

A Future at Risk

Meeting the Challenge of Louisiana's High School Dropout Problem

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Karen M. Rowley, Ph.D.

Primary Author of Report

krowley@la-par.org

Robert Travis Scott

President

robertscott@la-par.org

Alison Neustrom, Ph.D.

Research Director

alison@la-par.org

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Public Affairs Research Council of Louisiana
4664 Jamestown Ave., Suite 300
Baton Rouge, LA 70808
Phone: (225) 926-8414
www.la-par.org

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Executive Summary

“Dropout.”

As one of the most discouraging words in the English vocabulary, the term dropout carries with it a palpable sense of burden and pain that is borne both by individuals and by society in general. For every student who leaves high school, a future is placed at risk. For every freshman class in Louisiana that typically sees nearly one out of six students drop out before graduating, that risk is multiplied into proportions that jeopardize the future prosperity of the state itself.

Specifically, 8,797 members of the Louisiana freshman class of 2006 dropped out of high school at some point before graduation in 2010, a cohort dropout rate of 17 percent. Measured by the number of freshman-class students who leave school within four years, the cohort dropout rate is generally regarded as the most accurate assessment of how a state is performing. Louisiana has one of the worst cohort dropout rates in the nation.

If one looks at the total number of students who dropped out between 2006 and 2010, the figure is even more alarming. A combined 56,800 dropped out in that period. Of that number, approximately 59 percent were male, two-thirds were 17 or older, and two-thirds were African American. The 56,800 figure is somewhat misleading, however, because it just indicates the number of dropout occurrences. It does not necessarily account for students who dropped out and then returned to school, for example, and it may count the same student multiple times.

The toll of personal grief, lost wages and broader economic impact is severe. The problems for government can endure long after a student’s departure from school, because dropouts are more likely to need public assistance. Compared to high school graduates, dropouts have higher rates of unemployment, lower earnings, poorer health and higher rates of criminal behavior.

In Louisiana, which has one of the highest poverty rates in the country, the financial impact of the dropout rate is significant. The Alliance for Excellent Education, a national policy group that advocates for higher graduation rates, estimates that dropouts from Louisiana’s class of 2008 could cost the state roughly \$6.9 billion in lost wages over their lifetimes. An improved high school graduation rate would contribute noticeably both to the state’s productivity and to its bottom line.

Despite this, Louisiana’s graduation rate is moving slowly in the right direction, running against a national trend of stagnant or declining performance. In recent years the state has created three new curriculum tracks, reorganized the education department and launched the nation’s biggest experiment in charter schools in New Orleans in an effort to boost the graduation rate and reduce the dropout rate.

State and local officials have identified numerous programs to combat, directly and indirectly, the low graduation rate. The clear challenge now is

implementation. Political and education leaders must emphasize actions over words at both the state and local levels.

Budget constraints will be offered as explanations for failing to rise to the occasion. Some will say the underlying reasons that cause students to leave school — problems that stem from difficult home environments, poverty and other social impediments — are too great for an education system alone to remedy.

While recognizing these challenges, this report indicates that some of these problems are not insurmountable and that real progress is possible. The Legislature in 2009 set a goal for the state to reach an 80 percent graduation rate by 2014. That was a tall order considering the state's rate has been about 67 percent in recent years.

In response to the Legislature's direction, state education officials crunched the data to find out how many students were entering high school, how many were being promoted from grade to grade and how many more needed to finish in four years to meet the 80 percent target. They found that the state needed an additional 6,900 students to graduate by 2014 to reach an overall 80 percent rate. After looking at programs the department already had in place, officials calculated they would be short by 3,704 students if they did not make any additional efforts.

The question then became where to find the additional 3,704 graduates. In looking more closely at which students were dropping out, education department staff found that they could be divided loosely into two groups — those who simply did not have the skills or knowledge base necessary to succeed in high school, and those who did but who dropped out because of boredom or a catastrophic life event or discipline problems. It was on the latter group that the department decided to focus, primarily because these students offered the biggest potential for quick success and because most of them could be found in approximately 50 high schools that education officials dubbed high-priority schools (See Appendix B).



Armed with this knowledge, the state Department of Education revamped its strategy for helping high schools improve their graduation rates and lower their dropout rates. The resulting plan has 17 distinct elements that encompass a broad scope of options. Department officials do not expect every school to use every dropout prevention and career readiness program. Rather, the 80 percent strategy offers a menu of options from which district administrators and school principals can choose according to what they believe will be most helpful. The department, in turn, will try to provide local districts and schools with the expertise and assistance they need to make the programs work. Although the 50 high-priority schools are the main target of the department's strategy, any public high school in the state has access to these programs.

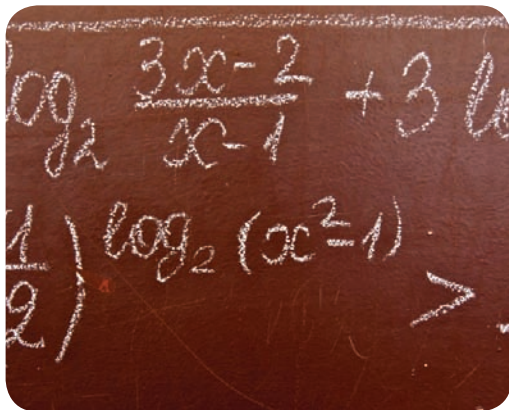
Nearly one in six public high school students in Louisiana drops out.

Education researchers and policymakers generally believe this kind of multiple pathways approach can have a significant impact on high school dropout rates. Although the evidence to support that strategy is still limited, what research exists points to positive results. So far the success stories across the nation have tended to focus on single school districts or high schools. No state has been the obvious one to emulate. Louisiana could be the first.

As the state and local districts seek to achieve a lower dropout rate and a higher graduation rate, they should avoid lowering educational standards as a means to reach them. High expectations should be established for all students, as well as a willingness to provide the necessary supports and interventions to help them succeed. The challenge goes beyond finding a way to get students to complete high school. Graduates must be adequately prepared for college or the next step toward the workplace. If not, then winning the graduation numbers game will be a hollow victory.

The state's emphasis from this point forward should focus on putting plans into action, dealing with at-risk students at all grade levels, tracking results and trends more usefully, and applying financial resources where they can be most effective.

Specifically, PAR makes recommendations covering three areas of concern: Strategies for Dropout Prevention; Measuring for Outcomes and Interventions; and Clearer Communication with the Public.



STRATEGIES FOR DROPOUT PREVENTION

① The state and local school districts should put resources behind dropout programs that show a track record of progress. In particular the administration and the Legislature should take the next steps needed to expand, renew or bring up to scale those programs proving to be effective.

② The governor, the Legislature and school districts should consider targeted dollars toward dropout prevention if they want improved results. The track record so far shows that effective dropout programs have been

backed by targeted grants and federal programs. An increase in the state's general financial support of local school districts would not necessarily ensure that districts would use the money to do their part to combat the dropout problem.

③ While the state should continue to lead the effort for dropout prevention in Louisiana by setting goals, upholding academic standards, tracking data, offering guidance and financially supporting key programs, state leaders and the Legislature should follow a strategy of emphasizing the role of local school districts in initiating and implementing programs to improve gradu-

ation rates. The state should require each local school system to pursue an effective plan that addresses the unique needs of its population.

MEASURING FOR OUTCOMES AND INTERVENTIONS

- ④ Proven outcomes should drive the state’s policy in selecting which curriculum tracks to offer in high schools. The Department of Education should monitor the three high school curriculum tracks to see how many students are enrolling in each one and how many are graduating. The state should collect vital information about where students go after graduation, whether it’s into the workplace, technical or community college, an apprenticeship or a four-year college. The information should be available to the public in a form that respects individual privacy but that also allows the public to see what progress is being made.
- ⑤ The Department of Education should implement a comprehensive information-gathering program that follows student performance from pre-kindergarten through at least one year beyond high school and identifies at-risk pupils. Such a program would include the already existing grade level expectations, which describe the knowledge and skills students are supposed to acquire in each grade, as well as the new “common core standards” the department plans to adopt. Those standards are part of a national initiative led by the National Governors Association to increase the rigor of the country’s academics. The data also would be useful in determining appropriate support and intervention measures.
- ⑥ The Department of Education should encourage local districts and schools to take full advantage of the information and analysis that will be available when the new Louisiana Education Data Repository System is fully operational and use that data to make the best instructional and intervention decisions possible for every student. In addition, the department should pursue funding to enhance the system.
- ⑦ The Department of Education should continue its efforts to build a comprehensive database warehouse that would encompass information from several state agencies — including the Department of Education, the Department of Children and Family Services, the Department of Health and Hospitals, the Office of Juvenile Justice, the Board of Regents and the Louisiana Workforce Commission.

CLEARER COMMUNICATION WITH THE PUBLIC

- ⑧ Education officials and the Legislature should focus on the cohort dropout rate as a key measure of the state’s progress in dealing with dropouts and publicize that figure as much as the annual dropout rate and the cohort graduation rate. The state Department of Education’s website could be improved substantially to provide clearer navigation and more useful information for local schools, districts and members of the general public.

Introduction

Nearly one of every six public high school students in Louisiana drops out. That dismal fact, based on state figures from recent years, corresponds roughly to the national average and demonstrates the magnitude of one of the most pressing problems facing the country today.

The effects of high dropout rates are profound both for the individual and society. Compared to high school graduates, dropouts have higher rates of unemployment, lower earnings, poorer health, higher rates of criminal behavior and increased dependence on public assistance.

A 2008 report from the California Dropout Research Project said the overall effect on governments is that they collect less tax revenue from dropouts but they spend more on services for this group to address problems created by more frequent health issues and criminal activity. Governments also spend more on public subsidies for those who fail to finish high school.

A study by the National Governors Association (NGA) Center for Best Practices estimated that dropouts cost the United States as a whole more than \$300 billion in lost wages and increased public sector expenses. Another study published in 2007 concluded that “just cutting the dropout rate in half for a single cohort of dropouts (nationwide) would generate more than \$45 billion in savings for society.”



In Louisiana, which has one of the highest poverty rates in the country, the financial impact of the dropout rate is significant. The Alliance for Excellent Education, a national policy group that promotes high graduation rates, estimates that dropouts from Louisiana’s class of 2008 could cost the state an estimated \$6.9 billion in lost wages over their lifetimes. An improved high school graduation rate would contribute noticeably both to the state’s productivity and to its bottom line.

Louisiana law requires that people stay in school until they are 18, and many students drop out legally when they reach that age. But others drop out before age 18, despite the law and despite another measure passed by legislators in 2008 that prevents dropouts from obtaining either a learner’s permit or a driver’s license. Enforcement of truancy laws is difficult and often not a priority for overworked law enforcement. In addition, lawmakers recently created a legal way for students to leave high school before age 18. A law passed in the 2011 session allows those who are 17 years old and who have completed the requirements for a General Educational Development (GED) certificate to leave high school early.

Why do students drop out? A 2006 report by the public policy organization Civic Enterprises found 35 percent of students said they dropped out because they were falling behind at school. Thirty-eight percent said they had too much freedom and not enough rules, while 42 percent said the problem was they spent time with people who weren't interested in school. Forty-three percent said they had been absent too many days and couldn't catch up, and the largest number — 47 percent — said their classes weren't interesting enough to make them want to stay.

A 2009 report by the NGA Center for Best Practices concluded that the reasons students leave school fall into four categories: academic failure, disinterest in school, problematic behavior and life events. A student might leave school because of pregnancy or the need to take a job to support a family. Research shows that generally the decision to drop out is one a student arrives at slowly and over a considerable period of time. Dropping out is not typically a sudden event. That means there is ample opportunity to reach these students before they finally leave.

The challenges for state education leaders is to reach students inclined to drop out and persuade them to stay in school and to find those students who already have dropped out and help them finish. This study is aimed at illuminating the steps Louisiana education leaders are taking and how best to proceed in the future.



The Numbers Tell The Tale

What is a “dropout” and how do we count those who drop out?

Confusion exists because there are several ways to measure how many students drop out and because states define the term dropout differently.

The NGA Center for Best Practices lists three ways to identify and measure dropouts:

- **An event (or annual) dropout rate** — the percentage of students who drop out each year.
- **A status dropout rate** — the percentage of a specific segment of the population who have dropped out. For example, the NGA Center’s 2009 report said that in 2006, the percentage of individuals between ages 16 and 24 who had dropped out was 9.3 percent.
- **A cohort dropout rate** — the percentage of students in a specific class, or cohort, who drop out within a set period of time. For instance, the cohort dropout rate for the class of 2011 would measure how many students who entered as freshmen in the fall of 2007 left school before the spring of 2011. Likewise, a cohort graduation rate would measure how many of those 2007 freshmen actually graduated in the spring of 2011. Used in this way, the term is called the four-year cohort rate.

The NGA Center for Best Practices contends that the cohort dropout rate is the truest measure of the full scope of the problem because it uses data examining a group of students over a span of time. According to the center, most states that publicize a dropout rate use the cohort measure.

In Louisiana, the Department of Education reports both an annual dropout rate and a cohort dropout rate (see Table 1; see Table 2 in Appendix C). The state’s annual dropout rate for students in ninth through 12th grades in 2010 was 4.6 percent, which reflected an improvement over 2009 when 6.3 percent of students dropped out. Education officials attributed some of the improvement to state and local efforts to keep students in school, but conceded some of the decline also was the result of a change in the definition of who is considered a dropout. The change affected the classification of those students who leave high school and enroll in an Adult Education Center. Prior to 2008-2009, these students were classified as dropouts. Beginning with the 2009-2010 school year, the department changed its definition to match the federal definition as described by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). If those students in the Adult Education Centers had been included in the 2009-2010 dropout rate



While the state’s annual dropout rate has improved, Louisiana still has the dubious distinction of having one of the highest cohort dropout rates in the country – 17 percent in 2010.

calculation, the rate would have been 5.8 percent, which still would have been an improvement over 2008-2009.

The Department of Education also calculates an annual dropout rate for students that encompasses grades seven through 12. In 2010, that dropout rate was 3.5 percent, which was an improvement over 4.8 percent in 2009.

Table 1 Louisiana High School Graduation & Dropout Rates

The cohort graduation and dropout rates are the percentage of students in each four-year group, or cohort, who graduate on time or drop out within four years. The annual dropout rate is the percentage of students who drop out from year to year.
**The 2005-2006 numbers were skewed heavily by the impact of hurricanes Katrina and Rita, making comparisons with succeeding years unreliable.*

	2005-2006*	2006-2007	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010
Cohort Graduation Rate	64.8 percent	66.3 percent	65.9 percent	66.6 percent	67.4 percent
Cohort Dropout Rate	20.6 percent	19 percent	18.6 percent	17.3 percent	17 percent
Annual Dropout Rate (Grades 9-12)	6.9 percent	6.9 percent	7 percent	6.3 percent	4.6 percent
Annual Dropout Rate (Grades 7-12)	5.6 percent	5.2 percent	5.2 percent	4.8 percent	3.5 percent

Source: Louisiana Department of Education

While the state’s annual dropout rate has improved, Louisiana still has the dubious distinction of having one of the highest cohort dropout rates in the country — 17 percent in 2010. That means that of the students who entered Louisiana high schools as freshmen in 2006-2007, 17 percent dropped out between then and graduation in 2010.

In 2010, Louisiana’s overall high school graduation rate was 67.4 percent — an increase of 0.8 percent over 2009 (see Table 1; see Table 3 in Appendix C). The graduation rate calculation is based on four-year cohorts (groups) of students. So in 2010, approximately one-third of those who entered high school in 2006-2007 did not graduate from the same school within the standard four years. At the national level, an average of about one-third of high school students do not graduate on time and that number is increasing, according to Education Week.

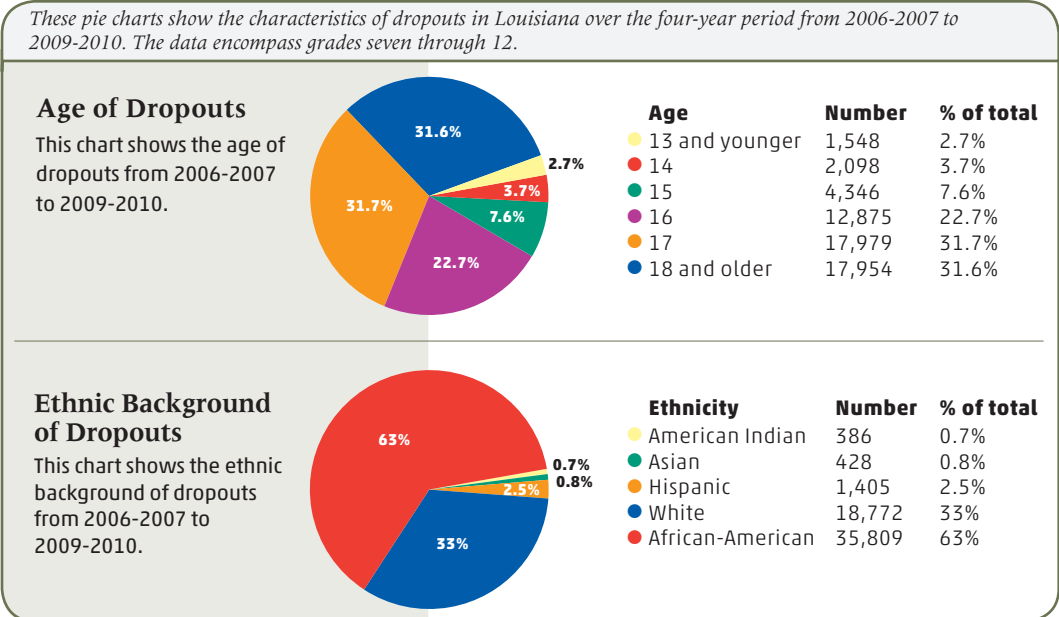
These numbers are sometimes misunderstood and deserve a closer look. If one takes Louisiana’s cohort graduation rate for 2010 — 67.4 percent — and combines it with the cohort dropout rate for 2010 — 17 percent — that adds up to 84.4 percent. What about the remaining 15.6 percent of students? They are not classified as dropouts but neither did they finish at the same high school within four years. The reasons include transferring to another school without being documented in the data, moving out of state, taking more than four years to graduate or earning a General Educational Development (GED) certificate instead.

