



**COMMITTEE ON K-12 EDUCATION**

**Transition Advisory Team**

**Governor John Bel Edwards**

**February 4, 2016**

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**Ann Smith, *Vice Chair***

## **Transition Team on K-12 EDUCATION**

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(Committee Member List Continued from Previous Page)

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February 4, 2016

The Honorable John Bel Edwards  
State of Louisiana  
Office of the Governor  
900 N. Third Street, No. 4  
Baton Rouge, LA 70802

Gov. Edwards:

Thank you for the opportunity to serve as your representatives to facilitate and lead the K-12 Education Transition Committee. Our focus was to ensure that each representative's voice was heard and that the deliberations were conducted in a professional and fair manner. As you know, the education ecosystem in Louisiana is multifaceted, thus it was necessary to ensure that all committee members had the opportunity to express their views in a setting that fostered openness and respect. Improving student achievement in Louisiana was the guiding principal in our discussions, despite some differing philosophies relative to the path toward the ultimate goal of providing the best education experience possible for our students.

In creating the report, the team focused on the following areas:

- Providing fair and equitable accountability measures
  - School and district comparisons primarily focused on improving instruction and outcomes
  - K-12 curriculum with fair, grade and age appropriate assessments
- Protecting local control of schools
- Promoting higher standards for education to help Louisiana students become more competitive nationwide
- Supporting high-quality and legally funded school choice options
- State funding for Pre-K programming as established in Act 3 of the 2012 Regular Session
- Increasing the Minimum Foundation Program (MFP) to fully fund the costs of educating students and support more competitive salaries for the best and brightest teachers and school employees, while upgrading technologies, and reducing school administrative costs.

Our process for dialogue was based on proven strategies for large-group facilitation in reaching consensus. We spent considerable time providing input on the status of various topics then identified key issues and themes. Finally, we developed recommendations as the product of a good-faith effort to meet the interests of the majority. It is important to note that despite the lack of complete unanimity on a few of the recommendations, overwhelming agreement was reached among the vast majority of the membership.

During initial meetings, the committee spent considerable time discussing the status of numerous initiatives involving K-12 education policy. We were fortunate to have the chief researcher for the Senate Education Committee, Jeanne Johnston, who gave an overview of K-12 education in Louisiana from a structural standpoint. The committee also received an overview of information regarding revisions to the federal Every Student Succeeds Act that were passed during our committee meetings in December 2015, and the accountability system in Louisiana based on statutory requirements.

Due to the short turnaround time and large committee size, it was important that the group realized the need for common themes and findings. We focused on developing themes and recommendations based on the lengthy discussion of the previously noted six topics in our charge: fair and equitable accountability measures, protecting local control of schools, promoting higher standards for Louisiana students, supporting high-quality and legally funded school choice options, state funding for Pre-K and increasing state funding for K-12 education via the Minimum Foundation Program.

The group's diversity provided rich, meaningful discussion and deliberation. In sum, the overarching goal of providing recommendations to enhance and improve student achievement in Louisiana became evident by the genuine and sincere desire of each committee member to ensure that the best educational experience possible is afforded to each and every child in Louisiana.

We are honored to be charged with this important task by Gov. Edwards. We hope you find the recommendations enclosed in this report meaningful and helpful.

Sincerely,

Scott Richard  
Chair

Ann Smith  
Vice Chair

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# INTRODUCTION

## Louisiana Constitution, Article 8, Section 1

The goal of the public educational system is to provide learning environments and experiences at all stages of human development that are humane, just and designed to promote excellence in order that every individual may be afforded an equal opportunity to develop to his full potential.

Louisiana continues to lag in various national rankings relative to student achievement. It is important to account for the fact that, in a number of other areas that contribute to quality educational outcomes, Louisiana ranks low as well such as poverty, health, income, etc. It is the belief of many stakeholders, including the members of the K-12 Education Transition committee, that several of Gov. Edwards' transition teams – the Committee on Children and Family Services, Committee on Healthcare, Committee on Public Safety and Corrections, Committee on Economic Development, Committee on Higher Education, Committee on Transportation and the Committee on Fiscal Matters – must, for the betterment of our citizenry work in unison and collaboratively to address the many barriers that exist to providing high quality education for our youth.

