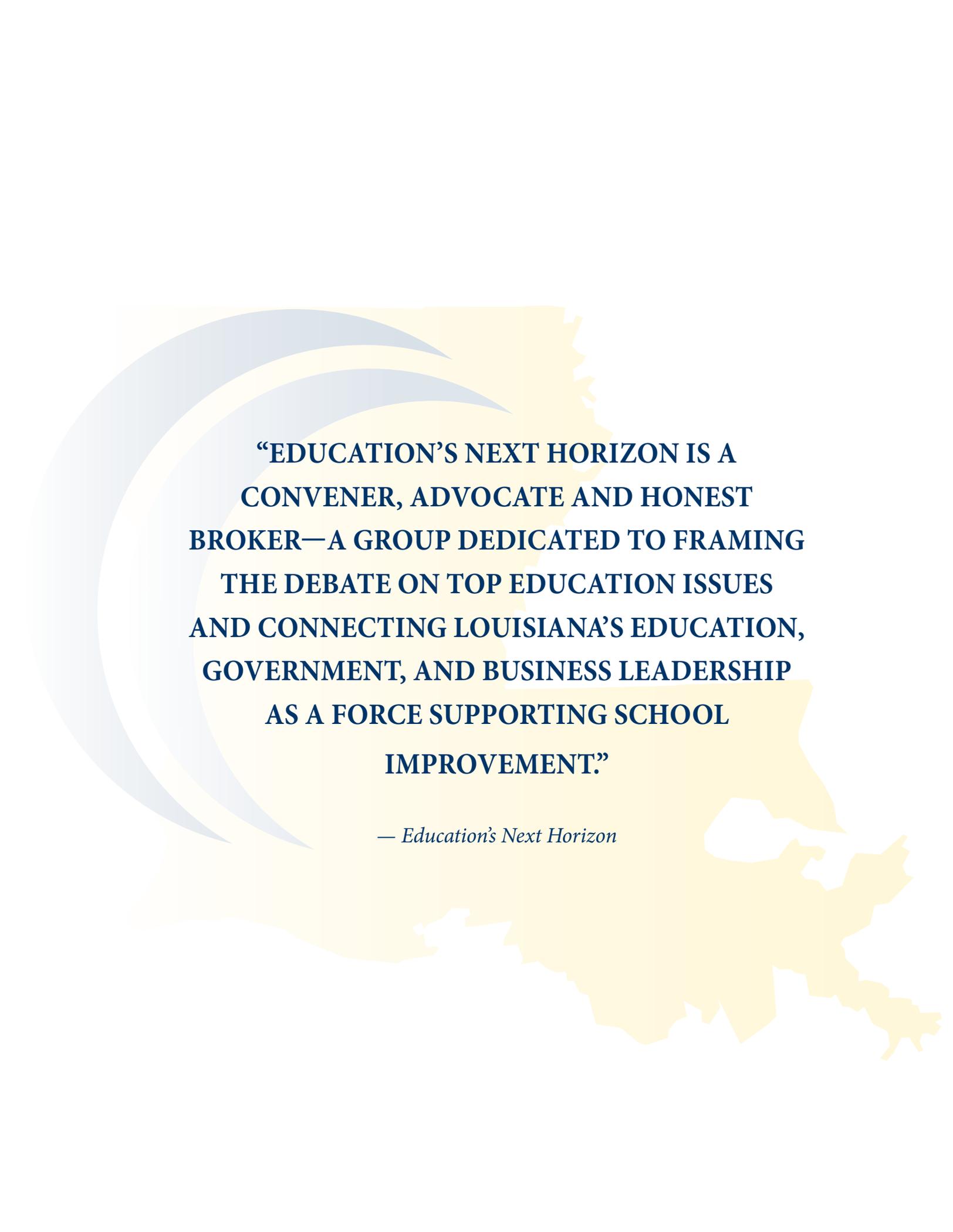


FRAMING THE DEBATE FOR SYSTEMWIDE REFORM

STAKEHOLDER COUNCIL | STUDY RECOMMENDATIONS



February 2009

A stylized map of Louisiana is shown in a light yellow color, occupying the right and bottom portions of the page. On the left side, there are three overlapping, curved shapes in shades of light blue and grey, resembling a stylized 'E' or a series of arcs. The text is centered over the map and arcs.

**“EDUCATION’S NEXT HORIZON IS A
CONVENER, ADVOCATE AND HONEST
BROKER—A GROUP DEDICATED TO FRAMING
THE DEBATE ON TOP EDUCATION ISSUES
AND CONNECTING LOUISIANA’S EDUCATION,
GOVERNMENT, AND BUSINESS LEADERSHIP
AS A FORCE SUPPORTING SCHOOL
IMPROVEMENT.”**

— Education’s Next Horizon



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FRAMING THE DEBATE FOR SYSTEMWIDE REFORM

STAKEHOLDER COUNCIL I STUDY RECOMMENDATIONS

INTRODUCTION

The mission of Education's Next Horizon is to frame the debate for systemwide education reform and to build capacity for education improvement. To effectively achieve its mission, the Board of Directors established a Stakeholder Council comprised of leaders from business, education, and government. The Council studies issues, conducts best practice research, and recommends policies and strategies for meaningful education improvement. **Stakeholder Council I** convened on January 30, 2008 and launched three workgroups:

The ***“Bridging the Skills Gap”*** workgroup had the task of synchronizing the public education system with identifiable workforce gaps while addressing current and future workforce competencies. The group was charged to study policies and strategies that would:

- build awareness and connect high school students with career and post secondary education,
- develop coursework that is relevant in the eyes of students and employers,
- promote and market high demand career options to parents and students; and
- better prepare students for these opportunities.

