



LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

March 14, 2017

Mr. Donald Aguillard, Superintendent
Lafayette Parish School System
P.O. Box 2158
Lafayette, LA 70502

Dear Superintendent Aguillard:

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.

The Louisiana Department of Education (LDE) has been working with stakeholders to develop Louisiana's plan for well over a year and has held dozens of 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, superintendent task force meetings, 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.

In 2013, the State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education [announced](#) 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. It is thus a priority reflected in the draft ESSA state plan.

Also in 2013, through rules promulgated in Bulletin 111, Section 303, BESE provided for a gradual transition to higher standards and a "two-year baseline" by holding steady the distribution of school letter grades for the 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 school year based on the 2012-2013 distribution. BESE then added the 2015-2016 school year to that transition period. Last spring, through Act 498 of the 2016 Regular Session, the 2016-2017 school year was added to this transition. The release of school letter grades this fall will represent the fourth consecutive year that the Department of Education has held constant the distribution of school letter grades in order to provide for what began as a two-year baseline.

Louisiana will continue to raise expectations for teaching and learning through 2025 in order to provide students with an education that is on par with their peers nationally. Throughout that

Louisiana Believes.

time, it is critical that parents, educators, and the public will be provided accurate, timely information about school performance in order to support academic growth and to evaluate the extent to which our state is meeting its goals.

In your letter you cited four issues that you believe warrant further discussion:

1. The total impact of the plan will have on local school districts and what will be required by the federal government

On [September 28, 2016](#) and again on [February 6, 2017](#), the LDE released draft frameworks that illustrate the total impact of the state's draft ESSA state plan on local school systems. The frameworks, which contain both summary information and detailed appendices, explain how Louisiana and its school systems will meet the requirements of ESSA address while addressing Louisiana's main challenges:

1. Fundamental expectations for students and graduates
2. Deep struggles for historically disadvantaged students
3. Fair access to experiences essential for success in school and beyond
4. A strong educator profession
5. Persistently struggling schools

The total impact of the proposed plan, including a complete overview of accountability implications, has also been discussed at recent regional accountability briefings for superintendents and district leadership. Refer to slides 34-44 of the [presentation](#) used in these meetings.

As for federal expectations, yesterday U.S. Secretary of Education DeVos released guidance relative to the requirements of the ESSA law and states' applications and submission timelines. Louisiana's plan will adhere to all such requirements.

2. A more intensive review of the Growth Index Factor for determining an appropriate percentage

The Accountability Commission has spent a significant portion of its recent meetings discussing the appropriate recognition of growth in the accountability system and reviewing simulations based on different weights. The commission ultimately recommended that the school performance score for elementary and middle schools be based 25 percent on growth in order to incent and reward academic growth while guarding against excessive volatility in scores from one year to the next. Materials from the Accountability Commission meetings can be found on the LDE's website [here](#).

3. Clarity on assigning zeros for nonparticipants in assessment

Like NCLB, ESSA requires states to provide for the testing of all students in order to measure and report student learning and school performance. State education agencies are expected to address test participation in their state accountability systems. Bulletin 111 has long provided for test participation and how scores will be addressed when students fail to test. Louisiana will continue to implement those regulations in accordance with the law.

4. Addressing the timeliness of release of accountability scores/data

The Department has worked closely with superintendents to plan for the timing of assessments and receipt of student results. As the state has shifted to higher standards requiring brand new aligned assessments, timelines have been later than usual but are expected to be earlier going forward now that essential scoring processes have been developed. The Department continues to work with its test vendor to ensure that timelines maximize student learning time and provide for results as quickly as possible. Obtaining federal approval for Louisiana's ESSA state plan by the beginning of the 2017-2018 school year will enable the Department to finalize assessment timelines and prevent any unnecessary delays in Spring 2018.

You also inquired about federal title funding. Information about the Direct Student Services option to provide courses and supports to students where they are currently unavailable can be found on page 12 and Appendix C of the second draft framework and page 69 of the draft state plan. The total amount of Title I funds allocated to local school systems remains largely the same from No Child Left Behind to ESSA. As required in ESSA, 100 percent of funds used for Direct Student Services will be awarded to geographically diverse local school systems, with priority given to districts with schools identified as needing comprehensive support.

