

**Early
Childhood
Education:**
Critical Needs
for Critical Years



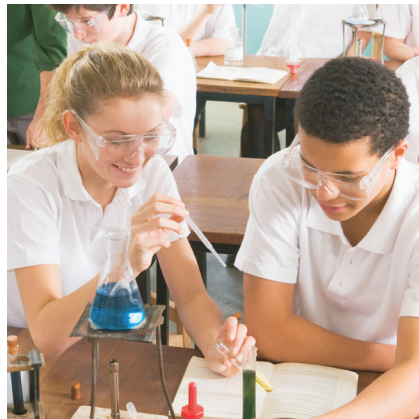
**Ensuring
Literacy:**
Reducing
Student
Retention



**Teacher
Quality:**
Key to Student
Success



**Increasing
Graduation
Rates:**
Learning to
Finish



**Louisiana
Students:**
College and
Career Ready

2011 Key Education Issues: Changing Louisiana's Future



2011 Key Education Issues: Changing Louisiana's Future

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2011 Key Education Issues: Changing Louisiana's Future

Forward

Louisiana is projecting tremendous budget challenges in the coming years. For the second consecutive year, our state is facing over a billion dollar budget deficit that threatens the delivery and maintenance of services in healthcare, PreK-12 and postsecondary education, and other government functions. While state government leaders work to streamline and right size government during difficult times, local governments, school districts, and private business across the state have the added challenges of regional and national economic pressures. In spite of these challenges, Louisiana's leaders continue to work toward building a better place to live and work for its citizens.

Strengthening public education is a foundation for our future economy and quality of life. The economic and social challenges require that we do more than maintain the status quo. We will continue to build on the progress of the past decade while advancing the next horizon—PreK-12 policies and programs that will raise student achievement, eliminate the achievement gap, and enable all children to be effective citizens in the global marketplace.

This is our second report on the five key education issues that will shape the future of Louisiana. This year's update includes a new section on Teacher Quality. This reflects national education research and Governor Jindal's reform focus on improving quality teacher education and effectiveness in Louisiana.

The 2011 issues are as follows:

- Early Childhood Education: Critical Needs for Critical Years
- Ensuring Literacy: Reducing Student Retention
- Teacher Quality: Key to Student Success
- Increasing Graduation Rates: Learning to Finish
- Louisiana Students: College and Career Ready

For each issue, the report provides an overview, current research findings and trends, and an analysis of key policy proposals. Each section ends with a set of questions that can guide our state's efforts toward achieving meaningful school improvement.

Education's Next Horizon believes that PreK-12 public education improvement must remain at the top of Louisiana's public policy agenda.



Steven Scheurich
Chairman and Board President
Education's Next Horizon



Phillip A. Rozeman, M.D.
Founder
Education's Next Horizon

Early Childhood Education: Critical Needs for Critical Years

Introduction and Context

Louisiana's LA 4 Pre-Kindergarten program began in eleven pilot parishes with the passage of Senate Bill 776 during the 2001 Legislative session. LA 4 is available in participating school districts to all children – at no cost to children eligible for free or reduced lunch services (FRL) and through tuition or local funding for families above this income level. Currently, LA 4 serves approximately 18,000 of the 40,000 “at-risk” children in Louisiana.

The Louisiana LA 4 Pre-Kindergarten initiative has consistently demonstrated high-quality results each year of the existence of the program. High-quality standards such as certified teachers and paraprofessionals, small classroom size, full-day program, research-based curriculum, and high-quality evaluation have resulted in children being more prepared for elementary school.

For accountability purposes, students in this program are administered the Developing Skills Checklist (DSC) – a test given at the beginning and end of the school year to measure progress in language, print and math. The scores of students participating in LA 4 improve from around the 10th national percentile in the pre-test to 50th percentile in the post-test in language and to nearly the 60th percentile in print. In mathematics, students improve from near the 5th percentile nationally to above the 50th percentile after participating in LA 4. This progress in LA 4 exceeds nearly all states.

Research shows that children enrolled in Louisiana's LA 4 program experience continual academic success as they progress through later grades. Kindergarten retention and special education participation rates are lower in the LA 4 group. At this point, there is data on the first three groups of LA 4 students. Follow-up of these first three groups of students on the 4th grade LEAP test shows significant improvement in performance over students who did not participate. This is true despite a higher poverty level in children participating in the early childhood program.

In addition to LA 4, the federally funded Head Start program provides comprehensive early childhood education to over 20,000 “at-risk” three and four year old children in Louisiana. This program combines Pre-K education with a comprehensive health and family education component.

The positive study results of Louisiana's LA 4 and high quality programs in other states prove that high quality Pre-K helps all children prepare for school – especially children at-risk because of poverty. This has led to much discussion about expanding opportunities to more children – including dialogue about increased funding and the development of diverse delivery systems.

School Readiness: What's the Definition?

The Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) monograph, "Ready to Start: Enduring High-Quality Pre-kindergarteners in SREB States," notes:

"Having a clear definition of (school) readiness, establishing and using school readiness assessments, and then addressing the needs of children who do not meet school readiness indicators are fundamental to educational programs in pre-kindergarten."