The workgroup study deliverables were to:

- Identify best practice policies and develop potential strategies for improvement of Career and Technical Education in Louisiana.
- Develop recommendations to align education with state and regional economic development priorities and strategies.
- Provide employer/community perspective in high school curriculum redesign.
- Connect students to technology by giving students access to 21st century technology to effectively advance learning and develop skills needed for post secondary and/or workplace success.

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The ***“Early Childhood Education”*** workgroup was given the task of developing high-quality, outcome-oriented early childhood learning opportunities for all children, particularly children in poverty. The group focused on:

- Collaboration of stakeholders (state education leaders, school districts, Head Start, childcare providers, and social service providers) in funding and providing high-quality improvements in early childhood education initiatives;
- Policy issues regarding the utility and effectiveness of existing collaborative efforts for service delivery to 4-year-olds, 3-year-olds, 0-2 year-olds, and pregnant mothers;
- Funding streams for Pre-K in Louisiana (ensuring stability and adequacy for the future);
- Teacher credentialing and teacher training that are built around the goal of academic and social preparation of young children for school; and
- Best practices in overcoming practical barriers to the expansion of high-quality early childhood initiatives.

The workgroup study deliverables were to:

- Develop a Louisiana definition of “school readiness.”
- Develop an early childhood education policy regarding school readiness “expectations” upon kindergarten entry for all children.
- Develop a plan for high-quality early childhood pathways and experiences to ensure that every child is school ready. The school readiness plan will address statewide collaboration and coordination issues among pre-kindergarten, early learning, and childcare services to achieve effective program delivery.
- Develop a system to address the needs of children who do not meet school readiness indicators.

The ***“Preparing Students to Graduate”*** workgroup was established to identify policies and practices that would increase high school graduation rates in Louisiana to a level above the national average. The group planned to focus on middle and high school attendance, and on student attitude and achievement.

Within several months of the workgroup's formation, Education's Next Horizon was invited by America's Promise Alliance and the Louisiana Department of Education to be the lead sponsor of a statewide dropout prevention summit. The summit was the start of a comprehensive planning effort in which community leaders across the state would begin meeting regionally to develop action plans to address the dropout problem in their communities. The following describes the Louisiana's Promise initiative and summarizes key results of the state summit:



COMMUNITY TEAMS TACKLING THE DROPOUT PROBLEM

Mission and Goals

The mission of Louisiana's Promise is to create a community movement around increasing graduation rates. Its goals are to:

1. Develop and implement plans for school and community improvement in three foundation principles:
 - Early warning systems and community support
 - Attendance and truancy
 - Connecting school to the student's future
2. Increase the high school graduation rate in Louisiana to greater than 80% by close of the 2015-2016 school year.

Statewide Summit

The Louisiana's Promise Statewide Summit on Dropout Prevention was held on October 28, 2008 at the Baton Rouge River Center in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. The purpose of the summit was to build greater public awareness of the dropout crisis and to mobilize local leaders to address the problem.

The summit was attended by more than 800 community leaders. School district superintendents from across the state assembled the teams. Attendees included educators, administrators and education policymakers, including members of the State Legislature, State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, the Office of the Governor Bobby Jindal and a number of municipal, parish, judicial, and law enforcement leaders. Participants also included representatives of faith-based and community-based organizations across the state.

Summit Sponsors

The Louisiana's Promise state and regional summits are an extension of the work of America's Promise Alliance, whose founders, Retired General Colin Powell and his wife Alma, have launched a national movement to address the dropout crisis. America's Promise Alliance provided significant financial and technical support to the Louisiana effort. We are grateful for the financial and planning support of the following additional sponsors: Louisiana Department of Education, Louisiana Association of United Ways, State Farm Insurance, Louisiana Public Broadcasting, Picard Center for Child Development at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, and Sparkhound.

Speakers

Summit speakers included Paul G. Pastorek, State Superintendent of Education, who delivered the keynote, and Dr. Phillip A. Rozeman, President and Chairman of Education's Next Horizon. A panel of three (3) presenters spoke on the summit's three (3) foundation principles.

Youth Involvement

In addition to having youth involvement in planning the event, students were active participants in the program. They spoke on the Louisiana's Promise video. They introduced the keynote speaker and the panel speakers. In addition, as part of our research we held five youth focus group meetings. Participants included 66 students who had dropped out. The report provides insight into the reasons and motivation for dropout behavior.

