



# LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

## **BIRTH THROUGH THIRD GRADE CONTINUUM: LOUISIANA PLAN**

### **Coordinating to Build a Strong Continuum**

As a result of Act 3 (2012), the LDE has adopted a birth to twelfth grade mission, focused on supporting children's development and success across this continuum. Yet, Louisiana recognizes that no single provider can serve all of the state's at-risk children: it takes a diverse system of child care, Head Start, and preschool to serve all at-risk children birth to five. Through Community Network Pilots, Louisiana is ensuring a continuum of learning from birth to age five within every community that:

- Empowers families with choice;
- Increases access to high-quality options;
- Engages families, including isolated or hard-to-reach families, that might not participate otherwise;
- Ensures resources, including curricula and assessments, support quality in diverse delivery settings;
- Supports seamless transitions across programs birth to five; and
- Supports all at-risk children in that community so they enter kindergarten ready to succeed.

With Community Network Pilots well underway, the LDE is now working to ensure coherence between these two systems: birth to five systems and K-12 systems.

### **Ensuring No Increased Cost to Families or Diminution of Other Services**

Louisiana will ensure enhancements do not result in additional costs for families or diminution of other important services. Because the LDE and BESE oversee local coordinated enrollment efforts, the state is in a unique position to reduce burdens on families (Appendix A. 7). For all the seats that will be funded through this grant, there will be no increased cost to families or diminution of other services, even as the state funds these seats at the higher rate of quality. As the state is preparing the funding model for early childhood as required by HCR 61 (2014), extensive consideration is being given to drastically reducing, if not eliminating, parent co-pay

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rates associated with child care subsidies, if permitted by the anticipated revised federal regulations governing CCDF (Appendix D. 2).

## **Ensuring Children are Well-Prepared for Kindergarten**

In 2011, the Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) established a statewide comprehensive definition of kindergarten readiness (Appendix A. 9). All of the state's work to unify the early childhood system is intended to improve kindergarten readiness for all children. As required by law, the state annually assesses kindergarten readiness against the definition, using the comprehensive *Developing Skills Checklist (DSC)* as a Kindergarten Entry Assessment (KEA) (Appendix A. 10). In 2014-15, the state is field testing a report card system for early childhood providers that will inform future policy on how best to measure kindergarten readiness and program quality (Appendix A. 6). The Community Network Pilots are testing the use of *Teaching Strategies GOLD* and other resources to determine a more complete kindergarten readiness measure that would be part of a comprehensive early learning assessment system. In addition, the report card field test and Learning Year includes assessing program quality using *CLASS*, which will give great insight into how well programs are preparing children for kindergarten.

## **Sustaining Educational and Developmental Gains in K-3**

Louisiana is taking a comprehensive approach to sustaining gains earned in early childhood through the third grade. Overall, the state is ensuring coherence between the early childhood and early elementary systems of resources and support, as shown in Table. F. 1. The strategy reflects the state's approach to supporting teachers through a continuous loop where teachers:

- 1. Set Goals:** Set ambitious goals for student achievement;
- 2. Plan & Teach:** Prepare lessons based on the *ELDS* and having high-quality interactions with children; and
- 3. Evaluate:** Reflect on student learning based on observation and assessment and adjust plans.

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**Table 1: Louisiana’s Strategy to Increase Coherence between Early Childhood and Early Elementary Systems**

Group	Responsibility	Resources	Direct Support
Community Network Pilots and Districts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Plan:</b> Develop community vision and plans to guide providers</li> <li>• <b>Build Systems:</b> Support teachers through observation and collaboration</li> </ul>	District Support Toolbox	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaborative planning with other networks</li> <li>• State staff support, both in central office and in the field</li> </ul>
Providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Set Vision:</b> Set vision, goals, and curricular and programming plans</li> <li>• <b>Manage Site:</b> Ensure teachers are supported to improve and children achieve</li> <li>• <b>Reflect:</b> Identify strengths and challenges, makes plans to adjust</li> </ul>	District Support Toolbox	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community Network Pilot leadership team</li> <li>• Community collaboration</li> <li>• Child Care Resource &amp; Referral</li> </ul>
Teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Set Goals:</b> Set ambitious goals for student achievement</li> <li>• <b>Plan &amp; Teach:</b> Prepare lessons based on the <i>ELDS</i> and having high-quality interactions with children</li> <li>• <b>Evaluate:</b> Reflect on student learning based on observation and assessment, adjust plans</li> </ul>	Teacher Support Toolbox	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community Network Pilot – coaches</li> <li>• Teacher Leaders</li> <li>• Professional Learning Communities</li> <li>• Child Care Resource &amp; Referral</li> <li>• Mental Health Consultation</li> </ul>