"School readiness" describes the capabilities of children, their families, schools, and communities to prepare students for success in kindergarten and beyond. Each component—children, families, schools, and communities—plays an essential role in the development of school readiness.

The Education's Next Horizon Stakeholder Council taskforce on early childhood education recognizes the need to define "school readiness" as a foundation for common understanding with and for early childhood education providers. This definition is the first step in the future development of benchmarks and expectations as well as the creation of a scorecard based on these expectations. These expectations are:

- **Ready Children** prepared socially, personally, physically, and intellectually within the developmental domains in literacy, mathematics, science, history and social science, physical and motor development, and personal and social development.
- **Ready Families** with adults who understand that they are the most important people in the child's life and take responsibility for the child's school readiness through direct, frequent, and positive involvement and interest in the child. Adults recognize their role as the child's first and most important teacher.
- **Ready Schools** that accept all children and provide a seamless transition to a high-quality learning environment by engaging the whole community. A ready school welcomes all children with opportunities to enhance and build confidence in their skills, knowledge, and abilities.
- **Ready Communities** that play a crucial part in supporting families in their role as primary stewards

of children's readiness. Ready communities – including businesses, faith-based organizations, early childhood service providers, community groups, and local governments – work together to support children's school and long term success by providing families affordable access to information, services, high-quality child care, and early learning opportunities.

Education's Next Horizon partnered with the Picard Center for Child Development in conducting a statewide survey on the school-readiness definition. Survey results were sent to the State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education. The State Department of Education is currently engaged in the development of a comprehensive literacy plan for Birth to 5-year-olds based on kindergarten readiness. The Board of Elementary and Secondary Education adopted a definition for kindergarten readiness in January 2011.

Creation of Diverse Delivery System

A diverse delivery system in early childhood education is a system of school based and other Pre-K programs (Head Start, child care, and faith-based centers) working together to provide high quality pre-kindergarten services to all three and four year old children in a community. These systems create opportunity by increasing access and providing high quality choices for families.

LA 4 is a high quality Pre-K program, but it is offered almost exclusively in public school sites. By contrast, many states are building and expanding their Pre-K programs through a "mixed delivery model," offering publicly funded Pre-K in private child care or Head Start settings. Across the nation, over 30% of all publicly funded Pre-K children are in private child care settings. This mixed delivery concept for providing Pre-K is getting greater attention in Louisiana because of the following potential advantages:

- Provides families a choice of quality programs in a variety of locations and settings.
- Builds on strengths of different components – the academic strength of LA 4 and the health and family education component of Head Start.
- Brings disparate programs together into a more comprehensive system of early education.

- Increases capacity by opening more classrooms to serve more children.
- Saves taxpayers' dollars by using existing facilities thereby reducing start-up expenses.

A Louisiana Birth-to-Five model that has gained national recognition is the Mahalia Jackson Early Childhood and Family Learning Center in New Orleans. The Mahalia Jackson Center provides top level birth-to-five early education, complemented by many services for children and their families, all under one roof. Services include adult education, job training and placement, teen parenting, prenatal care, medical, nutrition, fitness and other health services, social services including WIC and nutrition assistance, and a public library branch.

The concept of promoting diverse delivery systems is also contained within Senate Bill 286. This provides for school district commitment to partnering with community providers with 10% of any additional state revenues provided for LA 4. This collaboration will only be applicable to partnerships with private child care providers or Head Start Centers with a four star rating working toward a five star rating in the Quality Start Child Care Rating System (as outlined by the Department of Children and Family Services (see www.qrs.louisiana.com)). The number of stars required for the collaboration with school districts is outlined in the "LA 4 Guidelines and Implementation Handbook" available at <http://www.louisianaschools.net/lde/saa/1874.html>.

Research Findings and Policy Implications

- 1) **Research Findings:** Four-year-old at-risk children who participate in the LA 4 pre-kindergarten program continue to show significant gains in the academic areas of Language, Print, and Math year after year.

Policy Implications: Louisiana should continue to deliver high-quality pre-kindergarten and school readiness initiatives for all at-risk four-year-olds – including the implementation of the LA 4 high-quality components across all funding types including LA 4, Title I, 8(g), Locally Funded, the Non-public Schools Early Childhood Development Program, Head Start, Even Start, the Educational Excellence Fund, and the Rural Educational Achievement Program. It can be expected that at-risk

students who are exposed to the high-quality LA 4 program will score higher in English/Language Arts (ELA), Math, Science, and Social Studies on iLEAP and LEAP achievement tests.

- 2) **Research Findings:** The LA 4 program significantly reduces the number of students placed in special education and reduces grade retention.

Policy Implications: This gives Louisiana an opportunity to reduce placements in special education and reduce grade retention by increasing the participation of students in LA 4 type programs. The reduction in special education placement and grade retention will free-up dollars within the Minimum Fund Program (MFP) to implement an aggressive intervention program for those students performing poorly at midyear. This could include spending on reading coaches and interventionists to support the Ensuring Literacy for All Initiative.