Community Team Breakout Sessions

The afternoon session was devoted to team breakout sessions. School districts were grouped by one of eight regions and met for several hours discussing dropout data and brainstorming strategies. Each participant was given a toolkit that included a state and district-specific dropout profile of key risk factors. To help facilitate initial discussion and strategy development, attendees were also given "guiding questions" on the data profiles and on the three (3) foundation principles. This information was captured on "Climbing to the Summit" forms. In addition, each district executed a Regional Summit Commitment Form in which they identified a contact person to help lead the regional summit effort.

Regional Summits

Follow-up Regional Summits began in January 2009. The purpose of the regional summits is to facilitate specific discussion and work toward the development of school district action plans. The action plans will consist of strategies in one or more of the foundation principles. The regional summits are being convened by Regional Service Centers of the State Department of Education. Summits are planned and facilitated by representatives of Education's Next Horizon, the State Department of Education, and the Picard Center for Child Development.

State Summit Performance Outcomes

- Number of participants in attendance: approximately 800
- Number of districts represented: 61
- Number of community summit plans turned in: 45
- Number of follow up summits planned: 8
- Summit Evaluation: Evaluation surveys show "outstanding" results

Media Highlights

The summit received extensive print media and television coverage. The event was held several days before the release of the report "Counting on Graduation" by The Education Trust. The report helped to draw public attention to the severity of the problem and to Louisiana's response. One of the summit sponsors, Louisiana Public Broadcasting, taped the morning sessions and has agreed to periodically air them on television public broadcasting.

Bridging the Skills Gap Workgroup

“Connecting School to the Future of Students”

LOUISIANA’S WORKFORCE GAP

Louisiana’s education pipeline is leaking. It is widely acknowledged that Louisiana middle and high schools have to find ways to better connect school to the future of students. The facts are sobering:

- Nearly a third of ninth graders fail to graduate on time.
- One third of the students who do graduate from high school fail to pursue a four year college degree.
- 35% of high school graduates enter 4-year public or private colleges.
- Only 10% of the state’s high school graduates enter a two-year college, proprietary school or apprenticeship program. And yet, nearly 60% of the year 2014 projected high demand occupations will require a two year associate degree. The state’s workforce system continues to suffer a severe shortage of qualified workers.

Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs offer tremendous opportunity to bridge the skills gap and give students a broad range of career options. In addition, CTE offers real-world experiences that engage and motivate students, while providing academic rigor.

FY 06-07 Louisiana High School CTE

- 131,599 of 181,489 (72.5%) of high school students enrolled in at least one CTE course
- 1,457 Nationally Approved Industry Based Certifications (IBCs) awarded
- 6,774 enrolled in IBSS; 808 partially completed
- 4,436 students in work-based learning (generating \$10,392,630)
- 10,624 students dually enrolled in 819 courses

FY 06-07 Louisiana High School CTE Funding

- \$11.7 million of Federal Perkins Act Funding
- \$217,314 State General Funds
- Local School Districts

Pathways, Articulation, and Industry-Based Certifications

The state’s Perkins funds are focused on areas that are defined as high wage, high skill, and high demand. As part of the CTE program offerings, students can participate in Work Based Learning in either paid or unpaid positions in industries aligned with their area of concentration. The State Department of Education offers 72 different areas of concentration or career majors defined under 16 national career clusters. The most popular clusters are education and training, health science, hospitality and tourism, art, audio visual technology, and communication.

In addition, the State Department of Education (DOE), in collaboration with the Louisiana Community and Technical College System and private industry, has developed 20 Career Pathway models based on statewide articulation agreements. Career Pathways offer a coherent, articulated sequence of rigorous academic and career courses.

The State DOE also recognizes 42 Industry Based Certifications (IBCs) which secondary CTE students can attain. IBCs are developed through collaboration with business, industry, and third party certifying agencies.

BEST PRACTICE POLICIES AND PRACTICES

The Workgroup spent considerable time reviewing and discussing policies and practices of effective CTE programs, including two respected papers: “Policy Issues Affecting Career and Technical Education” by the American Youth Policy Forum (AYPF), and “Retooling Career Technical Education” by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices.

“Policy Issues Affecting Career and Technical Education”

From May to September 2007, the AYPF held a series of four forums to present effective and innovative CTE programs. The forums identified the following key policy issues:

- **Skills and Competencies** – The need for a stronger focus on workplace skills and 21st Century skills to ensure workplace competencies.
- **Curriculum** – The need for more relevant, hands-on high school curriculum to help students understand the connections to future careers and post secondary education. CTE curriculum should be aligned and integrated with core academic standards.
- **Professional Development** – Many CTE teachers need academic training and many academic teachers need training in “applying” math and science to real world situations. It is critical that teachers be recruited from business and industry.
- **Multiple Pathways, Flexibility, Options** – Presenters advocated the concept of rigorous but relevant multiple pathways to graduation. Options could include college preparatory, a program of study career pathway, and/or articulation and dual enrollment in post secondary education. Two things are needed to ensure the effectiveness of this approach: (1) students must be provided information and guidance on available options, and (2) funding has to be flexible to allow more choice. Students need more guidance and counseling to make decisions about pathway and career choices. More flexible school scheduling is also needed.
- **Standards and Assessment** – Standards should be developed to include industry and 21st Century skills. Assessment instruments should be designed to evaluate the effectiveness of CTE programs.
- **Credit Articulation to Post Secondary Education** – Presenters endorsed the concept of articulation, but urged that policies be enacted to address barriers that keep students from earning credits on college-level CTE courses taken in high school.