Nationally, the precise high school graduation rate varies according to which organization is counting. For instance, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reported that the national high school graduation rate was 74.9 percent in 2008, the latest year for which national figures are available. Education Week’s annual Diplomas Count survey reported a figure of 72 percent, and the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS) found a rate of 70.1 percent.

By comparison, Louisiana’s 2008 graduation rate was 65.9 percent, according to the state Department of Education. The national reports were less generous. The NCES, for instance, put Louisiana’s high school graduation rate at 63.5 percent in 2008, the Diplomas Count survey put the state at 59.6 percent, and the NCHEMS reported 58.1 percent.

Are the variety of figures a source of contention? Definitely — which is one of the reasons why the National Governors Association voted unanimously in 2005 to define the high school graduation rate as the percentage of students who graduate in four years. It is not a perfect measure, as critics point out, because it fails to take into account those students who take longer than four years to finish or those who end up pursuing an alternative path to a credential. But the four-year cohort rate at least provides a way for states to compare themselves with each other and for the public to measure the progress, or lack thereof, of their local school districts.

The bottom line is that Louisiana’s graduation rate lags the national average but is moving in a positive direction while the nation’s trend is either stagnant or declining. Whether this counter-trend for Louisiana will continue may depend on the further implementation of programs put into place in recent years to combat the problem.



Source: Louisiana Department of Education

Louisiana's Situation

Today, education reform efforts in Louisiana are driven by the convergence of three separate but intertwined forces: 1) The High School Redesign Commission (recently renamed the College and Career Readiness Commission) under the auspices of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE), 2) the state Department of Education and 3) the Louisiana Legislature. Policies generated by the High School Redesign Commission and BESE, bills passed by the Legislature and initiatives developed by the education department have resulted in a smorgasbord of programs aimed at boosting the graduation rate and lowering the dropout rate. Education leaders hope the varied approaches will help them find ways to keep students in school and entice those who have left to come back and finish.

Adding impetus, as well, is a legislatively imposed deadline the state Department of Education faces. In 2009, legislators mandated that the state high school graduation rate reach at least 80 percent by the 2014 graduating class, a deadline that affects the freshmen who entered high school in the fall of 2010. Despite the legislative deadline, the law does not specify any penalties for failure to meet the 80 percent target. Instead, the law says that legislators may enact other measures they deem necessary to help improve the graduation rate, and it makes a portion of the state superintendent of education's annual performance evaluation contingent on achieving the 80 percent rate.

In numerical terms, state and local education leaders must find ways to increase the graduation rate by 12.6 percentage points — from 67.4 percent in 2010 to 80 percent in 2014 — in less than four years. Considering that the state's high school graduation rate rose only slightly from 64.8 percent to 67.4 percent from 2005-2006 to 2009-2010 (see Table 1), the challenge is enormous.

LOCAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS

Although much of this study is focused on the state's efforts to improve Louisiana's high school dropout and graduation rates, local educational authorities — school districts — bear a responsibility for addressing these problems as well. What the graduation and dropout numbers show clearly is that many local districts have failed in that responsibility over the past decade or so.

At the same time, other local districts are working to increase their high school graduation rates and lower their dropout rates. Some of them are highlighted in boxes, called School District Initiatives, placed throughout this report.

Local education leaders may cite lack of funding and resources as reasons for their inability to improve their graduation and dropout rates, but for 11 years — from 1999-2000 to 2009-2010 — districts saw their state funding

increase each year. In addition, the state Department of Education has been working over roughly the same period to provide local districts with information, support and resources that could help them address the dropout problem. In 1998, BESE and the Department of Education set up the School Accountability System, which gradually has raised the threshold for acceptable performance among schools and districts. In the past decade the state also has reformed and strengthened high school curriculum offerings. All of these efforts have been designed to encourage and prod local districts into improving their graduation and dropout rates.

Despite this work, the state's graduation and dropout numbers have shown only incremental improvement. What this suggests is that part of the problem lies in the decisions local school districts make. How a district chooses to spend its annual state allocation of money or other resources will have an impact on how successful it will be in improving its graduation and dropout rates. Local school district authorities do not have to be solely dependent on state aid to tackle their dropout problem. Rather, each district can use its own money or seek outside assistance to institute its own dropout intervention programs or those offered by state and national programs. Local district officials also can try to raise their own taxes, provided they can persuade voters to approve them.

SCHOOL DISTRICT INITIATIVES

Example 1: West Baton Rouge

The effort to improve Louisiana's graduation and dropout rates is by no means one-sided. In addition to the state Department of Education initiatives, much work is being done at the local level in many school districts across the state.

In West Baton Rouge Parish, the district has a set of programs to address its dropout problem. Many of the programs were set up for other purposes initially, but district officials found they were having a positive effect on keeping students in school. Among them are a focus on literacy and numeracy skills in elementary and middle school, the implementation of a mentorship program at one of the middle schools, the implementation of Ninth Grade Academies at both high schools in the district and the installation of the Dropout Early Warning System (DEWS) to help identify at-risk students earlier so there is time to intervene.

The district also has set up an activity bus at each high school that takes students home as late as 5 p.m. Having access to the bus enables students to stay after school for tutoring or for extracurricular activities and encourages them to stay engaged.

Another major part of the district's dropout prevention efforts is an emphasis on early learning. Nearly every 4-year-old in the parish is enrolled in a pre-kindergarten class. In addition, the district is the grant holder for federal Head Start money and officials have used the funds to enroll 136 at-risk 3-year-olds in the program.

The decision to focus considerable resources on early intervention was a deliberate one on the part of the superintendent and is backed up by research that shows the importance of engaging children in the learning process as soon as possible, particularly when they come from disadvantaged households.



LOUISIANA HIGH SCHOOL REDESIGN COMMISSION

In 2004, then Gov. Kathleen Blanco created the High School Redesign Commission (of which PAR was a member through 2011) to make recommendations on how the state's high schools should be redesigned so more students graduate with the skills they need to succeed both in the workplace and in postsecondary education. Among the topics the commission examined were increasing the rigor of the high school curriculum, reducing the dropout rate and expanding opportunities for dual enrollment, in which students may take classes at two- or four-year colleges while in high school.

The commission published two reports — in 2006 and 2007 — that offered numerous suggestions for change in Louisiana's high schools. The 2006 report focused on a set of broad goals, such as high academic expectations and an accountability system to monitor student progress.

The 2007 report offered six specific recommendations for improving high school education:

- Requiring four units (courses) of math for high school graduation.
- Implementing a more rigorous curriculum (called the LA Core 4) for incoming freshmen in 2008-2009.
- Strengthening the career and technical training courses that students can take as part of their diplomas.
- Modifying the graduation index so that the high school accountability program is better aligned with the goals of high school redesign. The graduation index is used to help calculate the school performance score for each high school. A school is awarded points for every student it graduates, and additional points are awarded based on the types of credentials with which students graduate, i.e., TOPS eligibility, an academic or career endorsement, an industry-based certification and so forth.
- Replacing the Graduation Exit Examination with end-of-course tests, beginning with the ninth-grade class of 2009-2010.
- Improving dropout prevention and recovery programs.

LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

In the summer of 2008 under Gov. Bobby Jindal's administration, the state Department of Education released its plan to improve Louisiana's high schools.

The plan, which was created with the recommendations of the High School Redesign Commission in mind, had four goals:

- Reduce the number of dropouts and increase the high school graduation rate.
- Increase students' readiness for postsecondary education.
- Increase students' career readiness.
- Increase students' participation in postsecondary education.

To achieve these goals, department officials made numerous changes. An electronic Dropout Early Warning System (DEWS) was created to identify students with attendance problems, low or failing grades or repeated discipline problems. The system was available to all local districts, but they were not obligated to use it. The department also set up school-level dropout intervention programs, revised the Louisiana Comprehensive Curriculum, created academic “catch-up” and credit recovery programs and created the Ninth Grade Initiative to provide extra support for incoming freshmen. In addition, the department put into place two Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) initiatives called High Schools That Work and Making Middle Grades Work. The agency also expanded the national Jobs for America’s Graduates (JAG) program, which targets at-risk youth. (See Chart 1 in Appendix C for a complete list of programs and initiatives.)

Graduation standards were raised with the addition of a fourth required math course and the implementation of the LA Core 4 curriculum. Development of end-of-course assessments was started, and Advanced Placement and dual enrollment courses were expanded. The LA ePortal was created to offer students a one-stop education and career planning site. More courses were offered and improvements were made in the career and technical education program.

Department officials also established Early College High Schools and developed more ways to allow students to receive college credit for high school courses. The Taylor Opportunity Program for Students (TOPS), which provides merit-based scholarships, was expanded as well.

One of the key elements in the education department’s plan was the implementation of the LA Core 4 curriculum. The curriculum is a more rigorous program of study than previously existed because of the additional math unit requirement and more rigorous science classes. It requires four units each of English, math, science and social studies, plus eight additional units encompassing health, physical education, the arts and electives.

Although the LA Core 4 is the preferred curriculum, there is also a somewhat less rigorous curriculum called the Basic Core that students may opt into with the approval of their parent or guardian. The LA Core 4 curriculum is designed to prepare students for entry into college. The Basic Core curriculum, while requiring the same number of English and math units, focuses more on electives geared toward a specific career area. The total number of units a student must earn to graduate is the same — 24 — and both curriculum tracks lead to the state’s standard high school diploma.

School District Initiatives

Example 2: Lincoln

At Ruston High School in Lincoln Parish, school leaders have established New Tech @ Ruston, one of 42 New Tech High Schools in the country and one of eight in Louisiana. New Tech High Schools are different from traditional high schools in that they focus on project-based learning and collaboration. Students use laptop computers rather than textbooks, and they work alone and in groups.

Lincoln Parish school officials have designed New Tech @ Ruston to be a school within a school so students end up taking their core classes at New Tech and then join other students in the general student body for electives. New Tech @ Ruston completed its first year of operation in 2010-2011 with 100 freshmen who were chosen by lottery. The school will continue to add 100 freshmen each year.

In addition, Ruston High School administrators have set up a Freshman Academy to help incoming freshmen adjust to the different demands of high school.

In addition, BESE members agreed to waive seat-time requirements for those districts that request it. Under BESE policy, students are required to attend school for a minimum period of time in order to earn credit for courses even if they can show they know the material. With the change in policy, districts have the flexibility to use a proficiency test to determine if students have mastered the necessary skills and to give them credit for the course if they pass, regardless of how much time they might actually have spent in the classroom.

LOUISIANA LEGISLATURE

In 2009, the Legislature, expressing frustration with what it perceived as a lack of progress in improving the high school graduation rate, passed two important education bills. The first ordered the state Department of Education to achieve an 80 percent high school graduation rate by the class of 2014. Before that, the department had been operating under a 2016 deadline recommended by the High School Redesign Commission and approved by BESE.

A frustrated Louisiana Legislature created the Career Diploma in 2009.



The second bill created a Career Diploma curriculum that offers high school students an opportunity to earn a diploma separate from the state's standard high school diploma. The measure passed despite objections that its graduation requirements were less rigorous than the newly instituted LA Core 4 and Basic Core curricula. For instance, the Career Diploma curriculum requires students to earn only 23 units to graduate. It also has less rigorous English and math components (see Table 4 in Appendix C). In addition, the law permits over-age eighth-graders to be promoted to the ninth grade even if they fail part of the eighth-grade LEAP test as long as they agree to enroll in the Career Diploma curriculum.

The Career Diploma option took effect with the start of the 2009-2010 school year. Because of the short time between passage of the law in June 2009 and the start of the school year in August, all but 11 of the state's school districts asked for and received a one-year waiver so state and district education leaders could determine how best to set up the Career Diploma.

That first year, approximately 250 students enrolled. In the 2010-2011 school year, the Career Diploma track was implemented in districts state-wide. Updated numbers through spring 2011 show that more than 2,300 students across the state now are following the Career Diploma curriculum (see Tables 5 and 6 in Appendix C).

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION REORGANIZES

Financial and administrative changes also have had an impact on the state's role in education. The state is a major source of funds for local school districts through a multi-billion dollar annual allocation of support from the Minimum Foundation Program (MFP). The amounts allotted to each district are formulated by state education officials and approved each year by the Legislature. In 2009, for the first time in nine years, the state per-pupil allocation established by the Minimum Foundation Program was not increased. Instead, the state allotment was held steady. Many districts received more MFP money overall but that was due to an increase in enrollment. This pattern has now continued for the third year in a row, with more money overall distributed by the MFP but no increase in the per-pupil allocation.

While there was no cut in the per-pupil allocation, local school districts saw a decline in the amount of discretionary money available because of increases in mandated costs such as retirement programs. School districts also must pick up the cost of remediation classes for students who fail high-stakes tests, bus transportation for private and parochial students and stipends for nationally board certified teachers. In addition, legislators cut the Department of Education's operational funding.

In the wake of the budget crisis, Department of Education officials spent the second half of 2009 and most of 2010 re-creating their strategy for public education. The department itself was reorganized from the top down into three main offices: Literacy, STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) and College & Career Readiness (see Chart 2).

Part of the high school graduation/dropout problem lies in the decisions local school districts make. Such things as how a district chooses to spend its MFP money or what resources it avails itself of have a big impact on how successful it will be in improving its graduation and dropout rates.

Chart 2 Department of Education's Nine Critical Goals

As part of its regrouping in light of the state's budget problems, the department reorganized itself and focused its mission on these nine goals.

- | |
|--|
| 1. 75 percent of students will enter kindergarten ready to learn. |
| 2. 90 percent of students will be literate by third grade. |
| 3. 90 percent of students will enter fourth grade on time. |
| 4. 90 percent of students will be proficient in English Language Arts by eighth grade. |
| 5. 90 percent of students will be proficient in math by eighth grade. |
| 6. 85 percent of students will graduate on time. |
| 7. 75 percent of students will be postsecondary or workforce-ready. |
| 8. Students will complete one year of postsecondary education. |
| 9. Students will achieve all of the above goals regardless of race or class. |

Source: Louisiana Department of Education

The Office of College & Career Readiness has four overarching goals:

- Students will graduate on time.
- Students will enroll in postsecondary education or graduate workforce-ready.
- Students will successfully complete at least one year of postsecondary education.
- Students will achieve these goals regardless of race or class.

To address the first goal, department officials decided to change the way the department works with school districts, administrators and teachers. In the past, the emphasis has been on compliance, that is, on making sure local districts comply with the vast body of laws and regulations that govern K-12 education in Louisiana. Instead, department officials shifted their approach to a service model in which they ask district officials what they need to help improve their education outcomes. The department staff then works with the local districts to figure how best to accomplish those goals and what resources — whether federal, state or local — might be available.

The new service model was one born of necessity. Previous efforts to improve student achievement have had mixed success and the reality is that the state still ranks near the bottom of most lists that evaluate educational quality. From a pragmatic perspective, the department does not have the money to fund many of the initiatives it has established. So if these initiatives are to be put into practice, local education leaders either must find the means within their own districts or look for funding elsewhere.

SCHOOL DISTRICT INITIATIVES

Example 3: Lafayette

In Lafayette Parish, education officials have placed a strong emphasis on career and technical training and certification through the use of Career Academies, which are small schools within a school. Each Career Academy focuses on a different theme: business and finance, computer repair and maintenance, design, engineering, health careers, information technology, law enforcement, and travel and tourism.

The district also has an Early College Academy on the South Louisiana Community College campus that lets students earn high school credits and college credits toward an associate's degree at the same time. The district operates a career center that allows high school juniors and seniors to take their core courses at their home school and then come to the center for specific career training.

Lafayette Parish high school students also have another option with the David Thibodaux Career and Technical High School /STEM Academy. The school combines core courses in the sciences and humanities with the specific technical training students need to pursue an assortment of career areas. District officials hope the school will help improve the graduation rate as well as produce students who have earned diplomas, industry certifications and college credit.

THE 80 PERCENT SOLUTION

With the deadline approaching for better graduation rates, state education officials crunched the data to find out how many students were entering high school, how many were being promoted from grade to grade and how many more needed to finish in four years to meet the 80 percent target. They found that the state needed an additional 6,900 students to graduate by 2014 to reach an 80 percent rate. After looking at programs the department already had in place, officials calculated they would be 3,704 students short in meeting the 80 percent deadline if they did not make any additional efforts.

SCHOOL DISTRICT INITIATIVES

Example 4: Caddo

Caddo Parish school officials established the Caddo Career & Technology Center with the goal of providing high school students a chance to enroll in one or more of 25 courses that explore different career fields, earn industry-based certifications and diploma endorsements, and use dual enrollment to get a head start on college. The center draws its students from Caddo Parish's high schools. Students from the regular high schools apply for admission and if accepted spend part of each school day at the center's campus.

