

Louisiana Students: College and Career Ready

Introduction and Context

To provide all Louisiana's children the opportunity to be successful in the global marketplace, Louisiana's education system must embrace change. Nearly all of today's jobs require higher level skills, creating a large skills gap. Closing this gap will require a commitment to a new approach to educating Louisiana students.

The four year cohort graduation rate in Louisiana – the percent of children entering the 9th grade that graduate four years later – hovers about 67% with “one-third” of students not graduating with their class. Of the 67% of students who graduate on time, approximately half of these students enter post secondary education. Of those that enter college, about one in three finish post-secondary education with a degree.

This growing skills gap will ultimately lead to an “opportunity crisis” for the next generation of high school students and will cripple the future economy of Louisiana.

If too many of Louisiana's adults lack education and in-demand skills, jobs will migrate elsewhere, making it even harder to find work that pays a living wage. Companies can now search the globe for the skills they need. Where they find them, good jobs and economic opportunities will follow. This is the major long-term vision of reform voiced by Governor Jindal – to create new jobs and prepare the people of Louisiana to fill those jobs.

In 2009 the Louisiana Legislature passed the Louisiana College and Career Readiness Act (Act 257). This legislation requires the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, in collaboration with post-secondary management boards, “to establish state strategic initiatives to improve high school graduation rates and ensure student readiness for post-secondary education and career opportunities... enacting strategies that seamlessly connect PreK-12 education with post-secondary education and career opportunities.” As a result of the legislation, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) and the Louisiana Department of Education have begun to implement extensive policies and supports focusing on increasing the graduation rate, stemming dropouts, improving transition from middle to high school, and increasing rigor, relevance, and college and career readiness in schools.

Louisiana's commitment is education transformation – to transform its education system to fit with the current times while preparing for a rapidly evolving future. This means that the definition of college ready and career ready are the same and the stakes for a student's future are even higher. Louisiana's future students are even more dependent on an education that prepares them for success in the global marketplace.

College and Career Ready Policy Institute

The state of Louisiana was one of eight states chosen by the National Governor's Association and the national non-profit organization Achieve, Inc., to participate in the College and Career Ready Policy Institute. The result has been the development of a state policy plan with a focus on:

- Clear State goals for high school transformation.
- Assessment and accountability systems aligned with the goals.
- Support systems and interventions to assist schools in meeting these goals.

Louisiana's participation in the College and Career Readiness Policy Institute has resulted in the formulation of the state's definitions of college and career readiness for the 21st Century:

- **College Ready:** A high school graduate has the reading, writing and math knowledge and 21st Century skills to qualify and succeed in the entry level, credit bearing, college-degree (one, two or four years) courses without the need for remedial classes.
- **Career Ready:** A high school graduate can read, comprehend, interpret and analyze complex technical materials, use mathematics to solve problems in the 21st Century workplace, and can pass a state/national approved industry based certification or licensure exam in their field.

This work of developing policies and support systems to help Louisiana students become college and career ready is now a major focus of the High School Redesign Commission.

High School Transformation – Clear Goals

The following goals have been set by the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) and serve as the long-term vision of high school transformation. These goals provide the foundation for a collective road map for action and a broader approach to accountability.

Louisiana's goals for the College and Career Ready initiative are:

1. Reduce dropouts and increase high school graduation rate.

- Metric: Increase 4 year cohort graduation rate to 80% by 2013-2014 school years.

2. Increase student readiness for post-secondary education.

- Metric: Percent of students graduating from LA Core 4.
- Metric: Percent of graduating class with ACT score of 18 or higher in English and 19 or higher in Math.

3. Increase career readiness of students.

- Metric: Number of Louisiana Career Readiness Certificates awarded.
- Metric: Number of Industry Based Certifications earned by high school students in high-skill, high-wage and high-demand occupations as approved by the Louisiana Workforce Investment Council and BESE.

4. Increase participation in post-secondary education.

- Metric: Percent of public school 11th graders enrolling in a Louisiana post-secondary institution within 4 years.
- Metric: Number of high school graduates enrolling in a technical college or 2 year LA public postsecondary institution within 2 years of graduation.
- Metric: Increase the number of public postsecondary Degrees and Certificates awarded (1 Year Certificate, Associates, Bachelors or higher).
- Metric: Number of credit hours enrolled in public postsecondary institutions by LA public high school students.