The K-12 Transition Committee's work highlighted the need for a continuous effort by a diverse groups to maintain dialogue so that improving education can be a high priority for Gov. Edwards, the Legislature and all Louisiana citizens. Another significant takeaway from our work is that, despite differences of opinion as to how we work together to improve education, the need to prioritize the value of the effort is tantamount to the success of everyone's future. Merely coming together as stakeholders provided hope and value toward the goal of providing recommendations to Gov. Edwards. In a larger sense, our effort revealed that we all have more in common than initially perceived or perpetuated by previous efforts that favored division and blame rather than unity and collaboration. Ultimately, there is no easy fix to improving education outcomes, and the effort must be prioritized for the betterment of our state.

## CURRENT STATUS

The status of public education in Louisiana is perhaps best characterized as being in a state of transition or flux. For the sake of brevity, please note some major legislative instruments approved between 2010 and 2012 that have, for better or worse, driven a number of structural changes in operations and policies for schools and school systems. In addition to the laws summarized below, Louisiana began the process in 2010 of moving toward national education standards known as the Common Core State Standards. Coinciding with the move to new learning standards in English language arts and mathematics is the transition to the accompanying standardized assessments. Louisiana has been a participant in PARCC, the Partnership for Readiness for College and Careers testing consortium, though with some modifications for the 2015-16 school year. The number of state law changes, in addition to a national movement regarding public education policy and federal changes in applicable education law, has added to the state of transition unfolding in Louisiana.

Moreover, the trends in state and federal funding for public education have fluctuated greatly in recent times for a number of reasons. State funding, even with the number of changes enacted by law, remained static from the 2008-09 school year through the 2013-14 school year. Rising operational costs accompanied by the transition to higher standards have resulted in financial challenges for many school districts. Changes in implementation strategies regarding higher standards have contributed to uneven implementation and logistical challenges that ultimately affect student learning. What follows is a short summary of major state legislative instruments that have impacted public education, concluding with a brief summary of federal law changes:

- **Act 54 of 2010** mandated new parameters for teacher evaluations, requiring two components – quantitative measures of student growth, such as value-added data, common assessment data or student learning targets, and qualitative measures of performance using traditional evaluation techniques such as classroom observations. From 2010 to present, there have been some modifications to the actual processes noted.
- **Act 718 of 2010** provided for assigning letter grades to schools and school districts reflecting their performance based on the current method of



determining school and district performance scores. Use of student assessment results is the major indicator in the calculation of letter grades.

- **Act 1 of 2012** drastically changed tenure requirements for teachers, altered termination requirements for tenured and nontenured teachers, and required all school governing authorities to establish salary schedules based on effectiveness and performance. The act also required school boards to delegate most personnel-related authority to the superintendent and for the superintendent to delegate most personnel authority to school principals. Reduction-in-force policies were required to be based on demand, performance and effectiveness without the use of seniority as the primary factor. School boards were required to include specific performance targets in superintendent contracts that must be submitted to the state superintendent.
- **Act 2 of 2012** provided for the Student Scholarships for Education Excellence program, a statewide voucher program that provides for parent petitions under certain conditions relative to entry into the state-run Recovery School District. The act also provided for course providers, a common charter school application process and provides for an entity known as local charter authorizers, which can create charter schools if approved by the state board.
- **Act 3 of 2012** provided for an Early Childhood Care and Education Network to align early-childhood programming so all publicly funded early-childcare programs have performance targets, uniform assessments and a uniform accountability system.

Since the passage of the aforementioned laws, many components have been litigated, modified, suspended by state board policy allowed for in the laws, etc. These changes contributed to the descriptor of the state of education in Louisiana being in a state of transition or flux.

In regards to standards and assessment in Louisiana, the most recent expression of the law from the 2015 Regular Legislative Session, Act 329, addresses the process for developing learning standards. The Board of Elementary and Secondary Education is required to develop learning standards in English language arts and math with specific procedures that must be used in order to seek final approval. The new process provides for legislative and executive branch oversight. At the time of this report,

various subcommittees in English language arts and mathematics are nearly complete in their review and preparing to submit final recommendations in early February 2016 to the Standards Review Committee, which will make recommendations to BESE.