The center has partnerships with local businesses and industries, which provide advice on which skills and careers are most needed, and the Caddo Career & Technology Scholarship Foundation provides \$1,500 scholarships to students who qualify to continue their technical education after high school.

The question then became where to find the additional 3,704 graduates. In looking more closely at which students were dropping out, education department staff found that they could be divided loosely into two groups — those who simply did not have the skills or knowledge base necessary to succeed in high school, and those who did but dropped out because of boredom, a catastrophic life event or discipline problems. It was on the latter group of students that the department decided to focus, primarily because they offered the biggest potential for quick success and because most of these students could be found in approximately 50 high schools that education officials dubbed high-priority schools (see Appendix B). These schools share several characteristics: They have student populations of more than 1,000; the students in question tend to have eighth-grade LEAP scores of Basic or above; and after four years, these students generally have not graduated.

Armed with this knowledge, the Office of College & Career Readiness revamped the department's strategy for helping high schools improve their graduation rates and lower their dropout rate. The resulting plan has 17 distinct elements (see Chart 3 in Appendix C). The scope of the programs is broad. Accelerated Pathways, for instance, is designed to help over-age students graduate in three years, while Jobs for America's Graduates (JAG) focuses on dropout

prevention and recovery even as it teaches students academic, workplace and life survival skills. Everybody Graduates! is an extension of the Ninth Grade Initiative and is aimed at helping students successfully move from the eighth grade to the ninth grade. The Areas of Concentration component is designed to organize career-specific programs that will be part of the Career Diploma and Basic Core curriculum tracks. The newest piece of the strategy is Connections, which replaced the largely unsuccessful Pre-GED Options program in the fall of 2011. This program is targeted at students who are older than most peers in their grade.

State education officials do not expect every school to use every dropout prevention and readiness program. Rather, the 80 percent strategy offers a menu of options from which district administrators and school principals can choose according to what they believe will be most helpful. The department, in turn, will try to provide the local districts and schools with the expertise and assistance they need to make the programs work. Although the 50 high-priority schools are the main target of the department's strategy, any public high school in the state has access to these programs.

DATA-BASED DECISION-MAKING

The 80 percent strategy includes a data collection and analysis component. Regional coordinators in the Office of College & Career Readiness regularly visit the highest-priority high schools as well as any other high schools whose principals request it. The coordinators gather data related to student attendance, discipline problems, and math and English course grades. From these data, education officials can see how many students in a high school could be at risk of dropping out and can offer suggestions about which programs might help. Department officials say there is more demand for assistance than staff available to provide it.



Key to all this work is the Superintendent's Delivery Unit (SDU), which analyzes data from the districts and schools. The state gathers hundreds of bits of information on each public school student every year using a variety of data systems. Each of the systems was designed to serve a specific need but they were not designed to talk to each other. The SDU's job is to analyze the various pieces of data across the systems to figure out what they say about individual students, schools and districts and about the broader picture of education in Louisiana.

For instance, the SDU can determine which students are at high risk of dropping out and provide that information to high school principals and counselors so they can determine appropriate intervention efforts. The unit can detect which schools do well with student achievement in the ninth and 10th grades, but then taper off in the 11th and 12th grades. With that type of information, education officials can meet with local school leaders to figure out the problems and suggest actions to address them.

The SDU also examines data generated by the various dropout prevention programs. Based on those results, the unit can make recommendations about which programs to keep, which ones to tweak and which ones to discard. For example, the data showed that the Pre-GED Options program, which was designed to help at-risk, over-age students acquire the skills necessary to pass the GED test, was failing miserably. Only a handful of students in

the program ever earned GED certificates. As a result, the department has eliminated the Options program and replaced it with Connections. The new approach is targeted toward the same students but will provide additional support in the form of academic and behavioral interventions, mentoring, parental involvement and tailored education plans.

LOUISIANA EDUCATION DATA REPOSITORY SYSTEM

In 2009, the department received a \$4.1 million federal grant to develop the Louisiana Education Data Repository System (LEDRS). LEDRS has three goals: help support a single data warehouse that would bring together educational data now kept in separate databases, provide a mechanism for automated federal reporting and for the generation of other reports, and create three new, stand-alone data systems to track homeless students, students with disabilities and certain student performance measures.

LEDRS is a database system that will track students from kindergarten through 12th grade via a unique identifying number, or key, that will stay with a student throughout the elementary and secondary years. The key will allow department and district staff to follow students over time, identify their obstacles, determine what support programs or interventions might help, and provide that assistance so students have the best chance to graduate.

The system will address the problem of not every district being able to tie into the department's Dropout Early Warning System (DEWS). Currently only those districts using one specific type of administrative software can link to DEWS. When LEDRS is fully functional, districts will be able to send their information to the central database regardless of what software they are using. The practical effect will be that department staff will be able to identify students in any district who exhibit the early warning signs that could lead to dropping out and work with the districts and schools to prevent that outcome.

While the completion of LEDRS could go a long way toward helping the Department of Education and local districts more easily and quickly analyze data and tailor instructional and intervention strategies, the problem of stale information remains. That is, right now, the department collects various types of information from the districts between two and four times a year. What is really needed, state and local officials say, is access to data that is updated daily. Such real-time data will come only when the central database system is configured to accept daily transmissions of information from the districts.

SCHOOL DISTRICT INITIATIVES

Example 5: Jefferson

At the end of the 2010-2011 school year, Jefferson Parish education leaders announced plans to set up a turnaround zone within their school district to work with several of the district's lowest performing schools. The turnaround zone was implemented beginning with the 2010-2011 school year. A turnaround officer was hired to oversee the schools and a portion of the faculty and staff at each school were replaced. Under the turnaround process, research-based instructional methods will be used, the school day will be lengthened and an incentive pay program known as the Teacher Advancement Program will be implemented.

District officials also said they planned to convert an eighth low-performing school into a charter school and hire an independent operator to run it. Planning for that change will take place during the 2011-2012 school year.

That, of course, will take more money. Department officials plan to apply for another federal grant that would allow them to enhance LEDRS so it can accept daily data feeds from the districts. In turn, the system would generate “dashboards” that would provide overviews of every student in the state’s public education system. Those dashboards would offer information at a glance for every student — family circumstances, academic performance, assessment results and other relevant information. With such a tool in place, the hope is that teachers, principals and education officials would be able to assess students’ needs and challenges more quickly and design instruction strategies accordingly.

CHARTER HIGH SCHOOLS

Designed for various purposes, charter high schools also are among the tools that the Department of Education hopes will increase graduation rates and lower the number of dropouts. Although they are not formally part of the department’s 80 percent strategy, charter high schools offer yet another education option for students who might otherwise drop out.

Charter schools have been permitted in Louisiana since 1995. In the 2010-2011 school year, 90 charter schools operated in the state. Of those, 21 were high schools (see Table 7 in Appendix C). Another seven contained high school grades within a K-12 enrollment framework. These charter high schools reflect a wide range of areas of concentration. Some focus on college-prep academics while others are built around technology, science and math or foreign languages. One offers certifications in career fields related to agriculture.

Whatever their focus, the charter high schools all have two overarching goals: to graduate all of their students and to make sure they are ready to move on to the next phase of their lives — whether it’s directly into the workplace or into a postsecondary program.

SCHOOL DISTRICT INITIATIVES

Example 6: St. John the Baptist

Leaders in St. John the Baptist School District have targeted over-age students with their Wildcat Success Academy, which is housed at East St. John High School. The program started in the fall of 2010 with 43 students. The goal is to help students catch up with the course credits they need to graduate.

Students must apply for admission to the academy. Those who are accepted attend the academy for two class periods each day. Rather than traditional classroom instruction, the program uses computers and educational software that allow students to work at their own pace. Students complete lessons and take tests via the computer. Five teachers, including one special education teacher, are available to work one-on-one with students as needed.

Intervention Efforts

No state education department, local school district or national research organization has yet discovered the magic bullet that will dramatically improve both graduation and dropout rates among the nation's high schools. Rather, most have found that a variety of programs works best to meet the different challenges students face as they pursue high school diplomas. Many at-risk students appear to benefit from specialized career and technical education, and a growing body of research indicates that an effective long-term strategy to address the high school dropout problem includes a focus on early childhood education. Whatever the programs, funding and reliable data will be key factors in determining the best outcomes. This section examines these themes and how they are taking shape in Louisiana.

SCHOOL DISTRICT INITIATIVES

Example 7: Ascension

In Ascension Parish, which has one of the fastest growing school districts in the state, administrators implemented Ninth Grade Academies four years ago and found they had a dramatic impact on keeping students in school and on track to graduate on time. In addition, one of the high schools runs a Summer Bridge program each summer aimed at middle-of-the-road rising ninth-graders. The three- to four-week program exposes the students to science and career/technical classes and shows them what they can expect in high school. The district also has a credit recovery program for students who have failed a class and an attendance recovery program to help students with excessive absences make up some of the time.

The district has expanded dual enrollment opportunities for high school students and has partnerships with River Parishes Community College, Louisiana Technical College and the Associated Builders & Contractors. It also has set up Edline, a Web-based communication service for parents similar to sites used by some other school districts. With the system, parents can track their children's grades, attendance and disciplinary actions. District officials say the system has helped increase the number of parents who talk with teachers and made it harder for students to hide their grades. In the fall of 2011, the district plans to implement two state programs – Accelerated Pathways and Connections – to provide its students with more options to stay in school and graduate.

The Ascension superintendent also has set up a school turnaround zone within the district and placed seven of the lowest-performing schools in it, including one high school. As part of that effort, a central office staff member has been assigned to each school to provide support and act as a liaison with the central office. The emphasis for these schools will be on identifying student weaknesses, coming up with strategies to address them and then monitoring the data to see if the strategies are working.

MULTIPLE PATHWAYS

A dominant theme in Louisiana education policy is the shift to a multiple pathways approach to keep high school students interested and engaged. Over the past several years, state education leaders have developed multiple options that school districts and students can use to increase their chances of success.

Two of Louisiana's programs are drawn from nationally implemented initiatives — the Career Academies and the National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Program. These programs are recognized as effective by the What Works Clearinghouse, an organization that tracks education policies and rates them according to their ability to help students progress in school.

Career Academies are typically schools within a school that offer career-based courses geared toward a specific theme. In Louisiana, between 13 and 30 Career Academies exist. As of now, no accurate count is available. The National Career Academy Support Network lists some 30 Career Academies in Louisiana, while the state Department of Education shows just 13. Part of the discrepancy likely comes from the fact that the state only keeps track of those Career Academies that are funded with federal Carl Perkins grant money. Some of the high schools offer just one academy, such as Carencro High School with its Academy of Information Technology. Others offer two or more. John Ehret High School in Marrero, for example, has Career Academies that focus on eight career areas. The What Works Clearinghouse reports that Career Academies across the nation help keep students in school.

Louisiana has adopted a multiple pathways approach to try to keep high school students interested and engaged.

Louisiana has three sites that offer the National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Program — Camp Beauregard in Pineville, Camp Minden near Bossier City and the Gillis Long Center in Carville, near Baton Rouge. The National Guard runs the program, which targets high school dropouts between the ages of 16 and 19. The program has two components: a five-month residential, military-style school and a 12-month post-residential period in which case managers and mentors work with students as they either continue with their education or enter the workforce. The Youth ChalleNGe Program operates in 27 other states and has a positive track record. According to the program's website, in 2009, more than 60 percent of all of its graduates across the country earned either a high school diploma or a GED certificate. The What Works Clearinghouse review found that the Youth ChalleNGe Program has a positive effect on helping students complete school. Funding for the program comes from the federal government, and in September, Louisiana Sen. Mary Landrieu announced that \$125 million had been placed in the Senate Defense Appropriations Bill for the program.

The Louisiana Department of Education also uses a widely acclaimed national program called Jobs for America's Graduates, or JAG. JAG targets at-risk students and those who already have dropped out. The program focuses on career development and communication, workplace and life skills. The goal

is for every student to earn either a high school diploma or a GED certificate. School leaders interested in setting up a JAG site on their campuses must apply for some of the federal funding that supports the program. The funding, which comes from the Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF) money the state receives, pays for a school site coordinator, which is required by the national JAG program.

JAG has existed in Louisiana for the past 16 years. Six years ago, there were 17 JAG sites in the state and they were funded through a state allocation. Then the state decided to use TANF money to expand the program. Today, 82 sites across Louisiana ranging from high schools to middle schools to alternative schools have JAG programs. With the expansion, education officials found that student outcomes improved markedly, and the latest data available show 93 percent of Louisiana students in the in-school portion of the JAG program graduate and 96 percent find jobs. The national JAG office places Louisiana's program among the highest performing states.

Data show that 93 percent of Louisiana students in the in-school portion of JAG graduate, while 96 percent find jobs.

In 2009, the Department of Education created a state version of JAG called the Educational Mission to Prepare Louisiana's Youth (EMPLoY). EMPLoY also was aimed at at-risk students and was a joint initiative of the department, the Governor's Office, the Louisiana Workforce Commission, the Louisiana Community and Technical College System, the Department of Corrections, the Office of Juvenile

Justice, and the Department of Children and Family Services. Originally, EMPLoY was designed to help students earn a GED certificate and acquire work readiness skills. It also included soft skills training, mentoring and dual enrollment opportunities for participants. Students focused on career areas such as nursing, automotive, welding and information technology.

For 2011-2012, education officials have decided to fold EMPLoY into JAG so that students will have the option to pursue either a high school diploma or a GED certificate. In addition, the department plans to establish a new JAG initiative geared toward middle school students with disabilities. It will be called JAG Aim High and will focus on literacy and math skills, job training and other skills training.

CURRICULUM TRACKS

Like many states, Louisiana offers multiple curriculum tracks for students (see Table 8 in Appendix C for examples of what other states are doing). Two of the tracks — the LA Core 4 and the Basic Core — lead to a standard high school diploma. A third track earns a Career Diploma.

The LA Core 4 and the Basic Core curricula were implemented beginning with the 2008-2009 school year. The focus of the Core 4 curriculum is college prep while the Basic Core offers students more opportunities to pursue

specific career areas. Both diplomas require students to take 24 units, or classes. The Basic Core requires fewer units in science and social studies and has no foreign language requirement. The lighter curriculum fills in the units with more electives, most of which must be concentrated in a career area. In either curriculum, students must pass the eighth-grade LEAP test to progress to the ninth grade.

Created by the Legislature in 2009, the Career Diploma requires 23 units, including seven devoted to career training. The state approved 104 areas of concentration for the Career Diploma in 2010-2011 (see Tables 5 and 6 in Appendix C). The five most popular areas were business, general studies, health science, agriculture and nursing. General studies is essentially a holding category for freshmen deciding on a focus. By their sophomore year, students must pick a specific area of concentration. Not every district offers courses in every area of concentration, so students who enter the Career Diploma track are limited by what is available in their districts.

A significant change brought by the Career Diploma is that it provides students a way to move to the ninth grade if they fail to pass the high-stakes LEAP test in the eighth grade. Students failing LEAP will not be held back if they enroll in the Career Diploma curriculum.

With its lower course requirements and potential circumvention of LEAP, the Career Diploma compromises the new standards set by the state's higher expectations for high school achievement. But the special diploma also represents a potential opportunity for decreasing the dropout rate and promoting more students into productive careers backed by a degree. The program is too new to have developed a set of results to determine how effective it will be. Ultimately, the state's evaluation of the program may rest on a question of values: Are better graduation rates through the Career Diploma worth the sacrifice of lower academic standards?



Before answering this question, state education authorities and the Legislature should examine those results of the program that can be measured objectively. Foremost, the state needs a clear understanding of how the Career Diploma students fare in the labor market once they graduate. The state also should monitor the less-rigorous classes offered under the program. Currently, the courses are a combination of units developed by the Department of Education and others developed by individual districts. The courses developed by the districts must be approved by BESE but it is too early to tell whether that oversight is effective. Both of these factors warrant careful monitoring by the Department of Education to determine whether the Career Diploma is accomplishing its goals of keeping students in school and preparing them for work.

CAREER & TECHNICAL EDUCATION

Another theme that goes along with the career readiness focus of many of the department's programs is the expanding role of career and technical education in the state. The goal of the state's Career and Technical Education (CTE) Program is to provide graduating students with the career education and training they need to enter the workforce, a job training program or postsecondary education. Louisiana offers students a choice of eight Programs of Study encompassing 16 career clusters. The Programs of Study include agricultural education, business education, marketing education, family and consumer science, health science, technology education, trade and industrial education, and a general CTE program.

Students can choose from more than 50 industry-based certifications as well as take advantage of dual enrollment opportunities to earn college credit. Education officials know there is a demand for CTE courses, as there is for dual enrollment opportunities. In 2010-2011, approximately 75 percent of the state's high school students had access to CTE courses and programs.

Departmental data show more than 90 percent of Louisiana students who complete at least three CTE credits earn a high school diploma. These results correspond with national research that has found students engaged in CTE programs are more likely to finish high school than those who are not.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

One of the most important education themes emerging at both the state and national levels is the critical need to focus on early childhood education for at-risk children. While the Department of Education's primary focus now is on raising the high school graduation rate to 80 percent to meet the 2014 deadline, there is recognition of the need for emphasis on childhood education before the first grade. Studies show that early childhood education pays off in economic returns. For instance, researchers with the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis have studied several early childhood education programs and found that expenditures on early childhood intervention pays back in the long term with citizens who are more productive with higher earnings. The researchers found that the return on investment ranges from \$5 to \$16 for every \$1 spent.