“Retooling Career Technical Education”

This issue brief by the National Governors Association identifies proven policies and strategies that states are using to reinvent traditional “vocational education” programs by raising the academic standards of CTE:

- **Connect Education to Economic Growth Industries** – States should ensure that CTE programs of study are aligned with emerging, high growth job opportunities.
- **Use the Bully Pulpit to Promote CTE** – Governors are encouraged to promote CTE programs as viable pathways to career and post secondary readiness.
- **Include Employer Demanded Skills in Standards, Assessment, and Accountability Systems** – Standards should be aligned with post secondary and workplace demands, including 21st Century skills such as problem-solving, critical thinking, and communication.
- **Base CTE Curriculum around State Standards** – States must develop rigorous standards, model curricula, and course sequence for each CTE program of study—spanning both high school and at least two years of college.
- **Improve the Quality of CTE Teaching** - The CTE teacher certification process should require all CTE teachers to have at least an associate’s degree and /or to regularly update their industry certification. Teachers must not only have the requisite technical skills but be competent and proficient in academic content. Professional development is strongly encouraged.
- **Design Quality Control Measures to Promote Rigorous Programs** – States should employ strategies such as financial incentives, stringent course selection and approval processes, and dual credit programs for students in courses that combine academic and CTE content.
- **Require High School Students to Declare a Course of Study**- Governors and state leaders should consider policies that help students focus on a course of study. Policy options could include requiring students to declare majors upon entering high school or to use technology to explore education and career options.
- **Eliminate Duplicated Coursework Between High School and Post Secondary Systems** – Articulation agreements between high schools and post secondary institutions should eliminate duplicative coursework between these education systems.



BRIDGING THE SKILLS GAP RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATION 1

Support the Retooling and Expansion of Career and Technical Education

1(a): Urge and Support Increased Funding for CTE

Prior to the FY 08/09 fiscal year, the State General Fund provided only \$217,314 for Career and Technical Education. The State received \$23 million of Federal Carl Perkins Funds, most of which are flow-through funds that are split 56/44 between the State Department of Education and the Louisiana Community and Technical College System.

The State Department of Education recently established a Division of Career and Technical Education, giving CTE much needed administrative support. For the FY 08/09 fiscal year, the Governor and Legislature appropriated an additional \$4.5 million for expanded career oriented activities, work-based learning and industry-based certifications, as well as funding for program administration. In spite of this funding increase, Louisiana ranks below most southern regional states in providing state dollars for CTE.

As competition for business growth heightens and labor markets tighten, it becomes increasingly important and necessary for Louisiana to invest in workforce education and training.

The workgroup recommends that the Governor and State Legislature continue to support the expansion of CTE with additional General Funds, including additional funding for the expansion of Dual Enrollment and Articulation Agreements between secondary and post secondary institutions.

1(b): Align CTE with State Emerging Growth Industries, High Demand Jobs and Skills Employers Demand

The Occupational Forecasting Conference of the Louisiana Workforce Commission is responsible for developing the state's official forecast of job growth and demand. Legislation enacted in the 2008 Regular Session of the State Legislature revamps the Occupational Forecasting Conference to enable more accurate and comprehensive projections of statewide and regional employment supply, demand, and wage forecasts.

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Workgroup Recommendations:

- *The Louisiana Workforce Commission should fast-track implementation of changes in forecasting methodology.*
- *Forecasts should be made in consultation and collaboration with private industry.*
- *Forecasts provided by the Occupational Forecasting Conference should be the primary source of job demand forecasts used by the state's secondary and post secondary education systems in developing CTE curricula and course offerings.*
- *CTE offerings, including Career Pathways and Industry-Based Certifications, should be aligned with the Conference's forecasts of high demand, high growth jobs. Offerings should also be aligned with regional job demands and skills needs.*
- *Demand skills inventories should encompass "soft skills" (problem-solving, critical thinking, communicating) to the extent those skills are demanded by Louisiana employers.*

1(c): Align and Integrate CTE with Core Academic Curricula and Standards for Grades 6-12, Community and Technical College, and Post Secondary

Louisiana must offer all students an equal pathway for success. The pathway must include rigorous academic preparation and relevant career technical training. The state should prepare all students for a high school diploma and a career readiness certificate. This is consistent with the State DOE's mission of providing a world class education for all students and it acknowledges education as being the single pathway to student success.

High school curriculum must be rigorous and support core academic skills, but it must also be relevant and help students to understand connections to careers and post secondary opportunities.