Future Implications

As evidenced by this report, the seven years of longitudinal data concerning the LA 4 program continue to support the importance of this program's positive impact on Louisiana's youngest students. These results, supported by research on brain development, epitomize Louisiana's dedication to ensuring its children are school ready. An effort to maintain and increase investment in early childhood education will continue to yield lasting benefits for Louisiana's citizens and remains a priority of policymakers and community leaders in the state.

As Louisiana continues to expand the effort to provide quality early childhood education, key questions that guide this effort are:

- Does Louisiana have the political will to support the continued expansion of the LA 4 initiative to more students?
- Can we agree on a common definition of school readiness to guide the development of early childhood education efforts for all providers?
- Is diverse delivery a viable option to expand quality early childhood education efforts in Louisiana?
- What Birth-to-Five initiatives deserve investment by Louisiana to create a level playing field for children born into poverty?

Ensuring Literacy: Reducing Student Retention

Introduction and Context

Reading is the fundamental skill on which all learning depends. Any child who doesn't learn to read well will not easily master other skills and is unlikely to flourish in school or in life.

Reading is a difficult skill to master and many children have difficulty learning. The reading problem is even more widespread among children from a high poverty environment. From the school perspective, low reading achievement is the greatest contributing factor to chronically low performing schools. In Louisiana, less than half of low-income 4th graders read at or above the basic level compared to nearly three quarters of their middle-class peers.

The development of reading skills is necessary for success in school or career. This is why Louisiana's accountability and standards system has "beamed the light" on literacy in public schools. This focus is intentional and intense: literacy provides every child the opportunity to build the skills to graduate from high school and prepare for post-secondary education and employment.

The good news is that a large body of research exists on reading and there is a consensus among educators and researchers on what we must do to help students succeed. This is captured in the "Report of the National Reading Panel" and has been combined with a study of best practices used by the Alabama Reading Initiative to develop the "Louisiana's Literacy Plan: Ensuring Literacy for All." (www.doe.state.la.us/LDE/uploads/11190.doc)

The Louisiana Department of Education is committed to improving reading instruction in all classrooms with an eye toward universal literacy among Louisiana's public school students. Currently, 175 schools (160 elementary schools with 15 middle and high schools) participate in this intense focus on "Ensuring Literacy for All."

Of course, the success of literacy instruction in Louisiana will not happen in isolation – it is dependent on the preparation and motivation of high quality teachers. Louisiana universities work to improve the undergraduate instruction of future teachers in the area of literacy instruction. School districts focus on professional development for existing principals, teachers, literacy coaches and reading interventionists. School leadership organizes instructional improvement around the belief that reading is fundamental.

Fine by Nine: Early Elementary Literacy

A large body of research supports the fact that children without foundational reading abilities by nine years of age are very likely to struggle with reading throughout their school careers. When every child learns to read on grade level by the end of the third grade, Louisiana will begin to see huge improvement in test scores across the state. As it stands, analysis of NAEP 2009 results indicate that Louisiana's 4th grade students rank 50th in the nation in reading.

This large literacy gap is the reason for State Superintendent Paul Pastorek's declaration that the three areas of educational focus in Louisiana are literacy, literacy, and literacy. The major focus of Ensuring Literacy for All is in the early grades PreK-4. Louisiana's plan dedicates at least 90-120 minute blocks of time for every student in grades K-3 for reading instruction. These students spend their day – indeed their year – engaged in reading and writing.

Every day, teachers in “Ensuring Literacy for All” schools develop and deliver instruction in key areas including phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency and comprehension. They individualize instruction to meet the needs of every child and create classroom environments that are rich with language and print. Key to the initiative is a quality teacher in every class who provides books and time for students to read.

Middle and High School: Preparing All Students for Success in their Future

In NAEP 2009 national testing of 8th graders, Louisiana’s students ranked 49th out of 50 states and the District of Columbia in reading. This is extremely worrisome for Louisiana since poor academic achievement is consistently linked with truancy, high suspension rates, and increased entrance into the juvenile justice system.

Low reading achievement is directly correlated with dropping out of school. Students who find themselves behind in reading – if not corrected by the school – will be unable to keep up in any course. The result is students counting the days to their 17th birthday – the day they can drop out of school in Louisiana.

Whether students are struggling learners or high achievers, “Ensuring Literacy for All” will provide continual development of literacy skills in the middle and high school grades so that all students are better prepared to face a world more dependent on educational attainment than ever before.

Ensuring Literacy for All: Model

“Ensuring Literacy for All” uses a Three-Tier Model to reach all learners and to give additional accelerated instruction to struggling readers.

In Tier 1, all students receive daily focused instruction on grade level reading/language arts curriculum. Teachers in all disciplines teach reading skills within the context of core academic subjects.

In Tier 2, students who struggle to meet grade level expectations receive additional targeted instruction in small groups of five or fewer. Student progress is

monitored every two weeks and lessons are adjusted based on data.

In Tier 3, severely struggling students receive additional intensive instruction by a specialized reading professional.