During this process, the Common Core State Standards remain in place. Some modifications were made in the 2015 legislative session, specifically Act 342 which requires that not more than 49.9% of the questions used to test students in the spring of 2016 come from PARCC, the Partnership for Readiness for College and Careers consortium. Further, comparability to other states is in question, since Louisiana is the only state that administered paper-and-pencil PARCC tests instead of computerized testing. Computerized testing for grades 5-8 appears to be mandatory for the spring of 2016.

Another important factor in the assessment processes has been the decision by some parents to opt out of statewide testing, which impacts the validity and reliability of the results that determine letter grades for schools and school districts. The Louisiana Department of Education's use of bonus points in its calculations also creates some doubt regarding reliability of final scores and the correlation to student achievement or lack thereof. In addition, many stakeholders expressed a desire for stability and continuity regarding the many changes in calculations that occur each year, especially at the high school level.

These modifications, in part due to changes in federal laws, have left multiple issues, concerns, interpretations and debates over the efficacy of continuously changing state and federal education policies. Indeed, a change in federal law occurred as the committee prepared this report. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act was modified in December 2015, becoming known as the Every Student Succeeds Act, which replaced No Child Left Behind. Significant flexibility is part of the ESSA version, and less focus is given to standardized testing. The unpacking of ESSA will take several months before stakeholders fully comprehend its impact as rules are promulgated for states regarding implementation. Undoubtedly, the changes will have an impact on what our future state accountability matrix looks like moving forward.

Capturing the full effect of these numerous and ongoing changes would go beyond the scope of our committee's task – providing general recommendations to Gov. Edwards. Hopefully, the snapshot of K-12 public education in Louisiana provides a glimpse of factors which demonstrate the need for cohesiveness and practical solutions for improving student achievement, despite the wave of changes.

## KEY ISSUES, THEMES AND FINDINGS

As the committee conducted several hours of dialogue on numerous topics, it became evident the state needs a renewed focus on practical, well-designed strategies to improve student achievement throughout K-12 education. Louisiana laws, state policies that emanate from law, federal policies that emanate from changes in federal education law and funding mechanisms tied to public education have all been in a state of change over the recent past. An overarching theme is the need for permanency and consistency.

Members found a need for better communication among all stakeholders. Too many policy shifts accompanied by uneven implementation at several levels was a repeated topic. We also identified a need to improve the way our state promotes the value of our workforce in public education. Members felt that the professions associated with K-12 education have been devalued over the recent past and need to recapture the inherent worth of teachers and public education in general. Because of circumstances associated with contentious legislative debate in recent years, many stakeholders expressed the desire to reestablish the teaching profession as one held in high esteem. Recruitment and retention efforts were also noted as an area of priority to ensure an adequate workforce.

Finally, the committee recognized a need to ensure that top-down policy is supported and trusted by those charged with implementation. Stakeholder input and transparency in developing policies that ultimately affect every student and family in Louisiana was a prevalent theme. Further, the need for all stakeholders to work collaboratively in our efforts to improve student achievement was evident. Past missteps regarding stakeholder groups opposed to each other rather than finding common ground emerged as a mistake that should not be repeated in the new administration.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

It is the hope of the K-12 Transition Committee members that our recommendations are accepted as realistic and practical suggestions intended to improve the education experience for Louisiana students. With great respect, we submit the following recommendations in each respective area of focus:

### **1. Provide fair and equitable accountability measures, school and district comparisons primarily focused on improving instruction and outcomes and K-12 curriculum with fair grade- and age-appropriate assessments.**

- Establish a strategic, statewide initiative promoting the value of a high-quality public education in Louisiana with an emphasis on highlighting positive student outcomes, highlighting high-quality programs and elevating the status of the teaching profession, inclusive including salary considerations.
- All schools receiving state taxpayer funds should be measured in a consistent, transparent method that includes multiple measures and a student-growth component, along with additional measures for all student demographics – alternative, juvenile system and drop-out recovery.
- Convene a new, more inclusive Accountability Task Force to ensure alignment with ESSA and encourage stakeholder input.
- Construct a new reporting mechanism, other than letter grades, which would profile the districts and schools' new accountability metrics, including multiple measures, indicators and benchmarks to ensure transparency and ease of understanding.
- Until alignment of new academic standards, curricula, assessments and accountability measures is achieved, pause the current accountability ratings and sanctions.
- Ensure a base, Louisiana-endorsed curriculum aligned to new standards and that assessments are provided to all schools and districts with all of the components available and communicated prior to school starting. The base, state-endorsed curriculum is optional and not mandatory for any school district or other Local Education Agency (LEA) – but serves as a base curricula aligned to assessments.

