



LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

*Testimony to be provided to the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee
"Fixing No Child Left Behind: Innovation that Better Meets the Needs of Students"*

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Chairman Alexander, Senator Murray, and members of the committee, I thank you for the opportunity to be a panel member today and provide some thoughts on innovative approaches to improved academic outcomes for students. This is an extraordinary opportunity that Congress has in considering Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), re-authorization.

Our state has attempted innovative approaches to a number of its most significant problems. These include turning around low-performing schools and the Recovery School District in New Orleans, as well as early learning and our Early Childhood Networks.

I am here to share two specific examples from within my area of work, College and Career Opportunities. In our state, only 20 percent of adults have a four-year degree and only eight percent have a two-year degree. Incremental growth will not solve the problem. We need scalable solutions like the Louisiana Course Access program and the Jump Start Career Education Initiative.

Louisiana's Jump Start Career Education Model

For generations our country has perpetrated a stigma against career and technical education, fearing – in some cases rightly – that apprenticeships and courses taught in workplace settings were becoming cellars to which the most disadvantaged students were perpetually consigned.

That stigma has had an unfortunate cost, perhaps nowhere more than in Louisiana, a state rich in natural resources, offering abundant job opportunity to its citizens. Too often a singular focus on

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the four-year university degree as the lone path to prosperous work has steered Louisiana graduates away from lucrative job opportunities in technical fields requiring a two-year associate degree or a workplace certification. In turn the economic gap has grown between those with a university degree (only 20 percent of Louisiana's population) and those with no degree or credential at all.

Jump Start is our state's new and unprecedented career education program that calls for school districts, colleges, and businesses to collaborate in providing career courses and workplace experiences to high school students, certifying them for the career fields most likely to lead to high-wage jobs. Every district in the state has launched Jump Start allowing them to continue their education after high school, certifying them for the career fields most likely to lead to high-wage jobs.

Jump Start will ensure Louisiana students have access to state-of-the-art facilities, equipment, and professionals to prepare during their high school schedules for careers in Louisiana's high-growth job sectors. Regional Jump Start teams comprised of Schools, Business and Industry, Post – Secondary institutions, State Economic Development and Workforce Commission representatives will identify career opportunities important specifically to each region of the state, for which students may earn industry credentials. By offering credentials that give graduates a leg up in Louisiana's economy of today and tomorrow, Jump Start will prepare our high school graduates for a productive adulthood. Jump Start closes this opportunity gap by offering not just an alternate path to prosperity and employment, but a pathway for every young adult.

First, Jump Start ends the longstanding practice of labeling students entering high school as "career" or "college." All students – from those with perfect ACTs to those with significant cognitive disabilities – can pursue a career pathway under Jump Start. These pathways, designed by teams of

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experts in every region of the state, involve courses taught in high schools, community colleges, and workplaces – no longer are the bureaucrats in Baton Rouge prescribing the course sequences and pathways. They culminate in credentials that will allow graduates to continue their professional training after high school, either in community colleges or within workforce training programs.

Last year the state Legislature and Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) created a Career Development Fund to finance the expansion of technical courses in the high schools and a Course Access Allocation to finance course providers outside of high schools, including community colleges.

Louisiana rewards high schools in their letter grade ratings when students achieve industry credentials. Advanced students earning construction trades certifications, for example, generate just as many points for their schools as do students passing challenging Advanced Placement tests.

In an effort to increase our instructional capacity in the state we train career educators statewide at summer academies to receive the professional they need to help students achieve their industry certifications. Additionally, the state has implemented teacher certification policies to facilitate industry professionals' entry into teaching positions, giving greater credit to workplace experience and expertise while providing these workplace experts with essential training on instructional strategies.

Louisiana Course Access

Ensuring our students have access to the appropriate coursework is necessary to make Jump Start work. Louisiana's education legislative reform package in 2012 included student Course Access legislation. Course Access (called Course Choice in our state) enables Louisiana families and

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students to select from hundreds of online and face-to-face courses not traditionally offered by high schools and middle schools. In this age of innovation in education, we can't accept these limitations on the growth of our children. If Louisiana and the rest of the nation are to compete in the 21st century, we have to get beyond the limitations of the traditional schoolhouse and provide each student with an education that meets with their vision of life beyond 12th grade.

Course Access is a critical component of *Louisiana Believes*, our state's plan to allow every student a pathway to college and a professional career. These Course Access courses offer students opportunities to pursue college coursework, Advanced Placement courses, and career training that prepare them for opportunities after high school. Louisiana high school students now have access to hundreds of dual enrollment courses at the state's four-year universities. Course Access also allows middle and high school students the ability to earn course credits via the Internet. The state has over 20 online providers that offer an array of courses geared to preparing students for 2-year and 4-year college.