CTE course offerings should be relevant to the lives of students, but they should also be rigorous enough to prepare students for graduation, post secondary education, and careers. Conversely, core curriculum should apply to what students do in real life and be taught in a way that enables students to connect learning to real world problems and situations.

This alignment and integration of rigor and relevance should cover the continuum of middle to post secondary education.

Workgroup Recommendations:

- *The state’s accountability system should contain rigorous academic standards for CTE, but standards should also take into account the value of ‘applied learning’ in core curricula.*
- *Standards should incorporate measures for soft skills and industry specific skills.*

1(d) Expand and Enhance Existing “Bridge” Tools

The state offers a number of tools to help students prepare for careers and post secondary opportunities. These include Dual Enrollment, Work-Based Learning, Industry-Based Certifications, and Literacy Enhancement.

The workgroup recommends that these programs be expanded and enhanced to encourage broader use. An example would be provision of credit to students for participation in integrated work-based learning programs, apprenticeships and other internship experiences that prepare them for industry-based certifications and careers.

The WorkKeys career readiness certificate offers students, workers, employers, and educators an easily understood and universally accepted credential that certifies workplace readiness. *The workgroup recommends that state funding be provided to enable all high school students to take the WorkKeys job skills assessment.*

1(e) Implement Measures to Build Local Capacity

The workgroup recommends that measures be implemented to help encourage local districts to offer more CTE courses and to build greater instructional capacity. These include:

- Continuing professional development for teachers and counselors
- Financial incentives such as performance-based funding tied to student enrollment and completion of CTE course in extremely high demand occupations
- Enabling business retirees to readily progress through special teacher certification requirements
- Establishing base salaries for CTE instructors at DOE and LCTCS that are competitive with private industry

RECOMMENDATION 2

Launch a Comprehensive CTE Communication and Promotional Campaign

It is commonly recognized that CTE is not widely perceived by students and parents, and in many cases by teachers and district policymakers, as a viable career option to student success. Many still view Career and Technical Education as being “vocational technical” courses and they fail to see the value and potential of less than four-year post secondary options.

As stated previously, the expansion of CTE is both a workforce and an educational imperative. The fastest growing high demand jobs in Louisiana are jobs that do not require a traditional baccalaureate degree. Parents and students should be better informed about job growth trends, skills demand, and career options. A considerable amount of messaging and promotion is needed to change perceptions and attitudes toward CTE and to steer parents and students to these career options.

The workgroup recommends that state agencies, in partnership with businesses, school districts and local communities, launch a comprehensive communication and promotional program to promote CTE as a viable career option to student success.

- The CTE communication plan must be multifaceted and multidimensional. It should be large-scale and comprehensive for all “relevance” tools and programs aimed at high school students.

- This should be a “state campaign,” not an agency campaign. It is recommended that state agencies collaborate in developing a single, common, over arching brand for marketing career options and career guidance programs and tools. The campaign should be jointly coordinated and funded by the Louisiana Workforce Commission, Department of Education, Board of Regents, Louisiana Economic Development, and the Louisiana Community and Technical College System. One department should be designated as lead agency with responsibility for coordinating the overall effort.
- Elements of the CTE communication plan should be integrated with existing promotional efforts such as the High School Redesign communication plan.
- To be effective, this function has to be locally or regionally driven. It must also comprise collaborative efforts between business, local government, economic and workforce development organizations, community-based entities, and education at all levels.
- Consideration should be given to outsourcing some promotional functions through competitively awarded performance-based grants to service providers who assist in developing and coordinating regional promotional partnerships. Strong business partnership and involvement has to be a key element of regional outreach and communication efforts.
- Communication and promotion has to be “programmed” as a regular, ongoing function of CTE. The overall plan should contain specific objectives with expected outcomes and timelines.

RECOMMENDATION 3

Expand Career Guidance and Education in Middle and High School

In addition to communicating and promoting the value and potential of relevance tools and programs, the state must take the lead to better guide students toward career pathways. The ratio of students to guidance counselors is grossly inadequate. But the state does have tools that provide excellent means and capacity for career guidance.

- The LA ePortal is a state-of-the-art career, college and work planning guide designed specifically for Louisiana K-12 students. The portal is also helpful to parents, educators, and employers. The LA ePortal provides a central repository of information to help students explore and plan careers and prepare for jobs. The portal serves as a one stop center for information on testing instruments such as ILEAP, GEE, EXPLORE, PLAN, and ACT. ***The workgroup recommends that ePortal and its service benefits be strongly promoted as part of the overall communication plan and that it be fully integrated into other career guidance initiatives.***
- The state’s Career Options Law was enacted in 1991. The law mandates that all high school students have a five-year educational plan and that all high schools offer career majors. Career majors are intended to provide a student with greater technical skill and a strong academic core. ***The workgroup recommends that a comprehensive program evaluation be made of the Career Options Law and that appropriate statutory and/or administrative and operational changes be proposed to ensure full compliance and to improve the statute’s overall effectiveness. Operational enhancements might include improved communication and more integrated data management systems.***
- The Louisiana Workforce Commission offers a Youth Portal at its website. The portal provides easy access to occupational and labor market information, as well as career planning and job readiness tips. ***The tool needs to be marketed to middle and high school students, teachers and parents.***
- ***The workgroup further recommends that the state consider piloting other career guidance tools such as Individual Learning Plans and Advisory programs, and mandatory career education course work.***
- ***The Louisiana School Counselors Association should be a primary conduit of information about all available career guidance tools.***
- ***Local school districts should place a high priority on hiring additional middle and high school guidance counselors.***
- ***Where feasible, information systems such as the Dropout Early Warning System and the LA ePortal should interface or be integrated or consolidated to improve service effectiveness.***

