educators, myself included, also serve as Data Mentors to students, sitting down with children individually and speaking with them about how they're performing. I've seen students rebound from challenging situations as a result of the connections that we make during these one-on-ones.

CONNECTION WITH STUDENTS AND FAMILIES

My voice as a charter school leader of color matters because I am a reflection of my students—both in their eyes and as a representative informing education policy makers on their behalf.

One unique perspective I have is that I've been a product of the public school system here in New Orleans, I've taught in the system prior to Hurricane Katrina, and I've continued to lead post-Hurricane-Katrina transformative work. I can relate to the successes, fears, aspirations of the children in the community that I serve—because I have lived it myself. For instance, approximately 60% of my students have been directly or indirectly impacted by violence. I empathize with them, but I don't allow them to turn this into an excuse. I know I need to be mindful that these are little people dealing with all these emotions, and I need to help them to cope with the stress and trauma they've experienced.

Because I come from New Orleans, I can also share with my students the best of the old New Orleans while bringing in new influences. For example, I can honor the culture of the New Orleans that my students' families experienced, honoring music and traditions, while making sure that my students have access to the latest developments in technology.

Robert Russa Moton Charter School

Location	New Orleans, LA
Year Opened	2008
Student enrollment	460
Grades served	PreK-8
Website	www.motoncharter.org

Student Demographics

Black/African-American	95%
Hispanic/Latino	5%



Homeless Youth	1%
At Risk Students	50%
Students with Disabilities	8%
ESL Students	5%



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