The U.S. Department of Education and the federal government also have recognized the need for early childhood education. In May 2011, the department announced the third round of the Race to the Top grant competition — the \$500 million Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge. States are being encouraged to apply for grants that would be used to develop and establish innovative learning programs for children from birth through pre-kindergarten. The grants will be awarded by Dec. 31, 2011. After failing to win grants in the first two rounds of Race to the Top, Louisiana education

officials had not decided whether to apply for the Early Learning Challenge money by the time this report was published.

Despite this, officials with the state Department of Education have identified the need for early childhood education. Two of the agency's nine critical goals are to ensure students enter kindergarten ready to learn and to ensure that all students are literate by the third grade, but reaching those goals has proved elusive so far, despite the existence of seven state and federally funded pre-kindergarten programs that serve roughly 41,000, or 64 percent, of Louisiana's 4-year-olds.

Approximately 30 percent of the state's 4-year-olds take part in one of three state-funded preschool programs: the Cecil J. Picard LA4 Early Childhood Program (named for the former state superintendent of education who pressed for legislation creating the program); the 8(g) Student Enhancement Block Grant Program (funded from Louisiana's portion of oil and gas money generated by operations off the Continental Shelf); and the Nonpublic Schools Early Childhood Development Program (NSECD).

One of the most important education themes emerging at both the state and national levels is the critical need to focus on early childhood education for at-risk children.

The Picard LA4 program was established in 2001 and has grown from serving 1,706 at-risk children to 15,762 students in 2010-2011. The 8(g) program is the oldest of the state's preschool programs. It was created in 1993 and served 3,459 at-risk children in 2010-2011. The NSECD program was set up in 2001 and provides tuition reimbursements to parents who send their children to a state-approved private school. The program is geared toward families who meet specific income requirements and served 1,308 students in 2010-2011.

In addition, the federally funded Head Start program served about 9,625 students in 2010-2011.

In 2008, Louisiana legislators passed legislation providing that, subject to the appropriation of funds, LA4 classes were to be offered at no cost to all 4-year-olds by the 2013-2014 school year for school districts participating in the program. While no additional funding has been allocated, Department of Education officials maintain that the current funding is sufficient to enroll all of the state's 4-year-olds in pre-kindergarten. The problem, officials say, is one of a system with too many moving parts and too many agencies in charge. If Louisiana were to adopt a system like Missouri's, they say, where there is one program and one funding stream, it would have enough money to serve all 4-year-olds.

At the local level, leaders in nearly one-third of Louisiana's school districts are discussing how they can oversee early childhood services aimed at children from birth through age 5. The discussion was inspired in part by a program in West Feliciana Parish under which the district oversees such

programs as Head Start and Early Head Start, among others. The goal is to better prepare children for kindergarten.

Adding impetus to the need for quality early childhood education is Louisiana's continuing poor performance on the National Assessment of Educational Progress test, which compares educational progress in all states, the District of Columbia and the overseas schools on U.S. military bases. In 2009, Louisiana fourth-graders scored well below the national average in both reading and math, ranking 51st and 49th, respectively. More specifically, only 18 percent of the state's fourth-graders scored at grade level or above in reading, while 23 percent scored at grade level or above in math. If Louisiana's students are to succeed in high school and beyond, the data show the state must start earlier in identifying those at risk and designing appropriate support and intervention programs for them.

TRUANCY ASSESSMENT & SERVICE CENTERS

In 1999, state lawmakers passed the Truancy Assessment & Service Center (TASC) legislation to help combat the problem of truancy among students in kindergarten through fifth grade. Research shows that there is a strong connection between truancy in the early grades and future academic and behavioral problems, including dropping out.

The goal of the TASC sites is to identify and address the underlying causes of truancy before children fall too far behind in school. The program is designed to focus on both children and their families, and provide supports and interventions where needed. TASC sites bring together an array of services ranging from basic necessities such as housing and utility assistance to tutoring, anger management, family support, and medical and mental health referrals.

The program is housed in the Office of Social Service Research & Development in the LSU School of Social Work. At the moment, there are 13 TASC sites serving 20 parishes in the state. At one time, there were 21 TASC sites, but budget cuts over the past few years have reduced that number by more than a third.

When a community is interested in setting up a TASC site, local leaders contact the office at LSU for information and guidelines on how to start the program, and they contact their legislators who must agree to request funding for the site in the state budget. In addition, each TASC site partners with the local school district, district attorney, sheriff's department, police departments and other community stakeholders to form an advisory board who help oversee its operation. Staff at the LSU office monitor and assess the work at each site.

The numbers show the program is having a positive effect. Since its inception, the program has handled more than 93,000 student referrals and served

more than 73,000 children and their families. In 2009-2010, the number of unexcused absences declined 43 percent among students who were referred to a TASC site, and nearly 67 percent had fewer than five unexcused absences after their referral. In addition, among those same students, 89 percent passed their classes.

FUNDING

Money for Louisiana's public schools comes from federal, state and local sources, with the majority allocated from the state's Minimum Foundation Program (MFP). The MFP in Louisiana dates to 1930. In essence, its goal is to make sure every school district has the funding necessary to provide a defined minimum level of education for its schoolchildren. Over the 80 plus years the MFP has existed, numerous changes have been made in the formula used to determine how much money the individual districts receive. The last change to the formula was made for the 1992-1993 school year when state officials decided to fund the MFP based on the number of students in each district rather than the number of faculty and staff positions.

While each district has the freedom to spend its MFP dollars as it sees fit, state law requires that 70 percent of the funding be spent on classroom instructional activities. The amount distributed to each school district is weighted by the number of students along with a complex formula of other factors, such as a district's financial condition and its population of students in special education.

More than half of the states across the country use some variation of a minimum foundation program to fund local education. Critics of the MFP complain that schools with the most need are often shortchanged when a central district office is allowed to decide who gets what money.

One way to address that concern is through an alternative funding method known as student-based budgeting. Under student-based budgeting, the state money is sent to individual schools. School principals determine how best to use it. Nationwide, about 14 city school districts and the state of Hawaii use student-based budgeting. In 2010, BESE set up a Student-Based Budgeting Task Force to examine the issue and to make recommendations about how such a system might be implemented in Louisiana. The leaders of six Louisiana school districts — Assumption, Iberville, Jefferson, Lafourche, Sabine and Terrebonne — also have agreed to take part in a pilot program that would test student-based budgeting. Plans call for the pilot to begin in August 2013. Some education leaders already are pressing for statewide implementation of student-based budgeting.

Among the concerns about student-based budgeting are whether school principals have the knowledge or ability to manage a budget in this way



or how individual school spending will be monitored. The Department of Education still is working on the details of the pilot program, but education officials have said the process will include training for principals and local school district leaders on how to handle their budget responsibilities.

Changes in the MFP allocation method could have a positive or negative impact on graduation and dropout programs now being implemented on the district level in some parishes. Some dropout prevention strategies are being implemented and coordinated by district offices, so a change in a district's funding could affect its ability to run programs. This potential impact is especially important in light of the shift in the way the Department of Education works with the districts. The new service model of operations is heavily reliant on the local districts and their willingness to implement dropout prevention strategies.

In response to ongoing tight budgets, the governor, along with the Legislature and BESE, has frozen the MFP's base per-pupil amount in recent years. From 1999-2000 until 2009-2010, the base amount had increased roughly 2.75 percent every year. Beginning with the 2009-2010 school year, the base amount was held steady because of the state budget crisis. The same decision was made for the 2010-2011 and 2011-2012 budgets. The overall amount of MFP dollars has increased, however, because of the growth in student numbers on a statewide basis since Hurricane Katrina in 2005. Although the MFP has not been cut, the districts have less discretionary money because of rising mandatory costs such as retirement and an increasing number of pass-along costs from the state, such as the stipends for nationally board certified teachers and transportation for parochial school students.

This funding situation is a critical issue because the Department of Education is operating with diminished resources. Its dropout prevention initiatives depend in large part on how well staff members can support programs in the local districts. The local districts have to find ways to restructure their resources to implement the programs the Department of Education believes will help improve their dropout and graduation rates, and they have to do it with less flexibility in their budgets. School districts have the option of trying to increase local revenue but their historic dependence on state resources and the state's relatively large homestead exemption, which reduces local property tax revenue for schools, are strong deterrents to that solution.

EASIER ACCESS TO INFORMATION

The public and policymakers need clear and reliable information about education programs in Louisiana. The Department of Education's website is difficult to navigate and the logical places to look for data many times fail to yield the desired information. If the information is available, it might be presented in pieces, making it difficult to compare schools and districts.

The Cowen Institute for Public Education Initiatives at Tulane University characterized the problem this way in an April 2011 critique:

“It is true that the state does collect and store a large and varied amount of data from schools and districts, more than most states, in its eight database systems. Much of this data, aggregated to the school level, is available to the public through reports and spreadsheets published on the Louisiana Department of Education’s website. However, problems with the transparency and accessibility of school operations data remain acute. The available data can be hard to parse and use for the average citizen. Additionally, more detailed student-level data needed by researchers is difficult and expensive to obtain.”

For instance, a person trying to look up information about which high schools offer Career Academies would have no success on the Department of Education’s website. The department does not post it, which means parents and students must wade through individual district and school sites, and those frequently do not have the information either. Data about graduation and dropout rates are scattered among several different web pages and the information is difficult to track. The department’s current set of strategies to reach the 80 percent high school graduation rate is not posted in any comprehensive way.

Part of the solution to the state’s dismal graduation and dropout rates lies in an informed citizenry understanding what options are available and how they can access those options. The Department of Education’s website, in its current form, simply isn’t conducive to that goal. Neither are many of the local school district websites.



What's Working

Nationally, education experts are paying attention to Louisiana's efforts. The state has won praise from the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, the National Conference of State Legislatures, the National Association of State Boards of Education and the Council of Chief State School Officers.

In a joint report published in 2008, these groups singled out Louisiana's efforts in several areas as examples of progressive initiatives:

- Implementation of end-of-course assessments for core subjects.
- Alignment of career and technical education standards with high school graduation requirements.
- Creation of an electronic early warning system to identify students at risk of dropping out.
- Creation of a "catch-up" curriculum for students struggling in reading and math.
- Implementation of an accountability system for the state's teacher preparation programs.
- Creation of a high school accountability system that has transparent performance goals.
- Inclusion of such factors as on-time graduation, completion of college- and career-ready curriculum, college enrollment, industry-earned credential and the need for college remediation in measuring the performance of the state's high schools.
- Creation of the Recovery School District to oversee the turnaround of low-performing schools.

Many of these attributes of Louisiana policy affect the state's effort to curb the dropout problem. A closer look at specific programs offers a more detailed picture.

PROGRAMS FOR AT-RISK STUDENTS

Under its 80 Percent Graduation Rate Strategies, the Department of Education has 17 programs or initiatives dedicated to improving high school graduation and dropout rates as well as increasing college and career readiness. Of those, four are geared toward direct intervention for at-risk students: Jobs for America's Graduates (JAG), Everybody Graduates!, Accelerated Pathways and Connections.

JAG has the best long-term track record. Ninety-three percent of Louisiana students who participate in the in-school component of JAG go on to graduate. The problem is that JAG is an expensive program to maintain and currently the only funding for it is \$3.3 million in federal TANF money.

As a result, school leaders who want to establish JAG at their facilities must apply every year for a \$50,000 grant from the TANF funds to pay for a JAG site coordinator. That leads to some uncertainty about whether sites can sustain JAG from year to year, and it means any additional costs of the program must be borne by the school or local district.

Everybody Graduates! is an outgrowth of the Department of Education's Ninth Grade Initiative, which was implemented in 2008. The Ninth Grade Initiative — also known as Ninth Grade Academies or Freshman Academies — is designed to keep freshmen mostly separate from older students during their first year of high school. The ninth-graders take classes together, have the same teachers and usually are located in a separate part of the school. The idea is to give them time to adjust to the different demands of high school before they become part of the general population.



The data show clearly that more students drop out in their freshman year of high school than at any other time. Part of that problem has to do with how well they handle the transition from middle school to high school. Department of Education officials know the program works because they can see fewer students are dropping out of ninth grade. The original program was designed as a three-year pilot funded by a grant from the state's 8(g) fund. As the funding ended, department officials decided to apply for another

8(g) grant and broaden the focus of the program so that counseling plays a bigger role and more activities are planned for incoming freshmen before they arrive. The money was approved, and now schools will be able to apply for up to two years of funding to develop research-based strategies to help students identified as at-risk.

One of the key components of Everybody Graduates! is the department's Dropout Early Warning System (DEWS). DEWS is an electronic monitoring and reporting system that allows district officials to see quickly which students have excessive absences, disciplinary problems and difficulties in English or math — all of which are known risk factors for dropping out. The information is sent to school leaders and teachers so that they can determine how best to intervene.

But there are weak points in the system. One — and arguably the biggest — is that not every district is tied into DEWS. It is not mandatory, and some districts use administrative data systems that don't communicate with the software used to run DEWS. Another weak point is that district data currently are sent to the department two to four times a year, depending on what type of information is involved. Without real time data, the DEWS snapshots are often outdated.

Two other direct intervention programs are brand new. Accelerated Pathways was implemented in the 2010-2011 school year and Connections went

into effect in the fall of 2011. Both programs are aimed at over-age high school students. Accelerated Pathways combines accelerated course work and a mentoring component to help over-age students graduate in three years. Connections is designed to replace the Pre-GED Options Program, which failed in its goal to prepare students to take and pass the GED test. The data showed very few students in the Options program actually earned a GED certificate.

PROGRAMS FOR ALL STUDENTS

Of the remaining 13 programs in the Department of Education's graduation strategy, five are available to all students regardless of whether they are considered to be at risk. Those five are Career and Technical Education/ Industry-Based Certifications, Areas of Concentration, Dual Enrollment, the Louisiana Virtual School and New Tech High Schools.

The Career and Technical Education, Areas of Concentration and Dual Enrollment components have proved to be both popular and successful. The department has expanded the number of offerings in career and technical education and in the areas of concentration in response to local and regional workforce needs and in partnership with the state's technical and community colleges. In addition, the demand for the Career Diploma has spurred the development of more courses.

One change the department has made is the elimination of any reward for schools whose students earn locally based work certifications. Under the state's school accountability system, schools earn additional points if students

The Louisiana Virtual School, which has the capacity for 7,500 seats, is funded by 8(g) money and a per-course fee paid by students. That money takes care of current needs for materials, but is not enough to expand the program's content or the number of students served.

graduate with career and technical endorsements on their diplomas. In the past, these endorsements could be national industry-based certifications or local work-ready certifications. Department staff were concerned about the quality and rigor of the local certifications, so the additional points for these endorsements were eliminated. School districts still can offer the courses for local certifications, but they will not earn extra points.

The Department of Education also has encouraged local districts to set up dual enrollment arrangements with technical and community colleges as well as with four-year universities. Again, the research shows that for many students, getting a head start on postsecondary work is a motivation to stay in high school.

The Louisiana Virtual School is a relatively new program that offers students the opportunity to take courses online. Those courses run the gamut to include core curriculum, Advanced Placement classes, dual enrollment, and career and technical education courses. Department officials hope the Virtual School will give them a tool to keep the interest of those students who find

traditional classroom settings an obstacle to learning while also helping those students in rural districts where academic opportunities are more limited. However, officials face a significant hurdle to that goal in terms of funding.

At the moment, the Virtual School has 7,500 seats and operates on a part-time basis. Money for the school comes from the state's 8(g) fund and from per-course fees students pay. That money takes care of current needs for materials, but is not enough to expand either the content offered or the number of students served.

Efforts to pass legislation that would allow MFP money to follow a student to whatever school he chose to attend — whether virtual or not — and that would let students take Virtual School courses even if those same courses were offered in a brick-and-mortar school so far have failed. One alternative that has been discussed could be to place the Virtual School under the auspices of the Office of Juvenile Justice and have staff look for grant funding to help expand, but no decision has been made.

Another new program is New Tech High Schools. These specialized schools are set up within existing high schools and students apply for admission. The schools are focused on project-based learning. Students take classes online via laptop computers, and they work in groups on specific projects to develop work-related skills. The state currently has eight New Tech High Schools. No data exist yet on whether they will help improve the state's graduation and dropout rates because they haven't been in operation long enough for a four-year group of students to finish.

Credit Recovery, an initiative that predates the 80 Percent Graduation plan, also has proved successful at helping keep students in school and on track to graduate. Credit Recovery is aimed at students who have failed one or more core courses. It allows them to retake the courses and still stay on track to graduate with their peers. Research has shown that for some students, having the opportunity to graduate with their class is enough reason to stay in school. Not every district offers Credit Recovery opportunities to their students, but those that do must figure out funding and staffing on their own.

At the moment, the Department of Education has programs in place that it knows are successful in helping students stay in school and graduate. It can't expand them because it lacks the funding. It has a few other programs that show some early promise but have yet to be fully tested. And it has a few brand-new initiatives that are just under way. Department officials hope the net effect of all of these programs and initiatives will be to produce enough additional high school graduates to reach the 80 percent graduation rate target by 2014.

Recommendations

Louisiana has a wide-ranging, feasible set of plans to address the state's dropout problem. In keeping with the multiple pathways approach favored by many nationally recognized educational research organizations, Louisiana's strategy features a smorgasbord of programs that target different types of students and address multiple challenges.

