

American Diploma Network (ADP) Louisiana's Action Plan

The Challenge

Louisiana ranks near the very bottom on every single indicator of child well-being tracked by the Annie E. Casey Foundation's *KIDS COUNT* reports—from child poverty to single parent households to out-of-work parents to the percentage of low birth-weight babies. Because our young people face some of the *worst* demographic odds in the nation, we believe we must find ways to give them the *best* set of secondary and postsecondary educational opportunities in America, especially if we want them to have a reasonable chance of competing for skilled work in today's Information Age.

There's no denying we have a long way to go ...

... in middle school:

- More than 40% of our 8th graders score below the basic level in math, and over a third score below basic in reading, on the National Assessment of Educational Progress. (U.S. Department of Education, National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2003)
- Only 14% of Louisiana's 8th graders take an Algebra-level math course or higher, the lowest percentage of any state in the nation. Moreover, that rate only improved by two percentage points from 1992-2003, compared with an increase of 12 percentage points for the nation as a whole. (U.S. Department of Education, National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2003)
- Nearly one in five 8th graders (18%) fails to be promoted to high school. (Louisiana Department of Education, 2004)

... in high school:

- Once again, nearly one in five 9th graders (18%) fails to be promoted to the 10th grade (Louisiana Department of Education, 2004)
- Only about half of our high school students complete a math course beyond Algebra II before graduation, an important marker of preparation for postsecondary education—a higher rate than the national average but well below leading states (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2003)
- Only 63% of our high school freshmen graduate on time with a regular diploma, placing Louisiana in the bottom ten states on a comparable measure of high school graduation. (Manhattan Institute, 2005) If anything, however, that estimate is probably too high; a recent internal study of a longitudinal state cohort revealed that only 54% completed high school in four years. (Louisiana Department of Education, 2004)
- Only 35% of our high school freshman—and 24% of African-American freshmen—graduate on time with the coursework and minimum skills necessary to be fully successful in higher education. (Manhattan Institute, 2005)
- Not surprisingly, then, of the public high school graduates who go on to enroll in a Louisiana college or university, 36% are placed in one or more remedial classes their first semester.

... and in postsecondary education:

- About 58% of high school graduates enroll in higher education, but only 71% of freshmen in 4-year colleges and 53% of those in 2-year colleges return for a sophomore year. (Mortenson, 2004)
- A dismal 38% of freshmen in Louisiana's 4-year colleges earn a college degree within six years, the lowest college completion rate in the nation. Moreover, Louisiana's college completion *gap* is shamefully large—only 28% of African-American freshmen in Louisiana's 4-year colleges earn baccalaureate degrees within six years. (National Information Center for Higher Education Policymaking and Analysis, 2004)

The end result is sadly predictable: Our average 9th grader has only a 13% chance of eventually earning an on-time college degree, odds that rank Louisiana among the bottom six states for the effectiveness and efficiency of its secondary-through-postsecondary educational pipeline. (National Center for Public Policy in Higher Education, April 2004)

Our business community, for one, has begun to say loudly and clearly that we must do better. The results of an annual Louisiana employer survey released last December revealed that:

- 72% of the employers are having a difficult time finding qualified applicants to fill open jobs (with a full 42% reporting difficulty finding candidates with *adequate basic reading skills*);
- 38% of employers say that finding qualified workers is harder now than it was five years ago; and
- 47% of employers say skill needs of entry-level employees are *rising*. (Council for a Better Louisiana, December 2004)

That skills gap is unlikely to disappear any time soon. In fact, the opposite is more likely true according to job growth estimates by the Louisiana Department of Labor.

