

Strong School Systems Initiative School System Letter of Commitment

The Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE) invites school system leadership teams to join the third cohort of the Strong School Systems Initiative. The Initiative will strengthen school system leaders and school board members' capacity in strategic planning, implementation, and progress monitoring through cohort-based professional development, technical assistance, participation in a network of peer leaders, and the provision of tools and resources.

THEORY OF ACTION

We believe that if LDOE:

- partners with school system leadership teams and boards;
- develops their capacity to create and implement plans for improvement,
- and aligns the Department's previous and other current approaches with this effort,

Then school system leadership teams will:

- Increase equitable access to opportunities (birth-12),
- Improve outcomes for all students,
- and sustain these improvements over time.

TIMELINE AND DELIVERABLES

From August 2022 through February 2023, school systems and their Technical Assistance (TA) partners will participate in a capacity-building program whereby they participate in cohort-based training sessions led by LDOE, and in between sessions, collaborate on the creation (or refinement) of the deliverables below.

1. **Steering Committee norms:** a set of approximately 5 norms describing how members of the system's Steering Committee (the Superintendent and her/ his direct reports) will enact the school system's values while working together to design and implement the plan.
2. **Aspirations:** definition of what will be true about the school system in five years, both at the mission level (e.g., graduates' capabilities, equity) and at the strategic priority-level (e.g., student culture, family engagement).
3. **Stakeholder engagement plan:** the steps to engage educators, school leaders, family members, students, community groups, and central office staff in the diagnostic and creation of the strategic plan.
4. **Diagnostic:** a report identifying a school system's strengths and growth areas, grounded in analysis of performance data, classroom observations, instructional artifacts, and constituents' perspectives.
5. **Measures and targets:** measures that hold the school system accountable for achieving its aspirations and making progress on its strategic priorities, along with data-informed targets.
6. **Decision-making rights:** articulation of which decisions and practices are centralized/ standardized across the system, and codification of key decision-making rights.
7. **Strategic priorities, initiatives, and deliverables:** description of the plan's areas of focus and work streams sequenced over multiple years.
8. **Implementation plan:** deliverables, action steps, owners, and timelines for the upcoming year.
9. **Resource needs:** identification of the staffing, technical assistance, and financial resources the system will need to implement initiatives in the coming year.
10. **Communication plan:** the means by which the Steering Committee will share the school system's priorities and initiatives with stakeholders.

After February 2023 or before, school systems that follow through on all commitments (outlined below) and produce high-quality strategic planning deliverables¹ will be offered technical assistance for progress monitoring of their strategic plans.

INTENDED IMPACT

This cohort will have been successful if the following are true:

- School system participants report that they would encourage their peers to participate in the initiative.
- School system participants report that the initiative successfully developed their teams' capacities to plan and monitor for system-wide improvement.
- Participating school systems develop high-quality strategic plans.
- Participating school systems implement and monitor their plans effectively.
- Participating school systems drive equitable growth over the next three years.

DETAILS ON SCHOOL SYSTEM PARTICIPANTS

Each school system's "Steering Committee" consists of the Superintendent, her/ his direct reports, and an aspiring leader.

- This Steering Committee will participate in regular professional development sessions, work with the system's TA partner to complete deliverables offline, and participate in system-level meetings to discuss and align on deliverables.
- One member of the Steering Committee will act as the "Project Manager."
 - The project manager will, among other things:
 - Be responsible for the school system's completion of deliverables on time.
 - Act as the TA partner's primary point of contact.
 - Participate in additional professional development alongside the TA partner.
 - Lead the progress monitoring effort that follows the strategic planning phase.
 - The ideal project manager should work at the system level and have the skills often held by a system's Chief Academic Officer, Curriculum Director, or Assistant Superintendent, including:
 - Visibility across the whole organization.
 - An orientation towards action and decision-making.
 - The gravitas to influence and hold accountable all members of the Steering Committee
 - A track record of successfully completing "special projects" that cut across departments, and thus require coordination with more than one member of the Steering Committee.
 - The ability to manage multiple workstreams.
- The "aspiring leader" should be a high-potential principal or central office staff member. The aspiring leader will participate in the Louisiana Superintendent's Academy as a part of the Strong School System body of work.

¹ A system's deliverables will be considered high-quality if the following is true:

- All of the deliverables together earn an average of a 2.7 or higher on the rubric used to assess quality.
- The system's deliverables earn a 3 on the following rubric rows (prioritized because they are most critical for effective progress monitoring): Mission measures, Strategic priority measures, Organization, Descriptive clarity, Initiatives, Deliverables, and Action steps.

BENEFITS

School systems participating in the pilot will enjoy the following benefits:

- 1. Professional development** -- Steering Committee members will participate in professional development sessions to develop a shared understanding of best practices in strategic planning and implementation, and skill in doing such work.
- 2. Technical assistance (TA)** -- each school system will be matched with an LDOE-vetted organization with deep expertise in strategic planning, strategy management, and instructional leadership.
- 3. Professional network** -- school system leaders will learn alongside leaders from other like-minded school systems across the state.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PARTNER COMMITMENTS

1. Attend all cohort-based professional development sessions and any additional calls and meetings.
2. Collaborate with school systems in completing the deliverables listed above, according to the approach outlined by LDOE and in a manner that meets the standards defined by LDOE and school system partners.

SCHOOL SYSTEM COMMITMENTS

LDOE requires that each school system's Steering Committee participate in regular professional development sessions, and then work with a TA partner in between these sessions to complete the deliverables described above.

The table below identifies the types of meetings that members of the Steering Committee will attend and the time commitments of each, over the course of this initiative

Meeting type	Participants	# meetings	Hrs prep per meeting	Length of meeting (hrs)
PD cohort sessions	100% of SteerCo members	3	0-1	2-3
Steering Committee	100% of SteerCo members ²	7	1	2-3
Check-ins with TA partner	Superintendent and Project Manager	Weekly	0-1	1

The table below identifies the major offline tasks and the time commitments of each:

Tasks	Responsible	Time (hrs)
Create stakeholder engagement plan, recruit participants, and schedule SteerCo meetings	Superintendent and Project Manager	3-5 hrs total
Preview content of SteerCo meetings	Superintendent	1 hr/ meeting

² While we understand that there will be extenuating circumstances, in general, Steering Committee meetings take priority over other training sessions and meetings. In most cases, if a SteerCo member has an immovable conflict, then the meeting should be rescheduled to accommodate him/ her.

Facilitate the gathering of constituents' perspectives by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administering system-wide surveys • Organizing and scheduling focus groups 	Project Manager	3-5 hrs total
Support the TA partner in completing a diagnostic, by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collecting instructional artifacts • Scheduling classroom observations 	Project Manager	4-8 hrs total
Collaborate with the TA partner in fleshing out the detail of the strategic plan (initiatives, deliverables, and action steps) and strategic priority measures	All SteerCo members	2-6 hrs total
Collaborate with the TA partner in identifying and calendaring professional development needs, and estimating staffing, technical assistance, and financial resource needs	All SteerCo members	2-6 hrs total
Follow up with SteerCo members as needed to ensure the completion of high-quality work on time.	Project Manager	3-5 hrs total

HOW TO COMMIT

Superintendent, please sign on the line below to indicate your interest in participating in this initiative, and ability to make the commitments described above.

Please email a signed copy of this letter to Dr. Jennifer Tuttleton, Deputy Assistant Superintendent, at Jennifer.Tuttleton@la.gov, by Monday, May 2, 2022 at 5pm CST.

Superintendent Signature