- Employee accountability should ensure multiple measures of teacher and leader evaluations with student scores and a growth component as parts of the overall evaluation process – significantly lower than the current 50% threshold. Pay-for-performance should be removed from the evaluative process. Establish a special task force to review the teacher and leader evaluation system with an emphasis on providing recommendations for legislation.

## **2. Protecting local control of schools.**

- Local communities should determine public education governance structures that work best for them.
- Revisit the original Recovery School District legislation and renew the focus on restoring local community control.
- For local education agencies that meet accountability benchmarks indicating student success, there should be no state override of local governance decisions relative to other educational options.
- Revisit the need for local charter authorizers (Type 1B).

## **3. Promote higher standards for education to make Louisiana students more competitive nationwide.**

- Analyze and evaluate the current Standards Review Process to ensure they result in high-quality Louisiana standards. If not, extend and enhance the review process to ensure high-quality standards.
- Ensure that a strategic communication plan accompanies the new LA standards and allows for alignment of standards, curricula and assessments **prior** to full implementation.
- Work to ensure equitable resources, including a focus on technology integration into all classrooms, are provided to all schools as a component of the implementation of LA standards.

- Work to ensure that continuity exists between K-12 and post-secondary education in establishing statewide standards that addresses both college and career readiness with an emphasis on dual enrollment coursework for high-school students.
- Ensure that quality teacher recruitment and retention are a priority.

#### **4. Support high-quality and legally funded school-choice options.**

- Local school-choice options should fall within the purview of local community governance.
- Eligibility of publicly funded charter schools should be granted to entities that adhere to serving all students, especially at-risk students as defined by law. Monitoring should be enforced.
- Voucher recipient schools should not be allowed to accept kindergarten students if students are zoned for an A-, B- or C-rated school. Voucher recipient schools should serve all students.
- Multiple measures of accountability should apply to all publicly funded education programs without variance.
- The same measures of accountability should be applied uniformly to voucher recipient schools and all charter schools without variance.
- Public-choice options should be offered in a manner that does not diminish the ability of any option for educational programming, especially in regard to finances.
- Locally approved funding for education programming should not be rerouted outside the parameters of the original local voter approval.

#### **5. State funding for Pre-K programming established in Act 3 of the 2012 legislative session.**

- All stakeholders support the value of universal Pre-K-4 programming in all communities.

- Funding universal Pre-K-4 **should not** be at the expense of K-12 and MFP funding in Louisiana.
- Prioritization should be given to identifying sources of additional revenue, such as 8g, that could flow to expanding Pre-K 4 options.
- Revisit Act 3 components of 0-3 Pre-K in terms of oversight, governance, evaluations and funding. Local districts are more able to focus efforts on Pre-K 4 through 12, but additional coordination and support are needed from the state to oversee and administer 0-3 Pre-K programming.

**6. Increase the MFP to fully fund the costs of educating our students and support more competitive salaries for best and brightest teachers and school employees, upgraded technologies, and reduce school administrative costs.**

- Establish efforts to determine the actual cost of educating a child in the current environment, including salaries, benefits, operational costs such as transportation, buildings and maintenance, the cost of the Unfunded Accrued Liability in the Teachers' Retirement System of Louisiana (TRSL) and the Louisiana School Employees' Retirement System (LSERS); equitable distribution of legacy costs, weighted student factors and an annual growth component.
- State funding for K-12 education should continue to be distributed in a block grant format to ensure local communities can make decisions that are best for themselves.
- In regard to weights in the formula, the at-risk and special education weights should be reexamined and increased.