Ensuring Literacy for All: University Preparation and Worksite Development of Teachers

Teachers can’t teach what they haven’t been taught; yet, too few teachers have been provided the necessary skills in research-based reading instruction during their pre-service or in-service professional development.

“Ensuring Literacy for All” is a comprehensive strategy to bring the best research and teaching practices in reading instruction to the classrooms of Louisiana. At the school level, the “spread” of the program is based on expert coaching and partnerships. Literacy coaches work with novice teachers in their classroom modeling “best practices” with real students.

School /university partnerships exist in some locations, but they are needed in each school. These partnerships provide a mutual benefit – the Education College provides guidance to PreK-12 schools and those schools in turn show university faculty the latest methods of literacy instruction.

Retention in the Early Grades

The result of student reading difficulties is often student retention. Louisiana retains more students in kindergarten through fourth grade than the national average for grade retention in K-8th. In Louisiana, 33% of students fail to make it to the 4th grade on age-grade level despite overwhelming research and practical evidence that retention does not benefit children in the long run. In fact, student retention leads to higher dropout rates.

In Louisiana, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) mandates 4th & 8th grade high stakes testing (LEAP) with retention. However, each district’s local Pupil Progression Plan determines retention in the non-high stakes grades.

Three meta-analyses of the research on retention over the past 75 years with a total of 700 individual analyses of retention data indicated that retention is not the solution. Each study compared retained students with low-performing peers who were advanced to the next grade level. The research failed to support the use of grade retention as an early intervention to support academic achievement (Jimerson, 2003).

Impacts of student retention are as follows:

- There is a decrease in academic achievement.
- There is no increase in social-emotional adjustment associated with retention.
- Low performing but promoted elementary students performed no differently than their higher performing peers in terms of educational attainment or employment outcomes at age 20.
- Students retained in elementary school were less likely at age 20 to be employed or in post-secondary education, and those who were employed earned less and received lower employment competence ratings.

National studies have consistently identified grade retention as a leading indicator of high school dropout rates. Grade retention increases a student's risk of dropping out between 20% and 50%. Retained students are between 2 and 11 times more likely to drop out. The academic impact and outcomes of students retained in Louisiana mirror this national research on the correlation of student retention and graduation rates.

Academic Impact of Retention

A Louisiana student who enters high school (HS)...	... graduates from HS in Louisiana
14 years old (on age-grade level)	81.2% of the time
15 years old (retained once)	47.8% of the time
16 years old (retained twice)	18.9% of the time
17 years old (retained more than twice)	7.1% of the time

The frightening aspect of this data is that predictions can be made from the research. Louisiana can accurately predict the graduation outcomes of 80% of the state's 9th grade class based ONLY on their age & previous school attendance. There is an indication from these results that Louisiana schools should reexamine their approach to student retention.

Retention of students has not lead to significant positive outcomes. In fact, the use of student retention to improve future school outcomes has fallen prey to the law of unintended consequences—in this case, reduction in student achievement and higher dropout rates.

Districts and schools throughout Louisiana are working to solve the retention problem. The Literacy Goal Office of the Louisiana Department of Education conducted a survey of school principals to determine what is being done in schools throughout Louisiana to prevent retention. Some of the strategies listed include:

- Tutorials by certified teachers for Pre-K, Kindergarten, and 1st grade to prevent grade retention
- Targeted collaboration with Head Start and other childcare providers to ensure that students are receiving the instruction needed from birth through Pre-K to be successful in Kindergarten
- Focused literacy and numeracy for most of the school day with science, social studies, health, embedded in the literacy instruction
- Specific training and models for Pre-K and Kindergarten interventions
- Utilization of the Speech and Language Pathologist to provide early interventions in Pre-K and Kindergarten
- After school support for strategic and intensive students with required parent seminars
- Additional time in the school day and school year
- Increased exposure to reading with classroom libraries and targeted read alouds to develop vocabulary and listening comprehension
- More focus on literacy and numeracy in Pre-K classes
- Side by side coaching provided to teachers by skilled reading coaches
- Specially trained certified teachers serving as interventionists

Ensuring Literacy for All: Final Thoughts

At the policy level, the full implementation of “Ensuring Literacy for All” will depend on political will. Resources are required to provide professional development, reading coaches, and interventionists. All teachers must be involved in teaching literacy – from PreK-4 elementary teachers to language arts teachers in grades 5-8 to math, science and history teachers at the middle and high school levels. Ultimately, the long term benefits of “Ensuring Literacy for All” will depend on College of Education programs in every university, providing “teachers in training” the instruction needed to meet the challenge.

Reading is the foundation skill of all learning. To this vision, the Louisiana Department of Education and Education's Next Horizon will continue to seek support and resources for a concentration on literacy beginning with the early elementary years and continuing through the late elementary, middle, and high school experience.

As Louisiana seeks to improve the reading level of all children, key questions that guide the “Ensuring Literacy for All” effort include:

- Does Louisiana have the political will to invest in state-wide literacy initiatives?
- How can we prevent retentions in the early grades with appropriate interventions?
- How can we improve literacy in middle and high schools?
- How can Louisiana be most effective in building the professional development and university preparation needed for a successful “Ensuring Literacy for All” initiative?