Education researchers and policymakers generally believe that a multiple pathways approach can have a significant impact on high school dropout rates. Although the evidence to support that strategy is still limited, the research points to positive results. So far the success stories across the nation have tended to focus on single school districts or high schools. No state has been the obvious one to emulate. Louisiana could be the first.

Education leaders have chosen a sensible path by developing a menu of options to seek improvements, but much work needs to be done. The initial signs are promising. Running against the grain nationally, the Louisiana high school dropout rate has declined and the graduation rate has improved modestly, but key measures still give the state low rankings.

The state's emphasis from this point forward should focus on putting plans into action, dealing with at-risk students at all grade levels, tracking results and trends more usefully, and applying financial resources where they can be most effective.

Specifically, PAR makes recommendations covering three areas of concern: Strategies for Dropout Prevention; Measuring for Outcomes and Interventions; and Clearer Communications with the Public.

STRATEGIES FOR DROPOUT PREVENTION

- 1 The state and local school districts should put resources behind dropout programs that show a track record of progress. In particular, the administration and the Legislature should take the next steps needed to expand, renew or bring up to scale those programs proving to be effective.**

While this recommendation may seem obvious, the allocation of resources in recent years has not provided the level of support for some programs to achieve their potential scope and impact. State officials have shown a willingness to replace or eliminate programs that are not working, in particular the poorly achieving Pre-GED Options program. With leaner state budgets, and the Department of Education taking on a more advisory role in implementing dropout programs at the district level, programs with proven results have been restrained.

The current administration has overseen a major expansion of the JAG/EMPLoY programs and has championed the positive results. But more could be done. For instance, two years ago, the department sought to expand JAG and asked for \$12 million in TANF money in its budget request to the governor. The request was turned down in light of the state's budget crisis, although the existing JAG funding was preserved.

Everybody Graduates!, while new, is another program that state leaders should consider renewing because it is an extension of a program — the Ninth Grade Initiative — known to help keep students in school. Currently, it is only funded for two years, which is the life of the 8(g) grant financing it, and schools must compete for the money.

Other programs, such as the state's early childhood education programs and the Truancy Assessment & Service Centers, have demonstrated a capacity to help younger students. While these programs obviously are not aimed at high school students, they focus on providing young students with the skills and support they need that will increase their chances of success in high school. These programs should be brought up to scale to serve more of those who need them.

The local school districts have a responsibility to bring their resources to bear on the dropout problem as well. While the state certainly can take the lead in offering assistance and suggestions, local education authorities are the ones who have the power and the responsibility to make these programs work. Nor do they have to wait for the state before tackling the dropout problem. For instance, officials in 22 local districts are examining how they can implement a program similar to one enacted in West Feliciana Parish 20 years ago under which the district took on child services that cover children from birth to age 5. The idea was to help children be as prepared as possible to enter school, and the data show the program is working.

2 The governor, the Legislature and school districts should consider targeted dollars toward dropout prevention if they want improved results. The track record so far shows that effective dropout programs have been backed by targeted grants and federal programs. An increase in the state's general financial support of local school districts would not necessarily ensure that districts would use the money to do their part to combat the dropout problem.

A review of effective dropout programs indicates that they are often supported through restricted dollars from federal grants or state trust funds. Targeted dollars for dropout programs help ensure that resources are put directly toward the goal of increasing graduation rates. The state and local districts should continue to tap available resources for special programs and should consider new appropriations targeted to support proven initiatives.

The state provides the lion's share of financial support for local school districts through annual allocations from the Minimum Foundation Program. If in the future the Legislature chooses to increase MFP funding for the districts beyond the minimum amount required by law, lawmakers should not take for granted how those additional dollars will be used. There is no guarantee the additional funding would necessarily result in better support for dropout prevention. Many school districts have cited growing expenses for employee retirement and health benefit programs, transportation and national teacher certification stipends. Marginally greater financing to districts through state MFP funds could be swallowed quickly by those and other escalating costs, leaving dropout prevention programs no further enhanced.

In whatever form, additional state financial support for districts or high schools should be based on the demonstrated success of dropout prevention measures or on a well-defined plan to attack the dropout problem that includes measurable goals.

3 While the state should continue to lead the effort for dropout prevention in Louisiana by setting goals, upholding academic standards, tracking data, offering guidance and financially supporting key programs, state leaders and the Legislature should follow a strategy of emphasizing the role of local school districts in initiating and implementing programs to improve graduation rates. The state should require each local school system to pursue an effective plan that addresses the unique needs of its population.

Louisiana has a history of reliance on state programs and financing to shoulder the burdens of local school districts. The state should continue to fulfill its leadership role of enforcing quality standards and assisting district initiatives to raise graduation rates. But the primary driver of better education outcomes must be the local school systems.

This strategy is due in part to a down-sized state education department and the tight budget realities facing the state for the foreseeable future. Also, the districts themselves are the best source of knowledge and solutions for the unique social environment and local problems they face. The state has identified a variety of tools and in many cases has supplied them to districts to work on the dropout problem. It is up to the districts to take control of their own strategies and their own future.



MEASURING FOR OUTCOMES AND INTERVENTIONS

4 Proven outcomes should drive the state’s policy in selecting which curriculum tracks to offer in high schools. The Department of Education should monitor the three high school curriculum tracks to see how many students are enrolling in each one and how many are graduating. The state should collect vital information about where students go after graduation, whether it’s into the workplace, technical or community college, an apprenticeship or a four-year college. The information should be available to the public in a form that respects individual privacy but that also allows the public to see what progress is being made.

The state offers three high school curriculum tracks for students — the LA Core 4, the Basic Core and the Career Diploma. All of these tracks are relatively new. Full implementation of the Career Diploma track began with the 2010-2011 school year. To help gauge the effectiveness of these tracks, the Department of Education needs to closely follow how many students enroll in each track, how many times they move from one track to another and how many students graduate from each track in four years.

The goals of each of the curriculum tracks are clearly spelled out — the LA Core 4 should prepare students for admission into a four-year college or university; the Basic Core should prepare students for admission at least into a technical college or community college; and the Career Diploma should prepare students either to enter the workforce upon graduation or to go into a training program or technical college. To know whether the curricula are producing the desired results, it is critical to determine where high school graduates go after high school and whether they are successful.

Such monitoring would serve several purposes. First, the data gathered would show the demand for each curriculum track and how well each is succeeding in graduating students. Second, the information would allow education leaders to see whether the career areas offered are ones that students are interested in and if those areas align with workforce needs throughout the state. Third, by tracking where students go after graduation, it will be possible to determine whether they are, in fact, college and career ready. If the information shows students still lack the skills necessary to succeed after high school, then that information can be used to revise the curricula. Fourth, monitoring would allow the public to hold teachers, administrators, school board members, the Department of Education and BESE accountable.

Parents and policymakers need clear information to see how individual schools, districts and curriculum tracks are progressing. Without this kind of student follow-up after graduation, Louisiana’s education policy will be flying blind.

5 The Department of Education should implement a comprehensive information-gathering program that follows student performance from pre-kindergarten through at least one year beyond high school and identifies at-risk pupils. Such a program would include the already existing grade level expectations, which describe the knowledge and skills students are supposed to acquire in each grade, as well as the new “common core standards” the department plans to adopt. Those standards are part of an initiative led by the National Governors Association to increase the rigor of the country’s academics. The data also would be useful in determining appropriate support and intervention measures.

The Department of Education’s work on dropouts is focused primarily on high school students and making sure they graduate on time. In particular, the agency is monitoring the 50 high-priority high schools that have large numbers of dropouts. That’s understandable given the 2014 deadline to reach an 80 percent graduation rate. But the reality is that in the long run it would be a more efficient use of state resources to identify at-risk students as early as possible and provide support and interventions in the early grades rather than waiting until high school and trying to undo years of missed opportunities. The goal would be to have as few students as possible at risk of dropping out by the time they get to high school.

The research shows that the symptoms for dropouts appear well before high school. Study after study has demonstrated the importance of getting children off to the right start educationally as early as possible. Some even advocate programs for at-risk 3-year-olds in an effort to keep them on track with their peers. The state needs a more comprehensive program that addresses children’s education starting from pre-kindergarten. Such a plan would involve monitoring students from grade to grade to make sure they are learning the skills they need and providing mechanisms for intervention should a student fall off track.

The department has established a list of nine goals geared toward each phase of elementary and secondary education. In the early grades, those goals are: every child will enter kindergarten ready to learn, every child will be literate by third grade, and every child will enter the fourth grade on time. For the middle grades, the goals are for every child to be proficient in English Language Arts and in math by the eighth grade. The goals for high school students are to graduate on time, graduate college- and career-ready, and finish at least one year of postsecondary education. The final goal is for all students to achieve these benchmarks regardless of ethnic or economic background.

Clearly the department has a framework in place for a comprehensive program. However, it needs to develop the same level of intervention and support programs for the primary and middle grades as it has for high schools.

The state needs a more comprehensive program that addresses children’s education starting from pre-kindergarten.

It is not enough to ensure that at-risk students attend early childhood education programs available in the state. Research shows that without follow-up and reinforcement of the skills children learn in these early programs, the benefits they provide can fade by the time a child finishes the primary grades. If a child is not reading on grade level by the third grade, for instance, it is very difficult for that student to catch up, and the odds of dropping out increase significantly.

The department has a literacy office and it has literacy programs proven to work. Both the Ensuring Literacy for All and the Reading First programs were evaluated by the Cecil J. Picard Center for Childhood Development and Lifelong Learning and found to increase student achievement levels. A significant problem has been funding. Over the past couple of years, funding for literacy programs has been cut as the department has been required to trim its budget. However, the Department of Education received some good news in September when it was awarded an estimated \$28.5 million from the federal Striving Readers Comprehensive Literacy Grant. The money is to be used to fund effective literacy programs for children from birth through 12th grade.

Another pressure point is the transition students make from their last year of elementary school in the fifth grade to their first year of middle school in sixth grade. This is a time when students tend to need a great deal of support because of the new and intimidating environment. In the same way that the department has encouraged districts to set up Ninth Grade Academies to ease the transition students have to make from middle to high school, it also could look at setting up an appropriately designed program to help students make the shift from elementary to middle school.

6 The Department of Education should encourage local districts and schools to take full advantage of the information and analysis that will be available when the new Louisiana Education Data Repository System is fully operational and use that data to make the best instructional and intervention decisions possible for every student. In addition, the department should pursue funding to enhance the system.

Louisiana has long been recognized for its strong data collection processes. Each year, the national Data Quality Campaign evaluates state departments of education on the strength of their data collection, and Louisiana is one of the few states that consistently meet all 10 Essential Elements cited by the group. The problem is that the information the department collects is stored in 26 different database systems that don't communicate with one another.

That makes it difficult and time-consuming for department staff to examine the data, determine what the information truly shows and figure out

how policy decisions should be shaped by it. It also is hard for individual districts and schools to use the information to help guide their work. Parents, researchers and other interested members of the public cannot easily obtain longitudinal, aggregated data that would help provide a clear picture of what is happening in public education at both the local and state levels.

Department officials hope all of that will change as work on the new Louisiana Education Data Repository System (LEDRS) nears completion. For the past 18 months, staff have been extracting the data from the 26 different systems and loading the information into the single LEDRS database. Department officials are ready to begin testing the new system in-house and in a handful of districts. If all goes as planned, the system will be rolled out in all of the districts sometime in October 2011. At first, only district administrators will have access to the data involving their schools, but within a year, the plan is to allow individual school leaders to look at the data.

For the future, department officials intend to apply for a federal grant that would be used to enhance LEDRS even further. The goal would be for LEDRS to accept daily data transmissions from the local districts and then turn around the analysis quickly enough so that principals and teachers can have near real-time information about their students.

Still, having access to more information more quickly will help only if local schools and districts put that information to use figuring out how best to reach those students who need additional support. Department officials need to have a follow-up plan in place to make sure that happens.

7 The Department of Education should continue its efforts to build a comprehensive database warehouse that would encompass information from several state agencies — including the Department of Education, the Department of Children and Family Services, the Department of Health and Hospitals, the Office of Juvenile Justice, the Board of Regents and the Louisiana Workforce Commission.

The previously mentioned grant that officials plan to seek also could be used to help expand the central database to cover students from “pre-K through 20,” which is to say, from early childhood education through higher education. This type of system would require the collaboration of a number of state agencies, and in fact an inter-agency team currently exists. The group is studying how to put an all-encompassing system into practice.

There is precedent for such a system. In 1988, the state of Florida set up the Florida Education and Training Placement Information Program. The purpose of the nearly 25-year-old program is to “compile, maintain, and disseminate information concerning educational histories, placement and

employment, enlistments in the United States armed services, and other measures of success of former participants in the state educational and workforce development programs.”

Obviously, Louisiana’s system should focus on what information would best serve the state, so it likely would differ from the Florida program, but the overall goal would be the same — improve educational outcomes. Such a system could go hand in hand with a comprehensive student-performance tracking program. It would allow agencies to identify at-risk students early and design intervention plans that take a broader approach to helping children and their families. In addition, closer collaboration with the Board of Regents and the Louisiana Workforce Commission could help the Department of Education in its efforts to make education relevant to both students’ and employers’ needs.

CLEARER COMMUNICATION WITH THE PUBLIC

8 Education officials and the Legislature should focus on the cohort dropout rate as a key measure of the state’s progress in dealing with dropouts and publicize that figure as much as the annual dropout rate and the cohort graduation rate. The state Department of Education’s website could be improved substantially to provide clearer navigation and more useful information for local schools, districts and members of the general public.

The National Governors Association Center for Best Practices says the cohort dropout rate is a better assessment than the annual rate for measuring the success of a public education system.

While the Department of Education is justifiably pleased with the recent improvement in the state’s event, or annual, dropout rate, the fact remains that the state’s four-year cohort dropout rate was 17 percent in 2009-2010, which is one of the highest in the nation.

The cohort dropout rate, like its counterpart cohort graduation rate, tracks how many students in a specific group — for instance, students who entered high school as freshmen in fall 2006 — go on to graduate in four years. It is a long-term measure of how the group in question is faring.

The National Governors Association Center for Best Practices says the cohort rate is a better assessment than the annual rate for measuring the success of a public education system.

Understandably, state education officials tend to focus more on the annual dropout rate in public discussions because it’s a less alarming number. But in the same way that they publicize the cohort graduation rate as a truer measure of progress, they need to more actively publicize the cohort dropout rate. It should be this rate that policymakers and the public keep in mind as they assess how well the state’s high schools are serving Louisiana students.

As part of publicizing this information, the Department of Education should look toward redesigning its website to make it easier to use. By its own admission, the department collects and analyzes tremendous amounts of data. The problem is that most of that data — and the analysis that explains what they mean — remain in-house. In particular, it is hard for parents and other interested citizens to track down specific information so they can gauge how their children’s schools and districts are doing.

Accountability remains a critical component of improving Louisiana’s public education. The best way to hold teachers, administrators, school board members and the Department of Education accountable is to make sure the public has easy access to data related to dropout and graduation rates and has a user-friendly way to compare these data between individual schools and between districts.



Conclusion

Clearly the state has a long way to go to reach the Legislature's goal of an 80 percent graduation rate by 2014. At the rate of improvement in recent years, the state will not achieve that threshold in time. But the 80 percent mark is not insurmountable. When the state education department calculated how many additional students would need to graduate to reach 80 percent statewide in 2014, the exercise showed that goal was obtainable if almost every high school contributed just a few extra graduates, ranging from one to as many as seven each year. Not every school needs to reach an 80 percent graduation rate for the state to meet that goal.

(For a high school by high school list of how many additional graduates each would need, go to PAR's website, www.la-par.org.)

Louisiana has no shortage of programs or plans to meet the 80 percent high school graduation rate. The challenge now is implementation.

Louisiana has no shortage of programs or plans to get to its target. The tools are in place to mend both the poor high school graduation rate and the large dropout rate. The challenge now is implementation. The state and local districts have been facing tougher economic times just when they have been expected to perform at a higher level.

As the state and local districts strive to reach these worthy goals, the state should avoid lowering its educational standards as a means to get there. PAR concurs with the concepts the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) laid out in a report on high school performance. Namely, high schools need ambitious targets for improving graduation rates. At the same time, education leaders and the public should insist on rigorous, relevant and engaging instruction. Districts, schools and teachers who make real progress should be recognized. Every school should not be treated the same. And there should be an understanding that every student will not earn a four-year college degree and that more students need to be prepared for other opportunities.

Two key points stand out in the SREB's list — high expectations for all students and a willingness to provide the necessary supports and interventions to help them succeed. Louisiana's dropout prevention and graduation plan has features of both of these elements. Education leaders have been working on high school reform efforts for more than a decade. In that time, programs have been tried and discarded, the nation's biggest experiment in charter schools has taken shape in New Orleans, a top-to-bottom state departmental reorganization has been completed, three new curriculum tracks have been instituted and an entire operating philosophy has changed.

Can all this planning and effort bring genuine progress? If so, each of the major players must perform a role.

The governor, who made high school dropout prevention a priority early in his administration, must reassert his energy and support in this direction. The administration should articulate solutions to implement these strategies and take the lead in arranging resources to back them up. He must spell out a convincing strategy to hold local school districts responsible for their end of the bargain.

