



LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

March 28, 2017

Ms. Debra H. Schum, Executive Director
Louisiana Association of Principals
103 Crawford Street
Winnfield, LA 71483

Dear Ms. Schum:

Thank you for your letter regarding the submission of Louisiana's ESSA state plan to the U.S. Department of Education for review and approval.

As you know, Wednesday, March 29, the state Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) will consider whether to direct the Louisiana Department of Education (LDE) to seek federal input on the state's plan. Only after another three months will BESE consider policy on this subject.

For nearly one year, the LDE has been working with stakeholders to develop Louisiana's plan, holding 136 [meetings](#) across the state with hundreds of educators, school leaders, parents, advocates, business and industry leaders, postsecondary education representatives, policymakers, and formal advisory councils, including but not limited to meetings of the Superintendents Advisory Council and the Accountability Commission. Detailed information on ESSA stakeholder consultation can be found at www.louisianabelieves.com/essa.

Throughout these many conversations, the LDE has indicated its intent to submit Louisiana's state plan for federal review and approval by the beginning of the 2017-2018 school year in order to provide educators with clarity about expectations and how they will be measured.

This plan is also consistent with the 2013 announcement by BESE of its intent to gradually shift to "mastery" as the state's performance expectation for A-rated schools in Louisiana. This goal was codified in Bulletin 111 and has been discussed extensively in numerous stakeholder meetings since that time.

In your letter you cited several concerns. What follows are responses to each.

- *Accountability Commission meetings*

Ms. Kathy Noel, who chairs the Accountability Commission, has worked hard to schedule and facilitate nine meetings of the Accountability Commission since January 2016 to discuss the accountability aspects of ESSA. Those meetings were held on January 29, June 27, September 12,

Louisiana Believes.

October 17, November 1, and December 5, 2016, and January 9, February 8, and February 17, 2017, and meeting materials can be accessed [here](#). During these meetings the LDE presented very detailed information related to each area of school accountability and offered multiple accountability formula options and simulations that aided the Commission in providing feedback and formal recommendations. All of those recommendations are reflected in the draft state plan.

You also referenced aspects of the plan that relate to expectations for graduation rates, ACT scores, and the transition or “curve” to adjust to the new school performance score components. Graduation rates and the ACT were discussed at the September, October, December 2016 and January 2017 commission meetings; the transition and “curve” were discussed at the October, November, January and February 8, 2017 meetings.

- *Stakeholder review of proposed state plan*

You noted the proposed state plan was presented to stakeholders on March 3, 2017, leaving them with less than a month to review it and offer feedback. As mentioned above, the LDE has consulted with diverse groups of stakeholders through 136 meetings across the state since January 2016. The draft state plan was actually released on February 20, 2017, after two detailed draft frameworks were publicly shared on [September 28, 2016](#) and [February 6, 2017](#). The draft plan reflects what was initially proposed in those frameworks as well as adjustments made based on stakeholder feedback received over the past year. The U.S. Department of Education requires states to post draft state plans for public comment for 30 days prior to submission.

- *Regional accountability meetings for school leaders*

Following numerous meetings with school leaders on ESSA throughout the past year, including detailed briefings at the school leader collaborative [meetings](#) held in December, Assistant Superintendent Baghian and Chairwoman Noel held briefings in March for school leaders to address school accountability. Approximately 300 individuals were in attendance. The information shared at those briefings was not inconsistent with what was presented to the Accountability Commission; however, additional data was provided at the request of stakeholders. Additionally, at the request of Superintendent Voitier, an additional briefing was held in Gonzales to accommodate the schedules of individuals who were not able to attend the initial meetings. Sign-in sheets from the regional accountability meetings can be viewed [here](#).

- *Interests and Opportunities component*

Page 21 of the state’s draft framework and page 32 of the [draft state plan](#) presents the timeline by which the LDE will work collaboratively with practitioners, content experts, and other stakeholders to develop and implement the Interests and Opportunities component that meets the ESSA requirement for having a school quality/student success indicator in the state accountability system. This will allow for collection and review of necessary data, piloting the measurements to ensure validity, and assisting school systems in preparing for the new measurement before results become part of the school performance score. We look forward to working with principals and superintendents on this measure.

- *Impact on teacher and principal evaluations*

ESSA does not address the evaluation of teachers and principals, nor does Louisiana’s state plan

change how teachers and principals in our state are evaluated. However, the Department remains committed to supporting our education leaders across the state on these matters.

- *Impact on federal funding to local school systems and Direct Student Services*

The overall impact of the state's draft plan on local school system federal funding is summarized on slide 13 of the [presentation](#) delivered at public ESSA meetings throughout the state. Title I within ESSA is intended to provide a "fair, equitable, and high-quality education, and to close educational achievement gaps." It provides fair access to courses for low-income students, particularly those living in remote regions of the state.

Today more than 33 percent of Louisiana eighth grade students attend a school that does not offer Algebra I. Of high schools that have a majority of students of color, approximately 20 percent do not provide Algebra II, 25 percent do not provide Chemistry, 70 percent do not provide calculus, and 90 percent do not provide physics.

Through the newly authorized Direct Student Service provision within the federal law, Louisiana can target up to three percent of the state's total Title I award to provide more money to school systems around the state that have historically struggled to provide access to basic courses and opportunities for students.

The overall share of Title I funds going to school systems does not change under Louisiana's proposed state plan. However, the plan will prioritize rural, low-income communities in targeting three percent of Title I funds, explicitly for these purposes.

Information about the Direct Student Services provision can be found on page 12 and Appendix C of the LDE's [second draft framework](#) and page 69 of the [draft state plan](#).