Teacher Quality: Key to Student Success

Introduction and Context

In a knowledge based economy that makes education more important than ever, teachers matter more than ever. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the U.S. Department of Education are focused on teachers in the classroom as the key to meaningful school reform. Education research shows that teacher effectiveness is the difference maker – an influence even greater than race, poverty level, or parent's education.

Katie Haycock of The Education Trust notes: *“Research shows that kids who have two, three, or four strong teachers in a row will eventually excel, no matter what their background, while kids who have even two weak teachers in a row will never recover.”* The difference between having an effective teacher or ineffective teacher for three years in a row can represent as much as 50 percentage points in student achievement on a 100 point scale (Babu and Mendro, 2003).

The 2010 Global Strategy Group poll offered seven options on the best way to improve education in Louisiana. The citizens of Louisiana noted that their number one option was “holding teachers more accountable for their students’ progress.” Their number two options was “providing more support and professional development for teachers.”

Increasing teacher effectiveness in Louisiana requires a six part strategy:

- Attracting capable individuals to enter the teaching profession and redesigning university programs to better prepare teachers for the classroom.
- Recognizing, rewarding, and learning from the truly exceptional teachers.
- Improving “quality of teaching” for all teachers with job embedded and targeted professional development.
- Encouraging the most effective teachers to teach in hard to staff schools.
- Keeping the best teachers in the profession over time. The current retention rate in Louisiana is 75% at one year, 50% at three years, and 40% at five years.
- Replacing teachers who are not effective with students.

Evaluating Effectiveness

Improving teacher effectiveness begins with being able to evaluate it. The New Teacher Project, a national nonprofit organization dedicated to closing the achievement gap by ensuring that high-need students get outstanding teachers, notes: *“A teacher’s effectiveness – the most important factor for schools in improving student achievement – is not measured, recorded or used to inform decision making in any meaningful way... Excellence goes unrecognized, development is neglected, and poor performance goes unaddressed.”*

School districts often fail to acknowledge or act on differences in teacher performance. In so doing, the

truly exceptional teacher can't be formally identified and schools miss the opportunity to learn from best practices. In a survey in 12 large school districts across the U.S., three of every four teachers went through a formal evaluation process without receiving any specific feedback about how to improve their practice. Less than 1% of teachers in the survey were rated unsatisfactory (the rate also noted in Louisiana schools) – a rate considerably lower than other sectors.

The Gates Foundation launched its Measures of Effective Teaching (MET) initiative several years ago with the goal of improving “the quality of information about teaching effectiveness.” METS is a national best practice research study aimed at providing a new knowledge base for state

and district policymakers and practitioners. This will consist of new teacher effectiveness models and tools that make the cutting edge difference in classroom and student performance. Results of the METS project are expected to be released later this year.

In 2010, the Louisiana Legislature passed Act 54 – a part of Governor Bobby Jindal's school reform agenda. The legislation is designed to ensure Louisiana's parents and citizens that an effective teacher teaches every student and an effective school leader leads every school.

Act 54 focuses on a better process to evaluate the performance of Louisiana's teachers. The legislation requires that teachers and administrative personnel be evaluated annually as opposed to the current three-year evaluation cycle. The law establishes a teacher evaluation process that is half based on student progress during the year and half based on traditional subjective assessment by school leaders. The legislation provides for the development of:

- a better process for identifying and rewarding the most effective teachers;
- targeted job embedded professional development for more teachers; and
- a more objective way to identify ineffective teachers.

A Model of Success – Louisiana TAP

Louisiana TAP (The System for Teacher and Student Advancement) is a comprehensive teacher quality and school improvement system based on the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching's (NIET) proven TAP model. Louisiana TAP is designed to attract, support, develop, and retain great teachers and ultimately improve student achievement.

TAP is based on four elements:

- **Multiple Career Paths** that allow teachers to pursue a variety of career options such as master and mentor teachers in each school.
- **Ongoing Applied Professional Growth** involving increased collaborative time for teachers to share and learn from each other, and to use data to target student instructional needs.

- **Instructionally Focused Accountability** that holds teachers accountable for maintaining high skills standards and for the academic growth of their students.
- **Performance-Based Compensation** that pays teachers according to roles and responsibilities, classroom performance, and student performance.

The TAP system uses a value-added growth calculation to determine the gains of student learning. A value-added gain score of "3" indicates that students grew an expected full year's growth. A score of "4" indicates growth at one standard deviation above an expected full year's growth, and a score of "5" represents growth at two standard deviations above an expected full year's growth. Student growth has been significant in TAP schools.

- For 2007-2008, value-added growth was calculated in thirty-six schools. Twenty-five (25) of the thirty-six schools showed a value-added score of 3 or more, with seventeen of those schools scoring value-added score of 4 or 5.
- For 2008-2009, value-added growth was calculated in thirteen (13) schools. Twelve (12) of the 13 schools received a value-added score of 3 or more. Ten (10) of those schools scored value-added scores of 4 or 5.
- For 2009-2010, value-added growth was calculated in 36 schools, thirty-one (31) or 86% of the thirty-six showed a value-added score of 3 or more. Twenty (20) schools or 56% earned value-added scores of 4 or 5.