The Legislature, in its oversight role, needs to continue examining the state's progress toward its goals, as well as the performance of the state education agency. In its appropriations role, it should ensure that its mandates for public education are backed with sufficient financial support and allocated in ways that ensure the goals are being met. The Legislature must insist that over time, reliable information will be available to assess the state's dropout prevention programs and its three curriculum tracks. In particular, lawmakers will need to know if graduates with a Career Diploma were able to achieve career success, an important factor in deciding whether the purported advantages of the new diploma program outweigh the disadvantage of its lower academic standards.

The local school districts and their communities must face the realities of a tighter budget environment and the prospect that state funding might not always be as generous as it has been in the past. Greater self-reliance by school districts could be a healthy trend in Louisiana, so long as the state's high educational standards are upheld.

Currently the Department of Education is playing a numbers game, trying to pick up additional graduates from as many schools and through as many programs as possible. On the surface, the measure of its success will be how many Louisiana high school students actually graduate in 2014. But the challenge goes beyond the task of finding a way to get students to complete high school. They must complete it with a quality education. High educational standards should not be compromised. Graduates must be adequately prepared for college or the next step toward the workplace. If not, then winning the graduation numbers game will be a hollow victory.

The state's political and education leaders must emphasize actions over words, well-targeted funding, interventions for at-risk students at all grade levels, solid analysis of trends, accountability for results and public dissemination of information.

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Appendix A

WHAT THE NATIONAL RESEARCH SHOWS

For some time, researchers have examined high school graduation and drop-out rates, and the findings of their studies have been consistent — too many high school students are dropping out and too few are graduating. The U.S. high school graduation rate essentially has been stagnant for the past couple of decades. The research also agrees that it is relatively easy for education leaders to identify those students most likely to drop out — whether they attend school in Maine or Iowa or California or Louisiana.

Individual factors that affect whether a student will drop out include educational performance, behavior, attitude and background. More specifically, things such as test scores, mobility, absenteeism, discipline problems, educational expectations and past educational experiences can give principals and teachers a good indication of which students are likely to succeed and which will need more supports and interventions to finish.

In practical terms, what this means is that there are several points at which schools can intervene to get students back on track to graduation. This is by no means an easy task as the research points out. It requires planning, training, resources and a commitment on the part of state and local education officials.

What forms of intervention are most effective and how to bring those programs to scale, however, are questions that continue to vex education experts. The effectiveness of high school dropout prevention strategies is often anecdotal and not necessarily based on rigorous research. The What Works Clearinghouse, an arm of the Institute for Education Studies, attempts to identify effective programs by reviewing and conducting effectiveness research on many social programs, including dropout prevention.

Dropout prevention studies are evaluated on three key measures: staying in school, progressing in school and completing school. Dropout prevention programs are defined by What Works Clearinghouse as “interventions designed to keep students in school and ultimately improve their likelihood of completing high school. These interventions can include services and activities such as incentives, counseling, monitoring, school restructuring, curriculum design, literacy support, or community-based services to mitigate factors impeding progress in school.”

Of the 28 high school dropout programs reviewed by What Works Clearinghouse, 13 had evidence of positive or potentially positive effects for at least one of the three measures. Four interventions had positive or potentially positive effects for the measures of staying in school and progressing in school. Eight other programs demonstrated potentially positive effects on one of the key measures.

While the What Works Clearinghouse focuses on verifying the outcomes of specific intervention programs, other national research has taken a broader policy approach in trying to identify what can help school administrators, principals, teachers and parents improve student achievement and boost the graduation rate.

The Southern Regional Education Board, for example, suggested in a 2009 report that education leaders focus their efforts in six areas:

1. Provide students in every program of study with a rigorous core curriculum.
2. Insist on high-quality career and technical course sequences that blend academic and technical content through challenging, relevant assignments.
3. Equip all students with 21st-century skills through high-quality career and technical programs.
4. Expect every student to strive to meet standards in academic and career and technical classrooms.
5. Guarantee students will have the support needed to meet readiness standards for college, career training or both.
6. Connect every student to an adult adviser or mentor who has the time and skills to provide guidance and support.

Another report — sponsored jointly by Civic Enterprises, the Everybody Graduates Center at Johns Hopkins University and the America’s Promise Alliance — argued that what works best is strong leadership, multi-sector collaboration, innovation, support for schools and technical assistance.

The Center for Reinventing Public Education released a report in 2010 urging education leaders to develop a “multiple pathways” approach to help more students graduate on time. Among the approaches it suggested were:

- Targeting at-risk students and then developing new schools or special programs within existing schools for them.
- Changing all the high schools in a district so that each one houses a different specialized program and students have more options.
- Reworking all of the high schools in a district into smaller schools that integrate career and technical education with academically rigorous college prep curricula.

A 2006 study by the Association of Career and Technical Education also made the case for the integration of career and technical education with an academically rigorous curriculum to address the demands of the 21st-century workplace, keep students engaged and re-engage those who already have dropped out. The Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) also has been urging education leaders to more closely align career and technical education

with academically rigorous courses. The SREB concluded in a 2008 report that “more students stay in school when they can concentrate in career/technical education (CTE) in high school.” The key, these studies say, is that career and technical education programs must blend academic and technical studies while connecting the work to a tangible goal.

Another report — this one from the National Governors Association in 2008 — summarized the issue this way: What colleges and employers want are students/employees who have skills in analysis, interpretation, application of knowledge, writing, mathematics, literacy, problem-solving, critical thinking, and computer-based skills, as well as soft skills in areas such as communication and group collaboration.

It’s an ambitious list, but business and education leaders agree these skills are critical to success in the 21st century and in the global marketplace. The question is how to get there.

Appendix B

HIGH-PRIORITY HIGH SCHOOLS FOR 2011-2012

THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION HAS IDENTIFIED 50 HIGH-PRIORITY HIGH SCHOOLS FOR THE 2011-2012 SCHOOL YEAR.

Assumption Parish

Assumption High School

Avoyelles Parish

Marksville High School

Caddo Parish

Fair Park College Prep High School
Green Oaks Performing Arts Academy
Huntington High School
Northwood High School
Southwood High School
Woodlawn Leadership Academy

Calcasieu Parish

Alfred M. Barbe High School
LaGrange High School
Sulphur High School

City of Monroe

Carroll High School

East Baton Rouge Parish

Belaire High School
Istrouma Senior High School
McKinley Senior High School
Scotlandville Magnet High School
Tara High School

Iberia Parish

New Iberia Senior High School

Jefferson Parish

Bonnabel Magnet Academy High School
East Jefferson High School
Grace King High School
John Ehret High School
L.W. Higgins High School
West Jefferson High School

Lafayette Parish

Acadiana High School
Carencro High School
Lafayette High School

Northside High School
O. Comeaux High School

Lafourche Parish

Central Lafourche High School
South Lafourche High School
Thibodaux High School

Livingston Parish

Denham Springs High School
Walker High School

Morehouse Parish

Bastrop High School

Natchitoches Parish

Natchitoches Central High School

Ouachita Parish

West Monroe High School

Richland Parish

Rayville High School

St. Charles Parish

Hahnville High School

St. John the Baptist Parish

East St. John High School

St. Landry Parish

Opelousas Senior High School

St. Tammany Parish

Covington High School
Fontainebleau High School
Slidell High School

Tangipahoa Parish

Hammond High School
Ponchatoula High School

Terrebonne Parish

Ellender Memorial High School
H.L. Bourgeois High School
South Terrebonne High School
Terrebonne High School

Appendix C

TABLES AND CHARTS

Table 1 Louisiana High School Graduation & Dropout Rates

The cohort graduation and dropout rates are the percentage of students in each four-year group, or cohort, who graduate on time or drop out within four years. The annual dropout rate is the percentage of students who drop out from year to year.

**The 2005-2006 numbers were skewed heavily by the impact of hurricanes Katrina and Rita, making comparisons with succeeding years unreliable.*

	2005-2006*	2006-2007	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010
Cohort Graduation Rate	64.8 percent	66.3 percent	65.9 percent	66.6 percent	67.4 percent
Cohort Dropout Rate	20.6 percent	19 percent	18.6 percent	17.3 percent	17 percent
Annual Dropout Rate (Grades 9-12)	6.9 percent	6.9 percent	7 percent	6.3 percent	4.6 percent
Annual Dropout Rate (Grades 7-12)	5.6 percent	5.2 percent	5.2 percent	4.8 percent	3.5 percent

Source: Louisiana Department of Education

Table 2 Dropout Rates by Local Education Authority (School District)

Annual dropout rates for the past two years are shown in the second and fourth columns for each school district. Cohort dropout rates are shown in the third and fifth columns.

School District	2008-2009 (Annual)	2008-2009 (Cohort)	2009-2010 (Annual)	2009-2010 (Cohort)
Acadia Parish	6.2 percent	20.3 percent	3.2 percent	15.1 percent
Allen Parish	2.7 percent	13.3 percent	2.7 percent	14 percent
Ascension Parish	4.5 percent	16.1 percent	1.1 percent	12 percent
Assumption Parish	6.8 percent	28.4 percent	8.0 percent	22.5 percent
Avoyelles Parish	7.5 percent	22.5 percent	6.1 percent	31.5 percent
Beauregard Parish	1.0 percent	6.1 percent	0.3 percent	2.5 percent
Bienville Parish	3.7 percent	14.3 percent	2.7 percent	6.3 percent
Bossier Parish	4.5 percent	12.7 percent	2.4 percent	10.7 percent
Caddo Parish	9.0 percent	19.3 percent	7.0 percent	23.3 percent
Calcasieu Parish	3.2 percent	12.2 percent	2.8 percent	12.2 percent
Caldwell Parish	0.6 percent	5.4 percent	0.2 percent	4.7 percent
Cameron Parish	3.1 percent	9.2 percent	1.0 percent	8.6 percent
Catahoula Parish	6.8 percent	13.5 percent	6.1 percent	16.1 percent
Claiborne Parish	6.0 percent	12.3 percent	3.7 percent	16.7 percent
Concordia Parish	5.1 percent	27.6 percent	6.6 percent	16.2 percent
DeSoto Parish	7.6 percent	23.7 percent	7.9 percent	15 percent
East Baton Rouge Parish	8.7 percent	21.5 percent	5.0 percent	25.3 percent
East Carroll Parish	4.6 percent	11.1 percent	2.7 percent	13.3 percent
East Feliciana Parish	7.2 percent	17.8 percent	6.5 percent	21 percent
Evangeline Parish	7.2 percent	21.7 percent	4.4 percent	23.2 percent
Franklin Parish	10.9 percent	22.3 percent	7.1 percent	27.8 percent
Grant Parish	5.1 percent	19 percent	3.8 percent	19.6 percent
Iberia Parish	5.2 percent	12.1 percent	4.1 percent	11.8 percent
Iberville Parish	7.9 percent	20.8 percent	3.2 percent	23.6 percent
Jackson Parish	2.8 percent	13.6 percent	2.6 percent	12 percent
Jefferson Parish	7.2 percent	18.9 percent	4.7 percent	20.4 percent
Jefferson Davis Parish	0.5 percent	4.3 percent	0.5 percent	1 percent
Lafayette Parish	6.0 percent	18.4 percent	3.0 percent	17.1 percent
Lafourche Parish	5.6 percent	14.6 percent	2.9 percent	14.4 percent
LaSalle Parish	2.9 percent	9.6 percent	1.8 percent	14 percent
Lincoln Parish	4.4 percent	13.4 percent	4.7 percent	13.9 percent
Livingston Parish	2.4 percent	9.6 percent	1.3 percent	7.9 percent
Madison Parish	6.4 percent	24.6 percent	7.0 percent	22.6 percent
Morehouse Parish	12.1 percent	31.5 percent	7.9 percent	33.3 percent
Natchitoches Parish	8.4 percent	24.5 percent	7.3 percent	25.5 percent
Orleans Parish	2.4 percent	15.2 percent	1.4 percent	3.2 percent

Table 2 Continued next page

Table 2 Continued

Ouachita Parish	6.3 percent	18.4 percent	3.8 percent	17.2 percent
Plaquemines Parish	5.0 percent	13.4 percent	2.3 percent	10.4 percent
Pointe Coupee Parish	8.9 percent	16.3 percent	3.9 percent	28.6 percent
Rapides Parish	6.9 percent	18.2 percent	5.5 percent	20.2 percent
Red River Parish	11.4 percent	14.3 percent	2.7 percent	19.6 percent
Richland Parish	5.7 percent	20.9 percent	5.2 percent	27.6 percent
Sabine Parish	2.8 percent	6.6 percent	2.5 percent	8.2 percent
St. Bernard Parish	5.2 percent	17.3 percent	3.7 percent	14.5 percent
St. Charles Parish	3.4 percent	9 percent	3.0 percent	11 percent
St. Helena Parish	9.7 percent	18.2 percent	4.8 percent	20.9 percent
St. James Parish	4.4 percent	14.2 percent	4.9 percent	11.5 percent
St. John the Baptist Parish	9.4 percent	23 percent	2.3 percent	22 percent
St. Landry Parish	6.7 percent	19.6 percent	6.7 percent	22.8 percent
St. Martin Parish	6.8 percent	19.4 percent	5.3 percent	16.3 percent
St. Mary Parish	5.0 percent	18.8 percent	3.1 percent	13.2 percent
St. Tammany Parish	4.3 percent	12.2 percent	3.0 percent	11.3 percent
Tangipahoa Parish	4.9 percent	20.1 percent	5.7 percent	20.8 percent
Tensas Parish	11.6 percent	23.9 percent	6.0 percent	18.4 percent
Terrebonne Parish	6.3 percent	17.6 percent	4.8 percent	15.2 percent
Union Parish	6.9 percent	21.1 percent	6.7 percent	25.5 percent
Vermilion Parish	4.0 percent	15.9 percent	2.7 percent	8 percent
Vernon Parish	2.8 percent	10.3 percent	2.7 percent	10.2 percent
Washington Parish	3.9 percent	10.2 percent	4.2 percent	12.7 percent
Webster Parish	4.7 percent	16.3 percent	4.7 percent	12.6 percent
West Baton Rouge Parish	5.9 percent	18.6 percent	4.8 percent	13.2 percent
West Carroll Parish	5.1 percent	24.1 percent	4.8 percent	17.6 percent
West Feliciana Parish	2.7 percent	13.3 percent	3.2 percent	7.1 percent
Winn Parish	4.1 percent	16.5 percent	2.6 percent	8.3 percent
City of Monroe School District	6.6 percent	25.2 percent	6.9 percent	21.6 percent
City of Bogalusa School District	8.2 percent	25.7 percent	6.2 percent	17.4 percent
Zachary Community School District	1.3 percent	8.5 percent	2.1 percent	5.7 percent
City of Baker School District	9.8 percent	25.5 percent	7.1 percent	22.5 percent
Central Community School District	3.4 percent	13.8 percent	3.8 percent	8 percent

Source: Louisiana Department of Education

Table 3 Cohort Graduation Rates by Local Education Authority (School District)

Four-year graduation rates for the past five years are shown for each school district.