- *President Trump's federal budget proposal*

Earlier this month, President Trump unveiled a [budget blueprint](#) for 2018. A full budget proposal is expected to be released in the next few months. The President's proposed budget reflects his budget requests to Congress, which will ultimately hold a number of hearings and vote on its own budget proposal. My staff has already discussed the proposed elimination of Title II funding with Louisiana's U.S. senators and I am hopeful that this funding will continue to be supported.

My staff and I remain committed to continuing to work with you and school principals across the state for the benefit of Louisiana's students.

Sincerely,



John White
State Superintendent of Education

cc: Honorable Members of the State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education

LOUISIANA ASSOCIATION OF PRINCIPALS

103 Crawford Street
Winnfield, LA 71483

The Voice of School Based Administrators

Telephone: 318-648-2999
Fax: 318-648-2990

Web Page: www.lapprincipals.org
E-Mail: debra.schum@lapprincipals.org

March 24, 2017

**TO: Superintendent John White
BESE Members**

FROM: Debra H. Schum, LAP Executive Director

RE: ESSA and the Accountability Commission

I am formally requesting that the ESSA Plan submission for the State of Louisiana be made in September instead of April. There are several reasons why our organization (Louisiana Association of Principals) is making this request:

- Over the last 6 months the accountability commission met to discuss the changes that would be proposed to BESE regarding next year's accountability formula and grading system. The majority of these meetings were spent discussing the growth component and which growth model to use, which left little time for discussion of other components of the Accountability formula. At the last accountability meeting held on February 17th there were several issues that were not allowed to come up for discussion (ie, High School Grad Rate, ACT scores, and looking at the point values given for basic and mastery so that 68% of Elementary School scores would not have to be curved). I, along with several other members of the commission stated that these issues needed to be discussed in an open meeting prior to the ESSA plan being submitted to BESE at the special March 29th meeting. We were told at that meeting that Jessica Baghian (LDOE Representative) would poll each of the members to find out specific items that could be placed on the agenda for a proposed meeting prior to March 29th. On Friday March 3rd, I received a letter from the chair of the Accountability Commission stating that a "majority" of the members had no further questions and that the questions that a "**few of you had,** can be answered through the regional meetings that are being hosted by the LDOE for Superintendents and Principals"! Also, Superintendent White indicated that the accountability commission would serve as the group to provide feedback of the overall ESSA plan, however our agendas were limited to specific items that were determined by the LDOE and members of the commission were not allowed to add agenda items and were given a very narrow scope as to what could be discussed.
- The final plan with specific details was not presented **until March 3, 2017**—so while a rough draft template has been out for over a year—the specific details haven't even been out for a month.

- The LDOE scheduled 5 Regional Meetings for Superintendents and Principals to discuss the final plan between March 6th and March 21st, 2017. (The first meeting was the Monday immediately after Mardi Gras Holidays and the last meeting was on the day that Statewide ACT testing was administered in High Schools Across the state). LAP conducted a survey to see how many principals were able to attend and **less than 10 %** of those responding to the survey were able to attend due to the dates they were offered and the distance they would have to drive to get to a meeting for a 90 minute power point presentation.
- I attended the March 21st presentation for both Superintendents and Principals and was surprised to see that the information presented had changed significantly from what had been presented at the Accountability Commission meetings in regard to High School Performance Scores. At the Accountability Commission we were provided with information that stated that only 1% of High School Scores would need to be curved. At the meeting held on March 21st, one slide said that 6 % of High School Scores would be curved and 46% of High School Scores would drop in 2018 even with a curve. This was never presented to the Accountability Commission.
- A formula that requires a curve for 68% of Elementary and Middle Schools and causes 46% of High Schools to drop a letter grade even with a curve should be a red flag that the formula may need to be adjusted.
- Meaningful stakeholder input has not happened! The regional meetings that were held were briefings and did not allow for true discussion of the formula and components specific to each school and district.
- Other Areas that have not been addressed
 - Interests and Opportunities clarity
 - Clarity on teacher and principal evaluations in light of the scores dropping an average of 15 points with the new formula.
 - There will be significant reductions in federal funding for title programs impacting local plans. Therefore, we request the department rely on the required 7% reservation and not exercise the optional 3% set aside.
 - Also the proposed federal budget that was released on March 16, 2017 **eliminates the entire Title II budget which may have significant impact on teacher and principal training and development and may affect the Believe and Prepare section of the current Louisiana ESSA plan.** By submitting in September we will know the actual Federal Budget prior to submission.
- LAP conducted a survey of Principals regarding the ESSA Plan and Submission timeline
 - **96% of Principals who responded to the survey were in favor of a September submission** so true dialogue can occur and revisions can be made to the current plan before submission to the USDOE.
 - **90% of Principals who responded to the survey indicated that the plan needed significant revisions.**
 - A majority of the comments made by principals made a plea asking BESE members to listen to them
 - One respondent stated the following—“I think it is ironic that on the same day BESE is supposed to vote on submitting the “proposed” ESSA plan, our state Network is hosting a meeting on how to implement the ESSA plan for next school year. This leads me to believe that it is already decided. Why have the farce of a BESE vote?”

The September submission will provide our State the ability to continue utilizing existing accountability formulas while we compile actual student data aligned to the new set of expectations. ESSA allows for assessment flexibility and accumulation of two (2) years of data until implementation. It will also allow time for principals, Superintendents and the community to work with the LDOE to devise a plan that provides the best learning environment for our students to achieve academic success.

I am hoping that you will you will “listen” to principals (and others) from across the state and move that Louisiana’s ESSA plan be submitted to the USDOE in September 2017.

Sincerely,

[Debra H. Schum](#)