During the 2010-2011 school year, there will be 118 schools involved in the Louisiana TAP initiative. Fifty-four schools are TAP schools: twenty-two as Year One TAP schools and thirty-nine as Year Two and Beyond TAP Schools. In addition to the 54 TAP schools, there are 64 Pre-TAP Schools.

Teacher Quality: Challenges and Key Questions

The focus on the classroom as the basis of meaningful school reform is not a new one. But what Louisiana hasn't done well in the past is recognize and learn from our best teachers and provide targeted professional

development based on individual teacher's strengths and weaknesses. The development of value-added performance assessment for teachers and principals provides a foundation for improving what happens in classrooms across Louisiana.

As Louisiana seeks to improve teacher quality, key questions are:

- How successful will Louisiana be in building district-level support in implementing Act 54 and in embracing other best practice models of evaluating teacher effectiveness?
- Will Louisiana be successful in implementing strategies to attract and retain the best teachers?
- Will Louisiana implement and sustain strategies to improve quality teaching for all teachers through targeted and job embedded professional development?
- Will Louisiana use information from the soon to be released Gates Foundation's "Measures of Effective Teaching" initiative in designing future school improvements efforts?
- Does the quality of the teacher in the classroom matter enough to replace teachers who are not effective with students?

Increasing Graduation Rates: Learning To Finish

Introduction and Context

In the United States, every 26 seconds a student drops out of high school. Our country faces a silent epidemic – year after year – where nearly one-third of all 9th grade students and half of low-income and minority 9th graders in the public school system fail to graduate in four years.

And the problem is not shrinking. The Education Trust notes: “The United States is the only industrialized country in the world in which today’s young people are less likely than their parents to have completed high school.”

At the National Summit on America’s Silent Epidemic, Robert Balfanz wrote:

“Decades ago, this would not have been a crisis. Manufacturing and agricultural jobs provided an avenue for employment and upward mobility for young adults without a high school degree. Today, the unemployment rate for young adults without a high school diploma is staggering. As a result, failure to graduate from high school has become a ticket to the underclass. For a single individual this can be tragic, but when the majority or near majority of students from entire neighborhoods and communities fail to graduate, the social and economic costs are profound and far reaching.”

As if these national statistics are not enough to cause concern, the problem is even more pronounced in Louisiana. In the 2008 periodical “High School Counts,” published by the Louisiana Department of Education, the following summary puts the dropout issue in context.

“Every year 15,000 students drop out of Louisiana public schools; more than one in three of our students do not graduate from high school. These individuals leave school unprepared to earn a living wage and are unable to contribute to the economy of the state. High School dropouts of Louisiana’s class of 2006 alone will cost the state \$6.5 billion dollars in lost wages over their lifetime. Dropouts contribute heavily to Louisiana’s burgeoning prison population, high welfare costs, and critical shortage of skilled workers. Our state can no longer afford the high costs of students dropping out.”

Research helps define the problem – who the dropouts are and how to prevent it. While there is no magic bullet or quick fix to the dropout crisis, Louisiana is committed to progress with a combination of hard work and good policy decisions.

A key component of Louisiana’s approach to increasing graduation rates is that whole communities must be engaged. Whatever the issue – economic development, workforce development, reducing the crime rate, reducing welfare costs, expanding the middle class, or reducing poverty – increasing the graduation rate is a means to achieving the goals of Louisiana.



Increasing Graduation Rates in Louisiana Communities

Louisiana's Promise began as a collaborative effort of Education's Next Horizon, America's Promise Alliance, Louisiana Department of Education, Louisiana Governor's Office, Picard Center for Child Development, United Way affiliates, and numerous other public and private partners across the state to focus on developing community-wide solutions to the dropout problem. The ultimate goal of the Louisiana Promise initiative is to help meet Louisiana's legislated goal of increasing graduation rates to 80% by the 2013-2014 school year. Louisiana is investing in community involvement and leadership in this effort because:

- Dealing with the dropout issue is a key to the future economy and quality of life in Louisiana.
- The dropout issue is not a school issue – it is a whole community issue.
- Education is a local issue – each local community is the best place to determine solutions.

Education's Next Horizon leads a communication and advocacy effort to keep dropout prevention a “top of the agenda” issue in Louisiana. Louisiana's education leaders are using best practice research to guide the state's effort to increase graduation rates. The objective of Louisiana's Promise is to create community-wide teams of education, law enforcement, political, business, non-profit and faith community leaders to develop local strategies in one or more proven best practice focus area. These focus areas are:

- Keep dropout prevention at the top of the agenda.
- Develop early detection and community support systems for “at risk” students.
- Reduce truancy and increase attendance rates.
- Bridge the transition of students between 8th and 9th grade and between 5th and 6th grade.
- Promote middle and high school transformation that engages students by connecting school to their future.