School District	2005-2006	2006-2007	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010
Acadia Parish	63.6 percent	66.0 percent	64.5 percent	65.4 percent	67.9 percent
Allen Parish	82.5 percent	85.3 percent	77.0 percent	77.0 percent	71.7 percent
Ascension Parish	73.6 percent	74.0 percent	76.8 percent	72.1 percent	75.4 percent
Assumption Parish	58.6 percent	55.7 percent	54.7 percent	45.9 percent	58.0 percent
Avoyelles Parish	57.9 percent	63.1 percent	58.9 percent	64.2 percent	52.6 percent
Beauregard Parish	88.0 percent	87.3 percent	84.1 percent	84.3 percent	85.8 percent
Bienville Parish	78.0 percent	78.2 percent	75.6 percent	73.8 percent	85.5 percent
Bossier Parish	74.8 percent	76.1 percent	77.6 percent	76.0 percent	75.9 percent
Caddo Parish	59.8 percent	59.4 percent	59.1 percent	61.8 percent	58.0 percent
Calcasieu Parish	73.9 percent	80.6 percent	76.7 percent	80.2 percent	78.5 percent
Caldwell Parish	63.3 percent	79.6 percent	73.7 percent	83.5 percent	81.5 percent
Cameron Parish	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	83.6 percent
Catahoula Parish	75.0 percent	60.6 percent	55.8 percent	67.2 percent	68.4 percent
Claiborne Parish	72.6 percent	70.0 percent	65.5 percent	78.7 percent	71.1 percent
Concordia Parish	81.5 percent	76.0 percent	71.6 percent	55.2 percent	66.2 percent
DeSoto Parish	72.7 percent	70.1 percent	68.7 percent	67.8 percent	74.6 percent
East Baton Rouge Parish	66.4 percent	61.8 percent	57.8 percent	56.8 percent	60.0 percent
East Carroll Parish	68.5 percent	73.5 percent	72.1 percent	80.9 percent	67.9 percent
East Feliciana Parish	69.4 percent	75.0 percent	72.5 percent	66.9 percent	64.3 percent
Evangeline Parish	67.1 percent	61.6 percent	66.8 percent	56.9 percent	55.4 percent
Franklin Parish	59.5 percent	66.7 percent	63.5 percent	65.4 percent	60.1 percent
Grant Parish	72.3 percent	72.1 percent	70.5 percent	72.8 percent	70.0 percent
Iberia Parish	58.3 percent	50.6 percent	58.2 percent	76.3 percent	76.4 percent
Iberville Parish	56.7 percent	49.3 percent	55.5 percent	55.8 percent	46.0 percent
Jackson Parish	73.3 percent	83.4 percent	77.3 percent	76.0 percent	73.3 percent
Jefferson Parish	N/A	60.4 percent	60.9 percent	60.6 percent	61.7 percent
Jefferson Davis Parish	83.1 percent	79.4 percent	80.1 percent	76.2 percent	85.3 percent
Lafayette Parish	66.3 percent	69.0 percent	66.8 percent	68.0 percent	70.4 percent
Lafourche Parish	64.8 percent	65.5 percent	69.7 percent	74.4 percent	72.3 percent
LaSalle Parish	78.9 percent	73.2 percent	80.9 percent	83.3 percent	71.7 percent
Lincoln Parish	73.1 percent	76.5 percent	65.2 percent	71.9 percent	73.0 percent
Livingston Parish	80.2 percent	81.5 percent	73.4 percent	76.8 percent	73.6 percent
Madison Parish	49.6 percent	54.4 percent	48.8 percent	64.7 percent	65.4 percent
Morehouse Parish	58.3 percent	56.1 percent	53.2 percent	51.1 percent	54.9 percent
Natchitoches Parish	52.8 percent	55.3 percent	54.2 percent	58.1 percent	57.8 percent
Orleans Parish	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	89.8 percent
Ouachita Parish	67.5 percent	67.6 percent	65.9 percent	67.5 percent	68.5 percent
Plaquemines Parish	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	75.5 percent

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Table 3 Continued

Poitee Parish	61.3 percent	62.1 percent	53.6 percent	52.2 percent	65.1 percent
Rapides Parish	68.0 percent	69.8 percent	66.6 percent	67.2 percent	67.5 percent
Red River Parish	53.8 percent	61.8 percent	62.4 percent	72.2 percent	57.1 percent
Richland Parish	59.9 percent	62.3 percent	64.4 percent	71.6 percent	60.9 percent
Sabine Parish	74.4 percent	73.1 percent	75.2 percent	80.7 percent	81.2 percent
St. Bernard Parish	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	74.9 percent
St. Charles Parish	79.5 percent	79.3 percent	82.4 percent	84.4 percent	79.4 percent
St. Helena Parish	51.0 percent	65.9 percent	64.0 percent	65.2 percent	51.4 percent
St. James Parish	68.3 percent	78.1 percent	78.5 percent	77.0 percent	74.5 percent
St. John the Baptist Parish	56.7 percent	65.6 percent	58.2 percent	58.5 percent	60.6 percent
St. Landry Parish	67.7 percent	67.1 percent	63.9 percent	66.9 percent	63.6 percent
St. Martin Parish	60.9 percent	67.5 percent	60.9 percent	63.1 percent	72.3 percent
St. Mary Parish	68.7 percent	69.2 percent	63.4 percent	67.2 percent	68.7 percent
St. Tammany Parish	72.6 percent	78.1 percent	79.5 percent	77.2 percent	76.7 percent
Tangipahoa Parish	69.3 percent	66.4 percent	66.2 percent	69.4 percent	67.6 percent
Tensas Parish	64.0 percent	70.0 percent	62.5 percent	57.5 percent	64.0 percent
Terrebonne Parish	61.7 percent	59.5 percent	67.0 percent	66.2 percent	65.7 percent
Union Parish	71.2 percent	61.3 percent	66.2 percent	62.2 percent	56.2 percent
Vermilion Parish	68.7 percent	74.0 percent	71.5 percent	67.4 percent	81.0 percent
Vernon Parish	77.2 percent	78.6 percent	76.6 percent	78.4 percent	79.0 percent
Washington Parish	86.1 percent	80.4 percent	80.3 percent	85.1 percent	77.0 percent
Webster Parish	69.3 percent	73.8 percent	76.5 percent	72.9 percent	68.7 percent
West Baton Rouge Parish	67.7 percent	63.1 percent	67.0 percent	70.0 percent	69.3 percent
West Carroll Parish	63.6 percent	67.5 percent	65.8 percent	60.8 percent	67.5 percent
West Feliciana Parish	72.7 percent	69.6 percent	73.1 percent	75.0 percent	72.4 percent
Winn Parish	74.3 percent	68.3 percent	71.4 percent	64.1 percent	63.0 percent
City of Monroe School District	48.4 percent	54.9 percent	54.7 percent	58.5 percent	62.9 percent
City of Bogalusa School District	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	64.7 percent
Zachary Community School District	83.1 percent	82.8 percent	87.8 percent	87.8 percent	83.3 percent
City of Baker School District	61.0 percent	56.9 percent	47.1 percent	52.5 percent	71.9 percent
Central Community School District	N/A	N/A	N/A	87.5 percent	85.2 percent
Recovery School District-New Orleans	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	47.7 percent

Districts in bold were severely affected by the hurricanes of 2005 and did not have to report graduation cohort results from 2005-2006 to 2008-2009 under a policy decision by BESE. Jefferson Parish, which could have taken advantage of the waiver, requested that its data be included beginning in 2008. Central Community School District was not established until 2007.

Source: Louisiana Department of Education

Table 4 Louisiana’s High School Curriculum Tracks

High school students in Louisiana may choose from among three different curriculum tracks. Differences among the three center on both the number and the stringency of the courses required.

LA Core 4 Curriculum	Basic Core Curriculum	Career Diploma Curriculum
<p>English – 4 units English I English II English III English IV</p>	<p>English – 4 units English I English II English III English IV or Senior Applications in English</p>	<p>English – 4 units English I English II 2 units from Technical Reading & Writing, Business English, Business Communications, Using Research in Careers (1/2 unit), American Literature (1/2 unit), Film in America (1/2 unit), English III, English IV, Senior Applications in English, or a local English elective</p>
<p>Math – 4 units Algebra I or Algebra I-Pt. 1 and Pt. 2 Geometry Algebra II 1 unit from Financial Math, Math Essentials, Advanced Math/Pre-Calculus, Advanced Math/Functions & Statistics, Pre-Calculus, Calculus, Probability & Statistics, Discrete Math, or a local math elective</p>	<p>Math – 4 units Algebra I and Applied Algebra I, or Algebra I-Pt. 1 and Pt. 2 Geometry or Applied Geometry 1 unit from Algebra II, Financial Math, Math Essentials, Advanced Math/Pre-Calculus, Advanced Math/Functions & Statistics, Pre-Calculus, Calculus, Probability & Statistics, Discrete Math, or a local math elective</p>	<p>Math – 4 units 1 unit from Algebra I, Algebra I-Pt. 1 and Algebra I-Pt. 2 (2 units), or Applied Algebra Rest of units from Geometry or Applied Geometry, Technical Math, Medical Math, Applications in Statistics & Probability, Financial Math, Math Essentials, Algebra II, Advanced Math/Pre-Calculus, Discrete Math, or a local math elective</p>
<p>Science – 4 units Biology Chemistry 2 units from Physical Science, Integrated Science, Physics I, Physics of Technology I, Aerospace Science, Biology II, Chemistry II, Earth Science, Environmental Science, Physics II, Physics of Technology II, Agriscience II, Anatomy & Physiology, or a local science elective</p>	<p>Science – 3 units Biology 1 unit from Physical Science, Integrated Science, Chemistry I, Physics I, or Physics of Technology I 1 unit from Aerospace Science, Biology II, Chemistry II, Earth Science, Environmental Science, Physics II, Physics of Technology II, Agriscience II, Anatomy & Physiology, or a local science elective</p>	<p>Science – 3 units Biology 1 unit from Physical Science, Integrated Science, Chemistry I, ChemCom, Physics I, or Physics of Technology I 1 unit from Food Science, Forensic Science, Allied Health Science, Basic Body Structure & Function, Basic Physics with Applications, Aerospace Science, Earth Science, Agriscience II, Physics of Technology II, Environmental Science, Anatomy & Physiology, Animal Science, Biotechnology in Agriculture, Environmental Studies in Agriculture, Health Science II, EMT-Basic, another unit from the Physical Science cluster, or a local science elective</p>

Table 4 Continued next page

Table 4 Continued

<p>Social Studies – 4 units Civics or AP American Government (1/2 unit) Free Enterprise (1/2 unit) 1 unit from World History, World Geography, Western Civilization, or AP European History</p>	<p>Social Studies – 3 units American History Civics or AP American Government (1/2 unit) Free Enterprise (1/2 unit) 1 unit from World History, World Geography, Western Civilization, or AP European History</p>	<p>Social Studies – 3 units American History Civics (1/2 unit) Free Enterprise (1/2 unit) 1 unit from Child Psychology & Parenthood Education, Law Studies, Psychology, Sociology, World History, World Geography, Western Civilization, Economics, American Government, African American Studies, or a local social studies elective</p>
<p>Health – 1/2 unit</p>	<p>Health – 1/2 unit</p>	<p>Health – 1/2 unit</p>
<p>Physical Education – 1 ½ units</p>	<p>Physical Education – 1 ½ units</p>	<p>Physical Education – 1 ½ units</p>
<p>Foreign Language – 2 units 2 units from same foreign language, or 2 units of Speech</p>	<p>Foreign Language – none</p>	<p>Foreign Language – none</p>
<p>Arts – 1 unit 1 unit from Fine Arts Survey, Art, Dance, Music, Theatre Arts, or Applied Arts</p>	<p>Arts – none</p>	<p>Arts – none</p>
<p>Electives – 3 units</p>	<p>Electives – 7 units Must include minimum number of courses required to complete a Career Area of Concentration</p>	<p>Electives – none</p>
	<p>Education for Careers or Journey to Careers - 1 unit</p>	<p>Career & Technical Education – 7 units Education for Careers or Journey to Careers (1 unit) 6 units in a Career Area of Concentration</p>
<p>TOTAL–24 units</p>	<p>TOTAL–24 units</p>	<p>TOTAL–23 units</p>

Source: Louisiana Department of Education

Table 5 Career Diploma Enrollment by School District — 2010-2011

In the first year the career diploma option was offered, roughly 250 students enrolled. In the most recent school year (2010-2011), nearly 2,500 students opted for the career diploma curriculum.

School District	Number of Students in Career Diploma Track
Acadia Parish	2
Allen Parish	5
Ascension Parish	50
Assumption Parish	6
Avoyelles Parish	Not reporting
Beauregard Parish	14
Bienville Parish	None
Bossier Parish	41
Caddo Parish	241
Calcasieu Parish	51
Caldwell Parish	19
Cameron Parish	None
Catahoula Parish	3
Claiborne Parish	13
Concordia Parish	None
DeSoto Parish	7
East Baton Rouge Parish	231
East Carroll Parish	None
East Feliciana Parish	1
Evangeline Parish	None
Franklin Parish	54
Grant Parish	None
Iberia Parish	41
Iberville Parish	31
Jackson Parish	4
Jefferson Parish	Not reporting
Jefferson Davis Parish	2
Lafayette Parish	59
Lafourche Parish	68
LaSalle Parish	5
Lincoln Parish	23
Livingston Parish	47
Madison Parish	None
Morehouse Parish	24
Natchitoches Parish	9
Orleans Parish	Not reporting
Ouachita Parish	44
Plaquemines Parish	10
Pointe Coupee Parish	10

Table 5 Continued next page

Table 5 Continued

Rapides Parish	169
Red River Parish	6
Richland Parish	26
Sabine Parish	Not reporting
St. Bernard Parish	14
St. Charles Parish	9
St. Helena Parish	10
St. James Parish	2
St. John the Baptist Parish	4
St. Landry Parish	47
St. Martin Parish	35
St. Mary Parish	51
St. Tammany Parish	None
Tangipahoa Parish	49
Tensas Parish	None
Terrebonne Parish	102
Union Parish	5
Vermilion Parish	164
Vernon Parish	23
Washington Parish	None
Webster Parish	49
West Baton Rouge Parish	19
West Carroll Parish	None
West Feliciana Parish	None
Winn Parish	5
Central Community School District	6
City of Monroe School District	61
City of Bogalusa School District	1
Zachary Community School District	3
City of Baker School District	51
Recovery School District	355
Total	2,381

Source: Louisiana Department of Education

Table 6 Career Diploma Areas of Concentration — 2010-2011

The state Department of Education has approved courses in 104 areas of concentration, although not every area is offered in every school district.

Areas of Concentration	Number of Students Enrolled
AC Refrigeration	4
Academic Studies	1
Administrative Support	58
Advanced Studies	13
Agriculture Production Welding	3
Agriculture Production/Management	123
Agriscience	7
Aircraft Maintenance	1
Allied Health	4
Animal Science	4
Architecture	25
Arts/Audiovisual Technology/Communication	21
ASE	1
Auto Body	1
Auto Technology	32
Banking & Finance	3
Biomedical/Medical	7
Business	190
Cabinetmaking	4
Carpentry/Construction	98
Child Care	12
Child Development Services	99
Clothing & Textiles	10
College Prep	11
Collision Repair	3
Commercial Arts	4
Computer Electronics	7
Computer Engineering Systems	1
Computer Science	3
Cosmetology/Barbering	40
Criminal Justice	19
Culinary Arts	92
Daycare Director	1
Dental	9
Diesel Mechanics	14
Drafting	15
Early Childhood Education	2
Economics	1
Education	56

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Table 6 Continued

Electrical/Electronics	9
Electrician	1
Emergency Health Care	8
Engineering	64
Entertainment Production	23
Entrepreneurship	7
Firefighter	1
Forensic Science	1
Forestry/Conservation	2
General Studies	176
Government & Public Administration	4
Graphic Arts	27
Health Care	6
Health Professional	20
Health Science	131
Horticulture	5
Hospitality & Tourism	24
Human Services	48
Industrial Operations	5
Information Systems	34
Information Technology	56
Interiors & Furniture	3
Journalism	2
JROTC	32
Landscaping	1
Law & Order	2
Law Enforcement Services	12
Law, Public Safety, Security	16
Lawn Maintenance	1
Legal Services	16
Liberal Arts	18
Management of Family Resources	27
Management of Family Services	1
Manufacturing	49
Marketing	1
Masonry	3
Mass Communication	2
Mechanics	1
Military	2
Mortician	1
Marketing & Sales Management	6
Music	1

Table 6 Continued next page

Table 6 Continued

Nursing	123
Nutrition & Food	59
Performing Arts	42
Personal Care Services	18
Petrochemical	1
Photography	3
Physical Therapy	1
Police Training	1
Power Mechanics	16
Pre-Med	14
ProStart	1
PTech	1
Public Safety	1
Social Services	23
Sports Medicine	3
STEM	2
Teacher	1
To Be Determined	66
Transportation	2
Veterinarian	1
Video Game Designer	1
Visual Arts	1
Vocational/Technical	27
Welding	124
TOTAL	2,381

Source: Louisiana Department of Education

Table 7 Charter High Schools in Louisiana

In the 2010-2011 school year, 28 charter high schools operated in the state.

Name	Location	Year Opened	Grades
Type 1			
Jefferson Chamber Foundation Academy	Harvey	2010-2011	9th-12th
Mentorship Academy of Digital Arts	Baton Rouge	2010-2011	9th-12th
Mentorship Academy of Science and Technology	Baton Rouge	2010-2011	9th-12th
Type 2			
Avoyelles Public Charter School	Mansurs	2000-2001	K-12th
Delhi Charter School	Delhi	2001-2002	K-12th
International High School	New Orleans	2010-2011	9th-12th
Madison Preparatory Academy	Baton Rouge	2009-2010	9th-10th
Type 3			
Benjamin Franklin High School	New Orleans	2005-2006	9th-12th
Lusher Charter School	New Orleans	2005-2006	K-12th
New Orleans Science & Math High School	New Orleans	2005-2006	9th-12th
Priestley Charter School	New Orleans	2006-2007	9th-10th
Warren Easton Charter High School		2006-2007	9th-12th
Type 4			
Edna Karr Charter High School	New Orleans	2005-2006	9th-12th
Louisiana School for the Agricultural Sciences	Bunkie	2000-2001	9th-12th
Type 5			
Abramson Science and Technology Charter School	New Orleans	2007-2008	K-11th
Algiers Technology Academy	New Orleans	2008-2009	9th-12th
Capitol Pre-College Academy for Boys	Baton Rouge	2008-2009	9th-12th
Capitol Pre-College Academy for Girls	Baton Rouge	2008-2009	9th-12th
KIPP Renaissance High School	New Orleans	2010-2011	9th
MLK Science and Technology Charter School	New Orleans	2006-2007	Pre K-10th
Miller-McCoy Academy	New Orleans	2008-2009	10th
Morris Jeff Community School	New Orleans	2010-2011	11th
New Orleans Charter Science and Math Academy	New Orleans	2008-2009	9th-11th
O. Perry Walker Senior High School	New Orleans	2005-2006	9th-12th
Pointe Coupee Central High School	Morganza	2008-2009	6th-12th
Sojourner Truth Academy	New Orleans	2008-2009	9th-10th
Sophie B. Wright Learning Academy	New Orleans	2005-2006	4th-10th
Thurgood Marshall Early College High School	New Orleans	2009-2010	9th-12th

Type 1 charters are start-up schools authorized by the local school board. Type 2 charters are either start-up schools or conversions of existing schools authorized by BESE. Type 3 charters are conversions of existing schools authorized by the local school board. Type 4 charters are start-up schools or conversions of existing schools authorized by BESE where the local school board is the applicant. Type 5 charters are conversions of existing schools taken over by the Recovery School District and authorized by BESE.

Source: Louisiana Department of Education

Table 8 High School Graduation Requirements in Selected SREB States

The following charts show the high school curricula for 12 of the 16 SREB states. Several of the states offer multiple options for diplomas.