Louisiana's Response

Over the past 10 years Louisiana has undertaken an ambitious and carefully orchestrated set of efforts to improve the quality of education for its PK-12 students. Driven by recommendations from an influential School and District Accountability Commission created in 1996, state leaders have developed and implemented a system of standards, assessments and accountability rated first in the nation by Education Week in January 2006, a system that now includes ambitious goals for all schools and districts to achieve by 2014. We also have developed rigorous grade level expectations and a statewide comprehensive curriculum tied to the standards. Based on another set of recommendations from our Blue Ribbon Commission on Education Excellence, we are implementing policies to greatly improve Louisiana's system of teacher and administrator preparation and support, work that earned our state Education Week's top ranking for "efforts to improve teacher quality" this past January.

We are beginning to see the fruits of these efforts in our elementary schools and, to a certain degree, in our middle schools; however, the urgency for the need to rethink our high schools is evident in the statistics presented above. Recognizing this need to restructure public high schools, a Commission on High School Redesign was appointed in 2004 by the Governor, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, and the Board of Regents to recommend actions to assist the state with the high school redesign process. The Commission, which has met since October of 2004, is currently immersed in the consideration of state policies, programs, and practices to support the redesign of high schools in ways that address the current and future needs of the state. Its challenge is to enable high schools to deliver on the promise to prepare all students to graduate from high school with the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in college, careers and community life. The Commission is being assisted in its work by Kati Haycock and Education Trust staff members, who are serving as facilitators/consultants to the Commission, and by the Model Schools Network and staff from the International Center for Educational Leadership who have begun working with eight pilot redesign schools in the state.

Additionally, Louisiana has joined with 21 other states in the American Diploma Project (ADP) in an effort to raise expectations and achievement in our high schools so that all students graduate with the knowledge and skills they need to be successful in college and work. Over the next three years, the Governor will work with the High School Redesign Commission to take the following steps on behalf of Louisiana's students:

Align academic standards in high school with the expectations for college and workplace success, so that all students who meet the standards are prepared for their next steps in life.

Upgrade high school course requirements so that all students are required to complete a college- and work-ready curriculum in order to earn a high school diploma.

Streamline the assessment system so that the tests students take in high school can also serve as readiness tests for college and work.

Develop an accountability system to hold high schools and colleges accountable for the success of their students.

In order to make the changes in policy and practice necessary to improve the preparation of our high school students and as stated above, the Governor, State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, and Board of Regents jointly appointed a High School Redesign Commission that has been established in legislation. Among others, the Commission membership includes (a) representatives of all of the major state education associations, including our school principal association and all three teacher associations; (b) the commissioner of higher education, the vice chair of the Board of Regents, and the presidents of the Louisiana Community and Technical College System and University of Louisiana System; (c) the deputy secretary of Louisiana's Office of Youth Development; (d) and business and industry representatives. This group (Attachment 1) has helped shape the Louisiana ADP agenda and is committed to carrying it out.

SUMMARY OF LOUISIANA'S ADP ACTION PLAN

Alignment of High School Expectations with Demands of College and Work

Louisiana will align high school diploma requirements with the knowledge and skills required for success in postsecondary education and work. The work will include:

- Making sure that Louisiana's comprehensive high school course curriculum and grade level expectations are at the level necessary to prepare students for success in college and high skills jobs.
- Requiring all high school students to complete this college- and work- ready curriculum in order to earn a diploma.
- Making the completion of the college-ready high school curriculum a requirement for college admissions, so that students who are admitted are prepared to succeed.

Testing and Accountability

Louisiana will review its system of assessments and incentives to make sure that the system holds high schools accountable for graduating students who are prepared for college and work, and that the system holds postsecondary institutions accountable for their success once enrolled. The system will include:

- Administering tests of college-readiness that all students will take in high school to ensure they have been taught the academic content necessary for success.
- Streamlining student assessments across systems by aligning high school tests with college admissions and placement tests.
- Linking and reporting data across the K-12 and postsecondary systems in ways that improve the transition from high school to college, including sharing college persistence data with respective feeder high schools to inform instructional practice and curriculum alignment.
- Working to improve the experiences students have after they arrive in college--the full range of institutional policies and practices that support achievement, persistence and success.