In October 2008, Louisiana's Promise held a statewide dropout summit with participation of over a thousand Community Leadership Team members from every school district in the state. In January and February of 2009, eight regional summits were held to accelerate the work of the District Community Leadership Teams with 100-200 people participating in each of the eight regions.

In partnership with United Way affiliates and the Picard Center for Child Development, Louisiana's Promise currently offers direct support to the twenty (20) school districts that have the lowest cohort graduation rates. Support to the districts includes convening and engaging community leaders in community summits to develop local solutions to the dropout problem. In partnership with the Louisiana Department of Education, Louisiana's Promise also provides dropout prevention planning support to targeted urban districts and high schools.

On the Path to Dropout: Identifying the Risk Factors

The first step toward an effective dropout prevention strategy is identifying students on the path to dropout. Louisiana has taken a step in the right direction with the development of an electronic Dropout Early Warning System (DEWS) currently implemented in over two-thirds of Louisiana's school districts. The system increases school and school district capacity to identify students who are at risk of dropping out.

Although the electronic Dropout Early Warning System has been initially “rolled out” in high school, the goal is to expand rapidly into middle and elementary schools. The electronically generated data will be “real time” throughout the school year. This will allow schools to make assessments early (i.e. first month absentee rates) and continue vigilance throughout the school year.

There has been good research on the key indicators predictive of dropping out. Louisiana is using analysis of these indicators to help schools identify students “at risk” of dropping out. These indicators include:

- Failure to be promoted to the next grade.
- Poor grades in core subjects.
- Low attendance.
- Behavioral problems, which often reflect disengagement.

As is noted in the “Ensuring Literacy” section of this report, one of the strongest predictors of “dropping out” is whether a student has repeated a grade in elementary or middle school. This is a significant concern in Louisiana because of the high number of overage students resulting from high retention rates in the early elementary grades and the failure rate of students on the 4th and 8th grade high stakes tests. National statistics indicate that nearly 80% of students held back two or more years in elementary or middle school leave the public education system without a diploma.

The failure of students in core academic courses in middle and secondary school is also a key predictor of dropping out. In multiple studies, grades tended to be a better predictor than test scores. A student receiving more than one F as a semester mark in the 9th grade is highly predictive of student failure to graduate.

Students absent from school tend to fall behind. Attendance rates in middle and high school are key predictors of “dropping out” – with even moderate levels of student absenteeism creating cause for concern. In comparison to students with good attendance, ninth grade students who miss over two weeks per semester have three times the dropout rate. Attendance is an accountability metric in Louisiana but remains a significant problem in the state’s middle and high schools.

Probably the most consistent indicator of high dropout probability is overage status. Recent work by the Louisiana Department of Education has shown that as the age of students increase when they enter 9th grade, their chance of graduating declines significantly. Students who reach ninth grade on age-grade level graduate 81% of the time. Students who are two years older graduate only 19% of the time.

On the Path to Dropping Out: Interventions in Louisiana

When considering ways to increase graduation rates, the best intervention practices fall in the following areas:

- Improving school climate in order to facilitate student engagement.

- Increasing rigor and relevance to maintain high expectations for students.
- Extend learning time and build effective remediation strategies.
- Concentrate on improving school performance in key indicators such as reduced retention, improved attendance, and discipline.

Louisiana’s LA Core 4 diploma pathway sets out high expectations for high school students – preparing them to be college and career ready in the information age. This pathway is based on a revised Louisiana Comprehensive Curriculum with a concentration on relevance and the addition of more appealing high school courses like Senior Applications in English, Math Essentials, and Anatomy/Physiology.

Louisiana schools completed their third year of state-funded 9th Grade Initiative that helps students succeed in high school by providing more personal attention and support through 9th grade academies. Starting in 2010-11, there are 82 schools receiving state funding for 9th grade academies and other initiatives through a modified version of 9th Grade Initiative – the Everybody Graduates! Grant program. In addition to these schools, many more continue to implement 9th grade academies without added financial resources from the state.

Greater emphasis is being placed on extended learning time and effective “catch up” and remediation programs. Districts are being supported in implementing the new Accelerated Pathway for at-risk overage students in 9th grade to graduate early.

Online differentiated instruction through the Louisiana Virtual School provides “anytime, anywhere” catch-up opportunities for students. These academic catch-up programs provide extended instruction in reading and math for struggling adolescent learners.

Improving school climate begins with a focus on relevance and greater personalization to meet student needs. Louisiana’s investment in the electronic Dropout Early Warning System (DEWS) is the foundation of a more targeted, student-centered approach to students at risk.

Louisiana invested in the implementation of Positive Behavioral Support initiatives in school districts across the state. This initiative provides research-based support for school districts in dealing with discipline concerns.

Louisiana continues to invest heavily in dropout prevention and recovery strategies that already have an excellent record of success in Louisiana and across the nation. These include the Job's for America's Graduates (JAG) and Educational Mission to Prepare Louisiana's Youth (EMPLoY) programs.