In addition, Louisiana will:

- Ensure structures exist to support meaningful collaboration for all teachers, including expanding its innovative use of Teacher Leaders. Teacher Leaders are highly effective

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educators who serve as school leaders assisting other teachers to plan high-quality lessons, reflect on student data to inform instruction, and improve professional practice (Appendix F. 1).

- Continue providing full day kindergarten, as required by Louisiana law.
- Create a report card system that ensures early childhood providers are preparing children for K-3. Through the field test and ongoing work to improve the K-12 accountability system, the state is working to incentivize and measure sustaining the educational and developmental gains children will be making in publicly-funded early childhood programs (Appendix A. 6).

By connecting processes and programs across the birth through third grade spectrum, Louisiana will increase the percentage of children reading and doing math at grade level by the end of third grade will increase. The proof of this sustained achievement is evidenced by the success of the state's LA 4 and NSECD programs, which show lasting benefits through the eighth grade (Appendix A. 3).

## **Sustaining Parent and Family Engagement**

Community Network Pilots have developed strong family engagement strategies, building on the success of local Head Starts in this effort. The Community Network Pilots are further working to engage families, particularly through coordinated enrollment and discussing child growth and development through *Teaching Strategies GOLD* (Appendix A. 7). To enhance this work, the state will release a family survey, currently being field tested this year. The survey will communicate expectations about family-school and school-family engagement and interactions and measure family satisfaction with their children's early childhood experiences. Family satisfaction data will be a component in the early childhood report cards for both providers and Community Network Pilots. The results of the survey will also help the state monitor and support the subgrantees.

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Subgrantees will build on successful practices from Head Start, LA 4, NSECD, and Community Network Pilots and use a variety of strategies to sustain parent and family engagement into the elementary years, such as:

- Helping all families by providing:
  - Communication and support materials that support learning at each grade level;
  - Partnerships with local providers of adult education;
  - Support programs to assist families with health, nutrition, and other services; and
  - Information fairs to help families understand schools and to help schools understand families;
- Designing effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communications about school programs and children's progress;
- Providing information and ideas to families about how to help students at home with homework and other curriculum-related related activities;
- Including parents in school decisions, possibly through developing parent leaders and representatives; and
- Identifying resources and services from the community to strengthen family practices.

## **Steps to Ensure K-3 Coherence**

Louisiana will build on its current strengths, the momentum of the Community Network Pilots, and the state's intensive focus to improve kindergarten readiness to ensure coherence between early childhood care and K-3 systems. The state will:

1. Define cohesive expectations for child growth and development;
2. Provide tools to support learning and help implement them; and
3. Build an accountability system to measure performance.

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**Defining cohesive expectations for child growth and development:** To establish unified expectations for growth and development, Louisiana will:

- **Create Early Learning and Development Standards:** The Louisiana state Early Learning and Development Standards (*ELDS*) are well aligned to BESE’s definition of kindergarten readiness (Appendix A. 9, B. 1). Additionally, *Teaching Strategies GOLD*, which is used by Community Network Pilot teachers to assess children’s growth and development, is 95% aligned to the *ELDS* (Appendix B. 3).
- **Establish Expectations for Teacher Preparation:** The LDE firmly believes that to improve child outcomes, children must have access to a high-quality teacher. Louisiana recently announced plans to create a new Birth to Kindergarten bachelor degree credential and to increase the credential requirement to teach in publicly-funded child care. Louisiana is preparing to require all lead teachers in publicly-funded child care hold an ancillary teaching certificate, which is dependent upon earning the Child Development Associate (CDA, Appendix F. 2, E. 1). To support teachers to meet the higher expectations, the state is working to expand its scholarship program significantly, from \$500,000 to \$5 million over three years (Appendix F. 3).