LOUISIANA'S PLAN FOR IMPLEMENTING ADP IMPERATIVES BY 2008

Alignment of High School Expectations with Demands of College and Work

August 2005 – January 2007 *(18 month work plan)*

Louisiana will take the following steps to align high school standards and course requirements with what students need to know and be able to do to succeed in college and the workplace:

Academic Standards for College and Work

- Launch process with the K-12, postsecondary and business communities to define the knowledge and skills students need to succeed in credit bearing courses in Louisiana colleges and universities and in high growth industries. Use national ADP benchmarks and the state's academic standards for college and work to identify gaps in existing high school standards and to revise those standards as necessary.
 - Involve high school teachers and college faculty, as well as business and industry representatives.
 - Use the American Diploma Project benchmarks and other national models as starting points for this work.
 - Revise high school standards as necessary to align with college- and work- ready benchmarks.
 - Solicit public input on academic standards drafts.
 - Commission external review of standards by Achieve.
- Have postsecondary and business communities validate that if students meet the state's academic standards, they will be ready for success in college and careers.
- Bring final standards to the Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) and Louisiana Board of Regents for adoption.

Course Requirements

The Louisiana High School Redesign Commission will:

- Recommend required core college- and work-ready curriculum (courses/credits and clearly articulated academic standards for courses). Solicit input and support from policy makers, stakeholders and the general public.
- Draft BESE's rules and legislation necessary to make the core college- and work-ready curriculum required of all students. Solicit input and support from the legislators, state board members and the general public.
- Identify state policies and programs needed to support implementation of the new requirements, including professional development and curriculum resources. Determine reasonable timelines for policy implementation.
- Develop communications plan to inform and engage key stakeholders throughout the process. Communicate policy changes widely and consistently.

Testing and Accountability

August 2005 – August 2008 *(36 month work plan)*

Louisiana will review its system of assessments and incentives to hold high schools accountable for graduating students who are college- and work-ready, and will develop a system to hold postsecondary institutions accountable for student success once enrolled.

Testing

The Louisiana High School Redesign Commission will

- Recommend a system for assessing academic college- and work-readiness of all high school students.
 - Determine the assessments to be given at the state level, including the type of test (end-of-course, end-of-grade, or cumulative survey test) and the subjects to be tested.
 - Develop timeline for test development, piloting, and full administration.
 - Ensure alignment with Louisiana academic standards for college and work.
- Identify changes necessary to streamline student assessments across K-12 and postsecondary systems. Review current college admissions and placement processes. Develop plan for using new high school exams for college placement purposes where possible.
- Determine additional ways to make high school assessments matter for students. Consider including scores on new assessments on high school transcripts and encouraging employers to use transcripts in hiring decisions. Also consider feasibility of phasing in new college- and work-ready assessments as part of high school graduation requirements.

Accountability

- Seek legislative changes necessary to include results of high school assessments as indicators of school performance in Louisiana's current school accountability system.
- Make Louisiana's core college- and work-ready curriculum (or documented equivalent) the minimum academic requirement for admission to Louisiana's colleges and universities. Ask the Louisiana Board of Regents to adopt this policy effective no later than with the first graduating class held to the required core curriculum. Seek legislative action if necessary to ensure this alignment for students.
- Link and report data across the K-12 and postsecondary systems in ways that can foster improved student achievement. Establish longitudinal data system to track student progress from elementary through middle and high school and into postsecondary. Share college persistence and success data with high schools to inform instructional practice and curriculum alignment.
- Identify college success strategies needed to improve the experiences students have after they arrive at college. Identify changes in state and institutional policy and practice that will be necessary to support positive student outcomes.
- Identify performance indicators and publish high school and college report cards to highlight progress and challenges.
- Develop communications plan to inform and engage key stakeholders throughout the process. Communicate policy changes widely and consistently.