High School Transformation: Accountability

In 1995, a report issued by *Education Week* ranked Louisiana among the bottom half of the states for its academic standards and accountability and its efforts to improve teacher quality. *Education Week* summarized that

“public education has never been a priority in Louisiana, and educators will have to struggle to change that.”

The tenth anniversary of that same report in 2005 gave Louisiana straight A's in both categories. *Education Week* ranked Louisiana higher than any other state in the nation in educational standards and accountability and efforts to improve teacher quality.

High school transformation based on college and career readiness for students forces Louisiana to create accountability measures beyond assessment alone. The State has responded with the development of the Louisiana Graduation Index – a point system that makes up 30% of a high school's accountability score. The graduation index awards points to each high school based on student result as follows:

Student Result	Points Awarded
Academic endorsement (successful completion of college ready course of study) or Career/Tech Endorsement	180
Tuition Opportunity Program for Students (TOPS)	160
State Approved Industry based Certification or TOPS Tech and Dual Enrollment or TOPS Tech and Articulated Credit	140
Regular High School Diploma	120
GED	90
Skills Certificate/Certificate of Achievement	60
Attendee	30
Dropout	0

High School Transformation: Assessment

Louisiana's current statewide assessments do not sufficiently measure college and career readiness and do little to provide feedback to schools and teachers to help guide improved instruction. Louisiana's participation in the College and Career Ready Policy Institute allowed the state to examine its high school assessment system against four core principles. These core principles were:

1. **“Proficient” should mean prepared.** Louisiana will develop a college and career ready anchor assessment.
2. **Tests should matter beyond K-12.** Student results should open doors in higher education and employment.
3. **Concentration on better assessment – not just more assessment.** Measurement of the full range of college and career readiness skills needed for postsecondary education and careers should guide curriculum and instruction.
4. **Streamline testing time and costs.** The assessment system should be re-examined in a comprehensive way.

For incoming 9th graders in 2010-2011, Louisiana has discontinued the use of the Graduation Exit Exam (GEE) as the high school anchor assessment. To earn a diploma, students will need to pass three End-of-Course (EOC) Tests in core high school subjects. These tests are better indicators of proficiency for postsecondary institutions or employers and are tied to a rigorous curriculum in core subjects in the following areas: (a) English II or English III; (b) Algebra I or Geometry; and (c) Biology or American History.

Louisiana has begun administering EOC tests and will phase in all of the above EOC tests by the 2012-2013 school year. The State has proposed that GEE retests for all four subjects should be provided by the State through 2013-14 and should become a district responsibility in 2014-15.

High School Transformation: Support and Interventions

Through the College and Career Ready Policy Institute, the High School Redesign Commission, and the Louisiana Department of Education's major reorganization during summer 2010, various supports and interventions have been developed to drive high school transformation. These key initiatives include:

1. Development of an articulation strategy with post-secondary education and workforce development leaders in areas of key goals and key messages, anchor assessments, dual enrollment, and Career and Technical Education (CTE).

2. The Delivery for Outcomes program, in which the LDE provides technical assistance on dropout prevention and recovery supports directly to schools identified as high priority throughout the state.
3. Expansion of the Dropout Early Warning System (DEWS).
4. Development of “Ensuring Literacy for All” for middle and high schools.
5. Promising dropout prevention and post-secondary preparation programs such as Everybody Graduates!, Career and Technical Education, the Connections Process, High Schools that Work/Making Middle Grades Work, Jobs for America's Graduates, Education Mission to Prepare Louisiana's Youth (EMPLoY), and New Tech High Schools.
6. Development of End of Course (EOC) testing intervention and remediation process as well as evaluation of current and potential future uses of ACT, COMPASS, and WorkKeys assessments.
7. Expansion of the extensive, user-friendly Louisiana Education Data Repository System (LEDRS).

College and Career Ready: Look at the Future

As Louisiana seeks to prepare its students to be college and career ready, key questions that remain are:

- What further changes to the State's accountability system are needed to ensure Louisiana's students are prepared for success in life?
- What assessments should be used to ensure Louisiana's graduates are college and career ready?
- What data support systems will be needed to meet the State's goals?
- What supports and interventions will best impact the State's College and Career Readiness goals to ensure that all students regardless of race or class will graduate on time, enroll in post-secondary education or graduate work-force ready, and successfully complete at least one year of post-secondary education?