Students are also gaining access to career courses leading to valuable Industry-Based Credentials through the Louisiana Community and Technical College System campuses. There are thousands of student enrollments through the LCTCS including Welding, Occupational Orientation and Safety, Oxyfuel Systems, NCCER Core Training (construction), General Electrical System Diagnosis, and Introduction to Industrial Instrumentation. Other course providers include LSU, districts, Florida Virtual School, Sparx Welding.

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Louisiana students now have access to:

- Foreign language courses impossible to staff and offer in rural areas;
- Career and technical education courses culminating in industry-valued certifications for high-paying jobs (e.g., welding);
- AP and college courses to get a head start on a college degree (e.g., Bard College offers liberal arts seminars for high school kids in New Orleans);
- ACT prep courses to increase chances of qualifying for a state scholarship; and
- Math courses using Khan Academy.

Louisiana's Course Access legislation passed with – and continues to enjoy – bipartisan support. We're seeing broad support for course access around the country, from Texas to Utah, Florida, Rhode Island and Minnesota.

As a result of these programs Louisiana has seen nation leading results the past 3 years:

- For the 2014-2015 school year, students have enrolled in 20,000 courses to date through Course Choice, an increase from 2,362 course enrollments in the 2013-2014 program pilot.
- Thousands of students in Louisiana are currently pursuing a high school diploma through one of 34 approved Jump Start graduation pathways. Jump Start Regional Teams are currently developing 20 additional pathways to submit for approval this spring.

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- Data from the College Board shows the number of Louisiana students scoring 3 or higher on Advanced Placement (AP®) exams, earning college credit, has increased 24.6 percent, the highest in the nation from 2013 to 2014. The rising number of students participating in AP® is leading to dramatic increases for African-American students, who have realized increases of more than 30 percent in tests scoring 3 or higher from 2013 to 2014, and 89 percent increase over the last two years. Likewise, the number of African-American high school students taking AP® tests increased 137 percent over the last two years.
- Research from Columbia University shows that many students who otherwise had not planned to take the ACT, especially those from low-income backgrounds, score unexpectedly well when given access to the test. Since Louisiana began requiring all public high school students to take the ACT series in 2013, the state has seen a dramatic increase in the number of seniors earning qualifying scores for a state scholarship. The number of seniors earning a qualifying score has increased by more than 6,000 since 2012.

Appropriate Federal Role

Looking ahead to the next iteration of the ESEA, many of us at the state and local level would agree that the federal role in a range of education policy decisions should be reduced. We would also agree that there are certain things that the federal government does well, including providing support for research and innovation.

I know I speak for Superintendent White and the rest of my colleagues from Louisiana when I express my hope that a reauthorized ESEA will support states' ongoing work with 21st-century models of teaching and learning while also finding ways to stimulate new innovations that can ensure all of our students have access to the world-class education they deserve.

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Coherent Planning

There is a need for a simpler federal framework that provides a coherent plan for schools and clear direction for states. States need to be able to focus on achieving large statewide goals versus singular programmatic goals.

Louisiana state's plan "Louisiana Believes," is built on the premise that all children can achieve high expectations for learning and that those closest to children – parents and teachers – know better than government how to help students achieve those expectations.

Louisiana's plan has guided our state's efforts to strengthen the state accountability system, providing increased clarity for parents and educators in the form of an A – F school grading system. This accountability grading system promotes standards and assessments that align with our ultimate goal of preparing every student for success in college and career, including factoring in Advanced Placement results, dual enrollment credit, and career education Industry-Based Certificates aligned to high-wage high-demand jobs.

Funding Flexibility

States need flexibility in managing the way federal funds are allocated. States should be given the authority to combine and utilize federal title funds to meet agreed-upon goals. Progress starts with allowing educators the independence to innovate subject to accountability standards. Congress should streamline grant requirements. States should propose how to distribute federal dollars in ways that align with their own funding formulas. ESEA should give states greater flexibility to use federal funds through competitive grants that allow states, districts, and non-profits to scale their most innovative practices but allow states to define what innovation truly is rather than restricting the applications.

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Preserve Annual Assessments

While innovation and testing may seem anathema to one another, in fact measurement is what allows us to determine which innovative programs work. Measurement also allows us to terminate low-performing Course Access course providers, while expanding the number of students with access to great teachers, great courses and great schools. Annual assessments enable us to track performance. Course access, school choice, and career education all rely on valid, regular measurement.

The federal parameters should both call for state accountability systems that commit to results, especially among historically disadvantaged students, and allow states to innovate on measures themselves. States need flexibility in designing and implementing state-developed accountability systems that will remain committed to transparent reporting of data for all students and focus on supporting on the lowest-performing schools.

In Louisiana, our accountability system has evolved to include not just grade level proficiency and graduation rates, but also real-world college and career attainment measures such as Advanced Placement results, dual enrollment credit, and Industry Based Credential attainment. Federal parameters should compel states to design systems in line with these principles, but states should have freedom to craft measures.

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