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## **GRADUATION SEASON: THE BEST AND WORST OF TIMES**

On a personal level, this graduation season is a great experience. My youngest child graduates from high school and my oldest completes her graduate studies.

All across the state of Louisiana, people are proudly gathering to celebrate the achievements of students at every level of education. It is the best of times.

But this graduation season could also be described as the worst of times. Many families have children that dropped out before completing high school. A lack of a diploma leaves these children little chance of being part of the knowledge economy.

The sad note is that dropping out is not an unusual occurrence. The goal of the education system in Louisiana is for all students to graduate and be prepared for post-secondary education or for a career. But nearly one-third of the children entering the 8<sup>th</sup> grade in our state will not walk to receive a diploma. Among graduates, nearly half do not seek post-secondary education opportunities and of those that pursue those opportunities, over 60% fail to graduate from community college, technical college, or a university. The result is that only 15% of our 8<sup>th</sup> graders will receive a post-secondary diploma. This tempers the excitement generated by the graduation season.

Louisiana has the most extensive and concentrated network of oil and gas pipelines in the world. We wouldn't tolerate losing 85% of the oil through leaks in the pipeline along the way. But we lose 85% of children in the education pipeline before completing post-secondary education – technical school, community college or a university.

We are losing human capital that is essential for growth and progress in our state. As one of the poorest states in the country, Louisiana can ill-afford to lose the knowledge power of its children.

There is no lack of potential remedies to the leaks in the education pipeline – if the public will is there to tackle the problems. We must invest in remedies to give children learning opportunities early in life by continuing to expand investments in quality early childhood education and literacy in early elementary years. We must develop ways to better engage students in higher elementary and middle school grades to prepare them for success in high school. And we must make a real effort to redesign high school with attention to the four “R’s” – rigor, relevance, relationships, and remediation.

As we celebrate the best of times of this graduation season, it should bolster our resolve to find ways to increase the graduation rate of students in our state. It is both a moral and an economic imperative.

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