RECOMMENDATION 4

Incorporate 21st Century Skills into Curriculum, Standards and Assessment

To be successful 21st Century citizens, Louisiana students must have 21st Century required skills, knowledge and expertise. As described by The Partnership for 21st Century Skills, these skills sets include:

- Core Subjects and 21st Century Themes
- Life and Career Skills
- Learning and Innovation Skills
- Information, Media, and Technology Skills

A 21st Century school has a learning environment that uses project-based learning, collaborative teaching, and supportive technologies. Case models show that learning environments of this type yield very positive outcomes, including lower dropout rates, higher attendance, and higher academic achievement.

The workgroup recommends that Louisiana embrace the 21st Century Skills model as a framework for future high school redesign. The state should formulate its vision for 21st Century Louisiana schools and develop appropriate strategies and policies in curriculum, standards and assessment, and learning environments to achieve the vision.

A starting point would be to identify the essential “non-negotiable” elements of the state’s 21st Century Skills vision and to adopt policies that will ensure implementation of these elements at the district level. These non-negotiable elements might include:

- ***Project-based learning***
- ***Collaborative teaching***
- ***Integration of curriculum content for relevance***
- ***Continuous professional development of teachers and counselors***
- ***Adult advocacy for students in schools***

Early Childhood Education Workgroup

“Brain Research and Economic Development Studies Support Early Childhood Education”

LOUISIANA’S SCHOOL READINESS

Louisiana has improved its efforts to ensure that all children are prepared for school, but more work remains. Louisiana has made great strides in implementing programs that impact school readiness. The Louisiana Council for Children and Families has cited the following concerns:

- 71% of Louisianans believe more work is needed to ensure that our children enter kindergarten with the knowledge and skills they need.
- 68% of parents in Louisiana rely on some form of child care to be able to work and earn an income for their families.
- 78% of children under the age of 5 are being cared for outside of the home at least part of the day in Louisiana.
- Thousands of children in Louisiana are cared for in family-child day care homes, where the provider cares for six or fewer children. These providers could benefit from training or assistance in developmentally appropriate activities.
- Approximately 16,000 children in Louisiana are being served by LA 4, a high-quality early childhood program for at-risk students which has resulted in improved academic performance, as measured by standardized test scores. Reduction in retention and special education placement has also been noted for those students who took part in LA 4.
- In Louisiana, 63% of public school students meet the guidelines for Free or Reduced Price lunches, an indicator of poverty. These students are at-risk for poor academic performance, being retained multiple times, and dropping out of school or referred for special education services.
- In an effort to address early childhood concerns, more school districts are developing initiatives to address the needs of youngsters from birth to age five. For example, for the past 20 years West Feliciana Parish has instituted programs to address the needs of children from the time they are born to when they begin kindergarten. As a result, the parish has seen a consistent improvement in its test scores and has reduced its rate of poverty.

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STATE SCHOOL READINESS MODELS

Louisiana has identified early childhood education as a priority and has started several measures to help children begin school ready to learn. Early childhood initiatives in the state include:

- Bright Start is a new state initiative working to build a coordinated early childhood system to ensure school readiness.
- Louisiana is among the first 20 states to implement a Quality Rating System. Parents will have a guide to assist them in choosing quality child care. This system is voluntary in Louisiana and awards child care centers star ratings based on certain criteria, including staff qualifications, program standards, administrative practices, and family and community involvement.
- Louisiana’s LA 4 pre-K program is recognized nationally as being among the best in the nation. LA 4 is proving that high quality pre-K programs can make a difference for 4-year-olds in assuring that they can succeed regardless of their backgrounds.

Louisiana does have an assessment tool, but has not clearly defined school preparedness. Only seven states have adopted a definition for school readiness. They include Alabama, Arkansas, Hawaii, Indiana, Maryland, South Carolina, and Wisconsin. Twenty-two states use an assessment to determine school readiness.

The definition recommended by the workgroup is modeled after the Virginia and Arkansas models of school readiness. The Arkansas readiness to learn initiative is one of seven elements aimed at closing achievement gaps and raising achievement for all students. In addition, Arkansas recently participated in the *Getting Ready: Findings from the National School Readiness Initiative*. This was a 17-state program designed to identify indicators used to track results for children from birth through age 8. The goal was for states to develop a comprehensive set of school readiness indicators to inform public policy decisions and track progress in meeting key goals for young children.



EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATION 1

Define Louisiana School Readiness

“School readiness” describes the capabilities of children, their families, schools, and communities that will best promote student success in kindergarten and beyond. Each component- children, families, schools, and communities- plays an essential role in the development of school readiness. No one component can stand on its own.

- **Ready Children.** A ready child is 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/emotional and creative development. Children develop holistically; growth and development in one area depends upon development in other areas.
- **Ready Families.** A ready family has 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 are empowered and equipped to recognize their role as the child’s first and most important teacher, providing steady and supportive relationships, ensuring safe and consistent environments, promoting good health, and fostering curiosity, excitement about learning, determination, and self-control.
- **Ready Schools.** A ready school accepts all children and provides a seamless transition to a high-quality learning environment by engaging the whole community to ensure a continuity of care. A ready school welcomes all children with opportunities to enhance and build confidence in their skills, knowledge, and abilities. Children in ready schools are led by skilled teachers, who recognize, reinforce, and extend children’s strengths and who are sensitive to cultural values and individual differences.
- **Ready Communities and Stakeholders.** A ready community plays 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, policy-makers 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.

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Disclaimer: *The purpose of stating a definition for school readiness is to serve as a guide for curriculum planning and to produce individualized instruction for all children and to inform public policy. It is important to note that creating a “school ready” definition is not meant to prevent student entry into kindergarten, or to place strict labels on children.*

RECOMMENDATION 2

Expectations of School Readiness

In order to define, assess, and establish an understanding of school readiness, we must set objective, research-based benchmarks for each component of school readiness and develop clear strategies for measuring progress towards these benchmarks.

- **Ready children...**
 - **communicate effectively** with adults and children by:
 - labeling objects and feelings;
 - providing simple descriptions for events;
 - effectively conveying information, desires, and needs; and
 - using simple language and grammar to solve problems and to negotiate social interactions with adults and peers.
 - exhibit **personal and social/emotional** skills and a sense of self-worth by:
 - feeling secure and valued in their relationships;
 - expressing their emotions and taking pride in their accomplishments;
 - recognizing the consequences of their actions;
 - showing self-control; and cooperating with others, using non-physical ways to resolve conflicts

- display emerging **literacy** skills within the developmental domain of communication by:
 - showing interest in and interacting with books as they are read by adults;
 - answering questions;
 - learning to use new words and tell stories;
 - recognizing and producing speech sounds, such as rhymes, beginning sounds, and letter sounds;
 - identifying the letters of the alphabet;
 - learning about print concepts from books, signs, and household objects; and
 - engaging in drawing and pretend writing and writing their name, letters, and other printed symbols.
- show an interest and skill in **mathematics** by:
 - counting and using numbers to describe and compare;
 - recognizing and sorting simple shapes and describing their position;
 - identifying simple patterns;
 - making simple comparisons based on length, weight, time, temperature, and size; and
 - using objects in play, experimenting with materials, building blocks and puzzles.
- build early **science** skills by:
 - exploring and showing curiosity;
 - asking and answering questions about nature, why things happen and how things work;
 - identifying patterns and changes in daily life; and
 - making observations based on the five senses.
- learn about **history and social studies** by:
 - interacting with their family, peers, religious, and social communities;
 - recognizing ways in which people are alike and different; and
 - recognizing the relationships between people, places and time.
- enhance **physical and motor development** by:
 - learning to control their bodies;
 - strengthening their muscles;
 - practicing different movements;
 - participating in regular physical activity; and
 - practicing healthy living and appropriate daily care routines.
- are given opportunities for **creative** endeavors by:
 - participating in music/movement, dramatic expression and visual arts; and,
 - emphasizing the experience rather than the outcome.
- **Ready families...**
 - interact with their children, helping them to develop listening and communication skills and to express their feelings, needs, and wants. Adults:
 - read to and speak with children regularly and respectfully;
 - appreciate the child's view of the world;
 - encourage exploration of the world in which they live;
 - are trustworthy and dependable; and
 - engage with children with joy, warmth, and comfort.
 - encourage and act as the bridge to positive social relationships. Adults:
 - help children learn to cooperate with others;
 - help children follow simple directions and complete basic tasks;
 - foster friendships with other children;
 - teach children routines and how to respond to rules and structure;
 - help children learn how to handle disappointments; and
 - expose children to and help them describe different people, places, and things.
 - ensure their child's health and well-being by:
 - completing all appropriate eye, ear, dental, social/emotional and other medical screenings as well as immunizations.

- **Ready schools...**

- smooth the transition between home and school by:
 - communicating kindergarten standards and other school information to families through activities such as home visits, telephone calls, questionnaires, and kindergarten visitation days; and
 - forming effective relationships with parents and early childhood programs to share children's pre-kindergarten experiences and to assess their development.
- support instruction and staff development by:
 - employing highly qualified teachers;
 - maintaining appropriate class sizes;
 - encouraging professional development; and
 - using best practices in the classroom.
- support teachers as they assess the individual needs of children, design instruction based on these needs, and regularly monitor students' progress.
- partner with communities and families by participating in activities such as:
 - recreational and enrichment programs;
 - family literacy activities;
 - before and after-school care;
 - open houses; and
 - communication with other early childhood education programs in the community.
- provide resources and services to address the diverse and individual needs of students and their families including:
 - educational services;
 - health and mental health services; and
 - social services.
- emphasize the importance of early childhood education by:
 - regularly reviewing the quality, appropriateness, and alignment of the curriculum across all grades and phases of development; and
 - regularly focusing on and supporting the quality of teachers' interactions with children at all grade levels.