In February 2011, Education's Next Horizon established the **Louisiana Center for Afterschool Learning (LA-CAL)**. Funded by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation and several public and private supporters, LA-CAL serves as Louisiana's primary vehicle to ensure a coordinated and uniform focus on high quality out-of-school time services for children and youth. The Center's goals are:

- Create a sustainable structure of statewide, regional and local partnerships, particularly school-community partnerships, focused on supporting policy development at all levels.
- Support the development and growth of statewide policies that will secure the resources that are needed to sustain new and existing school-based/school-linked afterschool programs.
- Support statewide systems to ensure programs are of high quality.

In the fall of 2011, the Pre-GED/Options Program will no longer be available. To better support dropout prevention, local superintendents and supervisors are working closely with the Louisiana Department of Education to implement the newly developed Connections Process, an initiative designed to ensure that districts have services to successfully prepare overage and academically behind students for college and career success. The Connections Process will include the following elements: academic and behavioral interventions; mentoring; job skills training; committee reviews; parent meetings; individual prescriptions for instruction; individual graduation plans; and exiting pathways (diploma pathways, GED, state-approved skills certificate).

Louisiana school districts will engage the entire community through District Community Leadership Teams in every school district willing to participate. These leadership teams will be dedicated to the key areas of keeping the dropout issue "top of the agenda"; building early warning and school and community intervention systems; improving community school attendance and truancy systems; and improving student engagement through connecting school to the student's future. The work of these teams has already led to changes in state attendance policy to allow fewer unexcused absences starting with the 2010-11 school year and legislation in 2009 and 2010 related to increasing graduation rates.

Increasing Graduation Rates – Next Steps

Increasing Graduation Rates is an important goal – a goal recognized by everyone concerned about education opportunity in Louisiana. Louisiana's goal of reducing dropouts will be an area of intense concentration by the Louisiana Department of Education, Louisiana Legislature, Governor's Office, and school districts across Louisiana.

Key questions that guide the state's effort to increase high school graduation rates include:

- What do we do to keep dropout prevention a "top of the agenda" issue?
- What can whole communities do to help raise graduation rates?
- What systems can be put in place and improved in elementary, middle, and high school to identify "at risk" students and reduce retention rates?
- What strategies should be employed to reduce the number of overage students in Louisiana schools?
- What systems can be put in place and improved at high schools defined by school researchers as "dropout factories" to increase the graduation rate?
- How do we better engage students in middle and high school?
- What can we do to support students in the transitions from 8th to 9th grade and from 5th to 6th grade?

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?

Education's Next Horizon Commitment to Louisiana



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Education's Next Horizon is a group of community leaders from across Louisiana who believe that education is the key to our future economy and quality of life. The purpose of Education's Next Horizon is captured in its name – to push forward the next horizon of school improvement in Louisiana. Our goal is to have schools “where each child will reach his or her potential.”

School improvement is complex and there is no magic bullet. However, we must determine our priorities. Education's Next Horizon has created a “Contract With Louisiana” around the following priorities:

- Louisiana can't improve what it can't measure. Louisiana's nationally recognized accountability system should be preserved.
- The achievement gap between black and white students must be narrowed quickly.
- Investment in Early Childhood Education is among the most effective long-term economic development strategies.
- If a child can't read well, school success is unlikely. Louisiana must have literacy for all.
- The creation of a good learning environment for children means dealing with the more basic needs of health, safety, and connecting with a caring adult.
- Workforce development depends on our high schools and middle schools. High schools and middle schools must be redesigned to meet the future needs of Louisiana.
- The teacher is the most important single factor for student success. “On the job” professional development and improving working conditions of teachers are the keys to school improvement.

If public education is the key to Louisiana's future economy and quality of life, it is everybody's business. We will play our part in helping frame the debate for comprehensive system-wide reform and for building the local capacity of education and community leadership dedicated to school improvement.

Education's Next Horizon was formed to change the question that governs the interaction between education leadership and the community as a whole from “What can you do for us?” to “What can we do together to educate all children well?” We will sustain this work without concern about election cycles, political affiliations, and education factions.

2011 Key Education Issues: Changing Louisiana's Future

2011 Key Education Issues: Changing Louisiana's Future is a publication of Education's Next Horizon, a statewide non-profit organization dedicated solely to PreK-12 education improvement. Our mission is to frame the debate for education reform and to connect Louisiana's leadership – education, government, business and community – as a force supporting meaningful school improvement.

We believe that improvement in the five education issues described in this report will transform Louisiana. Concentrating school reform efforts around these areas will keep Louisiana on track to a brighter future.

These issues comprise the reform agenda – from Pre-K to elementary school literacy and numeracy to improvement of graduation rates and preparation of students for post-secondary education and careers – that will give every child in Louisiana the opportunity to reach his or her fullest potential. Getting results will mean working together to address the key questions and challenges posed in this monograph. Our future depends on it.

For the full report of *2011 Key Education Issues*, visit our website: www.ednexthorizon.org.



412 N. Fourth Street, Suite 240
Baton Rouge, LA 70802
225-383-3844
www.ednexthorizon.org