ALABAMA			
Courses	High School Diploma*	Occupational Diploma**	Alternate Adult High School Diploma***
English Language Arts	4 units	4 units	4 units
Mathematics	4 units	4 units	4 units
Science	4 units	4 units	4 units
Social Studies	4 units	4 units	4 units
Physical Education	1 unit	1 unit	1 unit
Health Education	0.5 unit	0.5 unit	0.5 unit
Arts Education	0.5 unit	0.5 unit	0.5 unit
Computer Applications	0.5 unit	0.5 unit	None
Foreign Language	None	None	None
Electives****	5.5 units	5.5 units	2 units
Career/Technical Education	None	None	2 units
Coordinated Studies	None	None	1 unit
Cooperative Career/ Technical Education	None	None	1 unit
Total Units	24 units	24 units	24 units

* Besides the standard Alabama High School Diploma, students may also earn one of three academic or career/technical endorsements if they choose.

** The Alabama Occupational Diploma is available for students with disabilities. They must earn the required course credits and complete an approved occupational portfolio.

*** Students pursuing the Alternate Adult High School Diploma must complete the required courses and pass the test for a General Education Development certificate.

**** Elective offerings must include foreign languages, fine arts, physical education, wellness education, career/technical education and driver education.

Source: Alabama Department of Education

ARKANSAS		
Courses	Smart Core Curriculum	Core Curriculum
English	4 units	4 units
Mathematics	4 units	4 units
Natural Science	3 units	None
Science	None	3 units
Social Studies	3 units	3 units
Oral Communications	½ unit	½ unit
Physical Education	½ unit	½ unit
Health and Safety	½ unit	½ unit
Fine Arts	½ unit	½ unit
Career Focus	6 units	6 units
Total Units	22 units	22 units

Source: Arkansas Department of Education

GEORGIA	
Courses	Curriculum
English	4 units
Math	4 units
Science	4 units
Social Studies	3 units
Health & Physical Education	1 unit
CTAE/Foreign Language/Arts	3 units
Electives	4 units
Total Units	23 units

Source: Georgia Department of Education

FLORIDA			
Courses	24-Credit Program Curriculum	3-Year/18-Credit Program Curriculum	3-Year/18-Credit Career Prep Program Curriculum
English	4 units	4 units	4 units
Math	4 units	4 units	4 units
Science	3 units	3 units	3 units
Social Studies	3 units	3 units	3 units
Physical Education	1 unit	None	None
Foreign Language	None	2 units	None
Arts	1 unit	None	None
Electives	8 units	2 units	1 units
Career & Technical Education	None	None	3 units
Total Units	24 units	18 units	18 units

Source: Florida Department of Education

KENTUCKY			
Courses	High School Diploma Minimum Requirements Curriculum	High School Diploma Pre-College Curriculum	Commonwealth Diploma Curriculum
English	4 units	4 units	4 units
Math	3 units	3 units	3 units
Science	3 units	3 units	3 units
Social Studies	3 units	3 units	3 units
Health	½ unit	½ unit	½ unit
Physical Education	½ unit	½ unit	½ unit
Foreign Language	None	2 units	2 units
Arts	1 unit	1 unit	1 unit
Electives	7 units	5 units	5 units
AP Courses	None	None	4 units
Total Units	22 units	22 units	22 units + 4 AP units

Source: Kentucky Department of Education

LOUISIANA			
Courses	LA Core 4 Curriculum	Basic Core Curriculum	Career Diploma Curriculum
English	4 units	4 units	4 units
Math	4 units	4 units	4 units
Science	4 units	3 units	3 units
Social Studies	4 units	3 units	3 units
Health	½ unit	½ unit	½ unit
Physical Education	1 ½ units	1 ½ units	1 ½ units
Foreign Language	2 units	None	None
Arts	1 unit	None	None
Education for Careers or Journey to Careers	None	1 unit	1 unit
Electives	3 units	7 units	None
Career & Technical Education	None	None	6 units
Total Units	24 units	24 units	23 units

Source: Louisiana Department of Education

MISSISSIPPI		
Courses	High School Diploma through 2010-2011 Curriculum	High School Diploma for 2011-2012 and beyond Curriculum
English	4 units	4 units
Math	4 units	4 units
Science	3 units	4 units
Social Studies	3 units	4 units
Health	½ unit	1 unit
Business & Technology	1 unit	1 unit
Arts	1 unit	1 unit
Electives	4 ½ units	5 units
Total Units	21 units	24 units

Source: Mississippi Department of Education

NORTH CAROLINA		
Courses	High School Diploma	Academic Scholars Program
English	4 units	4 units
Math	4 units	4 units
Science	3 units	3 units
Social Studies	3 units	3 units
Health & Physical Education	1 unit	1 unit
Foreign Language	None	2 units
Career & Technical Education or JROTC or Arts or other subject areas	None	4 units
Higher-level courses such as AP or IB	None	2 or 3 units
Electives	6 units	None
Total Units	21 units	23 or 24 units

Source: North Carolina Department of Education

SOUTH CAROLINA		
Courses	College Prep Curriculum	Career Tech Curriculum
English	4 units	4 units
Math	4 units	4 units
Science	3 units	3 units
Social Studies	3 units	3 units
Physical Education	1 unit	1 unit
Computer Science	1 unit	1 unit
Foreign Language	1 unit	None
Career & Technology Education	None	1 unit
Electives	7 units	7 units
Total Units	24 units	24 units

Source: South Carolina Department of Education

TENNESSEE		
Courses	College Curriculum	Non-College Curriculum
English	4 units	4 units
Math	4 units	4 units
Science	3 units	3 units
Social Studies	3 units	3 units
Physical Education	1 ½ units	1 ½ units
Business	1 unit	1 unit
Foreign Language	2 units	None
Arts	1 unit	None
Electives	3 units	6 units
Total Units	22 ½ units	22 ½ units

Source: Tennessee Department of Education

TEXAS			
Courses	Minimum High School Program	Recommended High School Program	Distinguished Achievement Program
English Language Arts	4 units	4 units	4 units
Mathematics	3 units	4 units	4 units
Science	2 units	4 units	4 units
Social Studies	2 ½ units	3 ½ units	3 ½ units
Economics (Free Enterprise System)	½ unit	½ unit	½ unit
Academic Elective	1 unit	None	None
Languages Other Than English	None	2 units	3 units
Physical Education	1 unit	1 unit	1 unit
Speech	½ unit	½ unit	½ unit
Fine Arts	1 unit	1 unit	1 unit
Elective Courses	6 ½ units	5 ½ units	4 ½ units
Total Units	22 units	26 units	26 units

Source: Texas Education Agency

VIRGINIA					
Courses	Standard Diploma*	Advanced Studies Diploma*	Modified Standard Diploma**	Standard Technical Diploma*	Advanced Technical Diploma*
English	4 units	4 units	4 units	4 units	4 units
Mathematics	3 units	4 units	3 units	3 units	4 units
Laboratory Science	3 units	4 units	2 units	3 units	4 units
History & Social Sciences	3 units	4 units	2 units	3 units	4 units
Foreign Language, or Fine Arts, or Career & Technical Education	2 units	3 units from Foreign Language; 1 unit from Fine Arts or CTE	1 unit from Fine Arts or CTE	1 unit	3 units from Foreign Language; 1 unit from Fine Arts or CTE
Health & Physical Education	2 units	2 units	2 units	2 units	2 units
Economics & Personal Finance	1 unit	1 unit	None	1 unit	1 unit
CTE	None	None	None	4 units	3 units
Electives	4 units	3 units	6 units	1 unit	None
Total	22 units	26 units	20 units	22 units	26 units

* Included in the units for each of these diplomas is a set number of "verified credits," which students must earn by passing certain end-of-course tests or other assessments.

** The Modified Standard Diploma is available, but not required, for certain students with disabilities.

*** The state also offers other credentials for students who cannot meet the requirements for any of the diplomas shown above, including a Special Diploma, a General Achievement Diploma and a Certificate of Program Completion.

Source: Virginia Department of Education

Chart 1 Department of Education Dropout Prevention Strategies — 2008

Just before the bottom dropped out of Louisiana's financial position, the Department of Education released this set of initiatives, which education leaders hoped would help stem the dropout rate. With the onset of the state's budget crisis, department officials took this list and revised it to come up with the 80 Percent Graduation Rate Strategies (See Chart 3).

Ninth Grade Initiative	This program is designed to help incoming high school freshmen make the transition from middle school. It encompasses increased personalization, developing skills for high school success, and encouraging education and career planning.
High Schools That Work/Making Middle Grades Work	HSTW/MMGW is a school improvement initiative designed by the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) to provide high school and middle grade students with the skills to implement 10 key practices the SREB has found to be essential to increasing school achievement.
Career and Technical Education	The Department of Education has placed renewed emphasis on CTE programs, with the goal of providing students with a challenging, relevant and seamless education that will help them become workplace ready and lifelong learners.
Credit Recovery	This initiative provides students with various mechanisms to recover credit after they have failed a course and stay on track to graduate with their peers.
Adolescent Literacy	This program focuses intensely on helping students with sub-par reading skills improve their ability to read and comprehend.
Jobs for America's Graduates Louisiana	JAG-LA is an affiliate of the national Jobs for America's Graduates Program. It focuses on at-risk youth ages 12 to 21, and promotes academic and skills attainment, civic responsibility, leadership development, and social awareness.
Initiative to Transform Professional School Counseling	This initiative provides professional development so that high schools can design a comprehensive school counseling program to meet the academic, career and personal/social needs of their students.
Senior Project	This is a four-component, student-driven program that can lead to students receiving an academic or career-tech endorsement on their diplomas.
Louisiana's Comprehensive Learning Supports System	This initiative aims to give all students an equal opportunity to succeed by providing the necessary physical, social and emotional support to overcome whatever obstacles they face in learning.
Educational Mission to Prepare Louisiana's Youth	EMPLOY provides struggling students with soft skills and job training as well as helping them work toward a diploma or GED.
Louisiana's Promise	This initiative seeks to engage leaders in local communities in discussions that will help them develop their own solutions to the high school dropout crisis.

Source: Louisiana Department of Education

Chart 2 Department of Education's Nine Critical Goals

As part of its regrouping in light of the state's budget problems, the department reorganized and focused its mission on these nine goals.

1. 75 percent of students will enter kindergarten ready to learn.
2. 90 percent of students will be literate by third grade.
3. 90 percent of students will enter fourth grade on time.
4. 90 percent of students will be proficient in English Language Arts by eighth grade.
5. 90 percent of students will be proficient in math by eighth grade.
6. 85 percent of students will graduate on time.
7. 75 percent of students will be postsecondary or workforce-ready.
8. Students will complete one year of postsecondary education.
9. Students will achieve all of the above goals regardless of race or class.

Source: Louisiana Department of Education

Chart 3 80 Percent Graduation Rate Strategies

Staff members in the Office of College & Career Readiness in the Department of Education developed this set of initiatives to address the state's low graduation and high dropout rates in response to ongoing budget problems and the legislative mandate to reach an overall 80 percent graduation rate by 2014.

	Strategy	Description	# of Students Potentially Participating Per Year	# of Extra Graduates Per Year	Budget
1	Accelerated Pathways	This program is a response to intervention (RTI) plan that incorporates academic interventions and sustained mentorship to help over-age students graduate from high school in three years.	236	20	From the LDOE
2	Louisiana Virtual School (LVS)	The Louisiana Virtual School is designed to improve student achievement and academic opportunities by providing students and teachers with increased access to required courses, a rigorous curriculum, enrichment programs and professional development opportunities using 21st-century learning systems. LVS courses are used to meet graduation requirements, to qualify students for TOPS awards, to recover and/or catch up with course credits, to alleviate scheduling conflicts and to extend opportunities for career/technical, dual enrollment and Advanced Placement courses.	2,500	7	\$2.38 million from 8(g) funds; self-generated \$150 per student/per course fee

Chart 3 Continued next page

Chart 3 *Continued*

3	Jobs for America's Graduates (JAG)	JAG is a dropout prevention and recovery program that delivers a unique set of services for at-risk students to help them earn a high school diploma and for out-of-school youth to help them earn a GED. Services are provided by a job specialist and are centered on the national JAG competencies, which include career development, job attainment, job survival, communication skills, workplace skills and life survival skills.	1,700	40 per 100 students	\$3.95 million; comes from federal grants
4	Everybody Graduates!	This initiative is designed to encourage and support the state's public schools in using an at-risk early warning system to identify students and provide interventions that will help more students be promoted on time to the next grade. The initiative provides a group of competitively selected schools with up to two years of funding to plan and implement research-based dropout prevention strategies.	14,500	2 in 2010-2011; 3 in 2011-2012	\$1.9 million from 8(g) funds
5	Career and Technical Education/ Industry-Based Certifications	These are career specific programs and credentials that provide students with multiple opportunities to become college and career ready.	1,500 in 2010-2011; 2.5% more per year after	10	\$11.3 million in Carl Perkins money; \$4.8 million in CTE state funds
6	Connections	Connections replaces the Pre-GED Options Program. The Connections process is a one-year program aimed at over-age students. These students receive targeted instruction and accelerated remediation geared toward attaining a high school diploma, a GED or a state-approved skills certificate. The components of the program include academic and behavioral interventions, mentoring, job skills training, committee reviews, parent meetings, individual prescriptions for instruction, individual graduation plans and exiting pathways.	50,000	1 per 100	Funding for staffing
7	Dropout Prevention/80% Graduation Rate Plan	The Dropout Prevention and Recovery Act approved by BESE requires each public school system with a four-year cohort graduation rate of less than 80% to establish and submit a Dropout Prevention Action Plan. This plan must include posting the four-year cohort graduation rate for each high school on the district website and sending written notices to the parents or legal guardians of high school students that include the four-year cohort dropout rate for the school and the retention rate by grade level.	18,000	1 per 100	Funding for staffing

Chart 3 Continued next page

Chart 3 *Continued*

8	College & Career Readiness Data Reporting & Awareness	This project is designed to increase Department of Education staff and stakeholder awareness and use of data that affect the statewide, district and school level graduation rates by creating and publicizing annual user friendly reports that include the relevant longitudinal information.	50,000	1.5% of students, or 750	Funding for staffing
9	College & Career Readiness Reorganization	This initiative provides for the reorganization of the Office of College & Career Readiness to provide effective and efficient delivery of services to all public school districts. The state is divided into two teams (East/West) and each of the eight regions in the state is assigned a team that focuses on providing best practice models to its schools. Special focus is placed on the 50 high-priority high schools. The reorganization focuses DOE's resources in the field, provides a DOE partner to drive school data examination by identifying data-driven strategies and visiting each school on a quarterly basis.	18,000	3	Funding for staffing
10	New Tech High Schools	The New Tech model provides an instructional approach centered on project-based learning, a culture that empowers students and teachers, and integrated technology in the classroom. Louisiana currently has eight New Tech High Schools.	Start with 90 freshmen each year	No four-year cohort data available yet in Louisiana	\$400,000 to start up each site
11	Areas of Concentration	These are career-specific programs that provide students with opportunities to become college and career ready.	50,000 in 2010-2011; 1% more per year after	Not yet figured	\$11.3 million in Carl Perkins money; \$4.8 million in CTE state funds
12	Dual Enrollment	Dual enrollment is the simultaneous enrollment of a student at both a secondary and a postsecondary institution. This program helps students accelerate their postsecondary work, enriches the course opportunities in academic and career and technical education, and provides students with an understanding of the rigor of college work.	50,000 in 2010-2011; 2.5% more per year after	0.5	\$11.3 million in Carl Perkins money; \$4.8 million in CTE state funds; \$5.5 million from the Board of Regents Early Start Funds

Chart 3 Continued next page

Chart 3 *Continued*

13	Louisiana School Counseling Model	The goal of this initiative is to improve school counseling to help increase student achievement and increase postsecondary enrollment. The model encourages school counselors to complete yearly action plans and results reports with data about student change, conduct periodic program audits to ensure that the school counseling program has the proper goals and is implementing interventions effectively. The model also provides a framework for districts to evaluate school counselors.	50,000	1	Included in the Everybody Graduates! budget
14	LA Gear Up	This strategy is to increase the number of students participating at each of the LA Gear Up sites by providing additional coaching and support through regional graduation coordinators. The program provides opportunities for targeted middle and high schools to receive assistance in integrating a range of reform opportunities into ongoing school improvement efforts.	10,300	1	No cost
15	College Summit	This program aims to build the capacity of high schools to increase the number of students going to college. Specially trained students help build a college-going culture, while teachers and counselors use a managed curriculum and technology tools to help all students create postsecondary plans and apply to college. Data and accountability tools help school leaders manage improved student outcomes.	0 in first year; 1,124 in second year and beyond	15	\$215 per senior; \$80 per 9th-11th grader; district/school pays cost
16	Louisiana Graduation Coach Task Force	The task force is charged with developing procedures and protocols to guide the state's graduation coaches in their work. This work is designed to improve the successful transition of students from elementary to middle school, middle to high school, and high school to postsecondary education or work.	50,000	1	\$40,000
17	Partnerships	This strategy is to increase partnerships with organizations whose primary goal is to increase the number of full-time freshmen who attend postsecondary institutions. Partnerships have been established with: Career Compass, BARD Early College, MyFutureInLouisiana, Louisiana Board of Regents, Louisiana Community & Technical College System and National Academy Foundation.	50,000	1	None

Source: Louisiana Department of Education