**Providing tools to support learning and helping to implement them:** Louisiana is building structures for all ages that will:

- **Review Curriculum:** To support early learning providers to deliver high-quality lessons, the LDE will review early childhood curricular materials to support providers in selecting instructional materials aligned to the *ELDS* and kindergarten readiness. The LDE will do the curricular review as part of the report card field test and Learning Year (Appendix A. 6).
- **Provide High-Quality Professional Development:** Community Network Pilots ensure that professional development is designed to meet the needs of teachers. Community Network Pilots provide teachers with training on the *ELDS*, ongoing assessment of children, and improving teacher-child interactions. Professional development structures

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also provide increased time and support for teachers to set goals, plan daily activities, adjust teaching based on ongoing assessment of children's progress, and collaborate with colleagues.

- **Support Assessment:** The state will build on its support system for K-12 assessment by developing similar supports for early childhood. To support formative assessment, LDE provides teachers with EAGLE, an online K-12 formative assessment system loaded with ELA, math, science, and social studies questions (Appendix F. 4). The system provides Louisiana teachers the ability to build online tests and receive student and class performance reports.

**Building an accountability system to measure performance:** For Louisiana to achieve its goal of having every child ready for kindergarten, the state needs an accountability system that will:

- **Align Assessment:** The state is working to ensure that teachers are using appropriate assessments to support and measure learning from early childhood through the third grade. Currently, early assessment in Louisiana involves diverse assessment tools, including the *Developing Skills Checklist (DSC)* and the *Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS)* (Appendix A. 10). Though Community Network Pilots are using *Teaching Strategies GOLD*, it is not used in kindergarten or beyond. The report card field test and Learning Year will help bring cohesion to the state's assessment approach.
- **Revise the Kindergarten Entry Assessment (KEA):** The Legislature mandates assessing children within thirty days of entering kindergarten for the purpose of placement and planning instruction. The state will work to ensure the KEA intentionally connects the expectations for early childhood to the expectations for early elementary students. The state plans to use the information from the field test and Learning Year to determine next steps in selecting an appropriate KEA that covers all five essential

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domains of development and would be part of a comprehensive early learning and assessment system.

- **Engage Families:** The LDE encourages and supports local leaders to build family engagement structures that will support the ultimate goal of every child entering kindergarten ready to learn, and sustaining those benefits throughout a child's academic career. Community Network Pilots will continually enhance family engagement through their coordinated enrollment efforts and discussions with families on child growth, through the use of *Teaching Strategies GOLD*. The Community Network Pilots demonstrate the benefits of having school districts partner with child care and Head Start to better serve families.

**Need for an Early Childhood Accountability Technology System:** To have the information needed to make continual system enhancements, Louisiana will use grant funds to build an early childhood accountability technology system to consistently measure program quality using program-based report cards and provide useful information for families and providers (Appendix A. 12). The system will serve as a single source of meaningful information for state agencies, providers, and families and allow linkages between early childhood programs and elementary school education.

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## Louisiana’s Ambitious and Achievable Plan: Coherence Across a Birth through Third Grade Continuum

Criteria	Key Activities	Parties Responsible	Performance Measure
1.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop funding model that supports and sustains high-quality birth to five system</li> </ul>	LDE	Funding Model
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase coherence between early childhood and early elementary academic strategy</li> <li>Use 2015-16 Learning Year with all publicly-funded providers to finalize early childhood report card system</li> <li>Build Early Childhood Accountability Technology System</li> </ul>	LDE	Academic Strategy; Report Card Field Test and Learning Year; Accountability Technology System
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engage families through coordinated enrollment and comprehensive support systems</li> <li>Partner with families to support children, using <i>Teaching Strategies GOLD</i></li> <li>Identify resources and services from community to strengthen family practices</li> </ul>	Subgrantee	Coordinated Enrollment Results; Family Survey

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