- **Ready communities and stakeholders...**

- ensure all children and their families have access as well as the resources necessary to receive high-quality early care and education.
- promote collaboration to reach the most vulnerable children and families through diverse channels of communication by:
 - supporting effective, innovative strategies; and
 - building a sustainable, comprehensive system that maximizes resources.
- educate policy-makers to formulate decisions that are grounded in best practice and evidence-based research.
- provide accessible and affordable family services related to physical health, mental health, and lifelong learning. These services include:
 - literacy, English language learning, parenting skills, and adult education;
 - home visiting programs;
 - basic health care and nutrition services, including prenatal care;
 - mental health counseling;
 - early identification and treatment for children with disabilities and other special needs;
 - drug and alcohol counseling;
 - family court services; and
 - child-abuse prevention.
- promote public assets such as parks, libraries, recreational facilities, civic and cultural venues and other opportunities to provide a better quality of life for families, encourage early learning opportunities, and foster community participation.

- regularly assess the status of children, families, schools, and community resources with regard to their role in school readiness and use these assessments in program planning and resource allocation.
- recognize, support, and sustain high-quality early care and education as a vital component of economic growth and development.

RECOMMENDATION 3

Develop a Louisiana Scorecard of School Readiness

Louisiana could benefit from a scorecard to address school readiness to ensure that education officials, community leaders and parents have the necessary tools and resources to prepare children for school.

School readiness can be assessed in terms of:

- Physical well-being and motor development
- Personal and social development
- How the child approaches learning
- Language development
- Cognition and general knowledge

A scorecard on early childhood school readiness can promote continuous improvement in student achievement and attendance. Research shows that it eventually impacts dropout rates and juvenile delinquency.

A scorecard should look at what early childhood providers are doing to make students ready for kindergarten.

Growth targets can be put in place to measure the amount of progress sites make every year to reach licensure, improve Quality Rating Scores and meet basic health and safety standards. Targets can also measure how well students do as they enter kindergarten.

Study and Planning Teams

Bridging the Skills Gap Workgroup

Jane Arnette
Wade Bishop
Brent Boe'
Jim Brandt
Janet Broussard
Sue Burg
Chris Cohea
Cindy Cutrera
Pete Darling
Ava Dejoie
Stephanie Desselle
Frances Farlow
Debi Faucette
Patricia Felder
Wayne Free
Allen Grant
Jim Henderson
Melba Kennedy
Ann Knapp
Girard Melancon
Patricia Merrick
Patrick Nelson
Brigette Nieland
Woody Oge
Dr. Jim Owens
Reba Poulson
Pamela Shows
John Warner Smith
Dr. Paul Theriot
Alice Thomas
Dr. Lisa S. Vosper
Angie White
Don Whittinghill
Karen Zoeller

Early Childhood Education Workgroup

Rick Bassett
Mary Alice Brasher
Melaine Bronfin
Dr. Pat Cooper
Randy Ewing
Ouida Forsyth
Lynda Gavioli
Sherry Guarisco
Dr. Mary Louis Jones
Pam Landry
Shelia Matute
Petrouchka Moise
Dr. Geoffrey A. Nagle
Kathy Noel
Cynthia Ramagos
Ivy Starns
Dr. Billy Stokes
Meg Scott
Nancy von Bargaen
Kahree Wahid

Louisiana's Promise Summit Planning Committee

Achievement Academy
Alliance for Education – Shreveport
Baton Rouge Convention & Visitors Bureau
Cardiovascular Consultants - Shreveport
Cecil J. Picard Center for Child Development
Communities In Schools of New Orleans, Inc.
Corporation for National & Community Service
deGravelles & Associates
Education's Next Horizon
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Louisiana Workforce Commission
Office of the Governor
State Farm Insurance Company
Superintendent, Zachary Schools



Education's Next Horizon

Education's Next Horizon is a group of business and 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. Based on our study, the next horizon of education should be built on the following observations:

- 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 improved teacher working conditions are keys to school improvement.

If public education is the key to Louisiana's future economy and quality of life, it is everybody's business. Education's Next Horizon will play a part in helping frame the debate for comprehensive systemwide 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 must sustain this work together across election cycles, political affiliations, and education factions.

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Development Academy*

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Educational Consultant

Christel Slaughter, Ph.D.
SSA Consultants

Billy Stokes, Ed.D
*Cecil J. Picard Center for Child
Development*

Phyllis Taylor
Taylor Energy Company

Alice Thomas, M.Ed.
Center for Development and Learning

Founding Sponsors



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