My staff and I will continue to work diligently with superintendents and other stakeholders to implement a strong plan for the benefit of Louisiana's students.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "John White", is positioned above the printed name.

John White
State Superintendent of Education

cc: Dr. Holly Boffy, BESE Member, District 7
Ms. Jada Lewis, BESE Member, District 8

ESSA Stakeholder Meetings*

2016 Regional ESSA Meetings:

- June 14, 2016 (Statewide School System Leaders and Educator Associations, Baton Rouge)
- July 26, 2016 (Lafayette)
- July 26, 2016 (Lafayette)
- July 27, 2016 (Pineville)
- July 27, 2016 (Shreveport)
- July 28, 2016 (Monroe)
- July 29, 2016 (Baton Rouge)
- August 1, 2016 (Houma)
- August 2, 2016 (Mandeville)
- August 2, 2016 (New Orleans)
- November 1, 2016 (Bossier)
- November 4, 2016 (New Orleans)
- November 7, 2016 (Opelousas)

Accountability Commission Meetings:

- January 29, 2016
- June 27, 2016
- September 12, 2016
- October 17, 2016
- November 1, 2016
- December 5, 2016
- January 9, 2017
- February 8, 2017
- February 17, 2017

Superintendents' Advisory Council:

- February 18, 2016
- May 26, 2016
- July 21, 2016
- September 21, 2016
- November 2, 2016
- February 16, 2017

Superintendents' Task Force:

- February 18, 2016

- September 21, 2016
- November 2, 2016

Regional ESSA Accountability Briefings with Superintendents and Principals:

- March 6, 2017 (Hammond)
- March 8, 2017 (Crowley)
- March 13, 2017 (Bossier City)
- March 20, 2017 (Monroe)
- March 21, 2017 (Gonzales)

School System Supervisor Collaboration Meetings:

- January 31, 2017 (Harvey)
- February 2, 2017 (Baton Rouge)
- February 7, 2017 (Ruston)
- February 9, 2017 (Lafayette)

*This above listing is not an exhaustive list of stakeholder meetings regarding the development of Louisiana's draft ESSA state plan. Additional meetings are listed at www.louisianabelieves.com/essa, and the LDE has held numerous individual meetings with school system leaders and other stakeholders as this plan has been developed.



LAFAYETTE
PARISH SCHOOL SYSTEM

March 8, 2017

Donald W. Aguillard, Ph.D.
Superintendent
P.O. Drawer 2158
Lafayette, LA 70502
337.521.7000

As Superintendent of the Lafayette Parish School System, I am requesting that the Louisiana Department of Education/BESE postpone the submission of *Every Student Succeeds Act Plan*. A later submission date will provide more opportunity to review and address concerns regarding the following components:

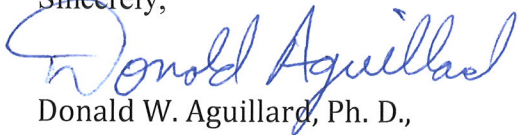
- 1) The total impact the plan will have on individual school districts. While a great deal of conversation has taken place about several issues, stakeholders have not been provided sufficient time to review the entire plan and evaluate its overall impact and that of its individual components. As the United States Government has been in transition, there is a lack of certainty as to what will be required.
- 2) A more intense review of the Growth Index Factor for determining an appropriate percentage. School systems have not had an opportunity to review their data related to this Growth Index – the first phase of consideration of growth. We are dependent upon the Louisiana Department of Education analyses for this information. Of greater concern are the various value-added calculations. A transparent process needs to exist, including data reviewed or confirmed by districts.
- 3) Clarity on assigning zeros for nonparticipants in assessment. Recently, school districts were evaluated on participation and either passed or failed achievement. Nonparticipants were not considered in the proficiency rates. While Louisiana touts its commitment to the validity of assessment indices, including a zero for a nonparticipant does not produce a valid result.
- 4) Addressing the timeliness of release of accountability scores/data. For several years, the Louisiana Department of Education has not provided assessment results prior to the end of the school year. The Louisiana *ESSA Plan* should not be submitted until student level results and school accountability designs are completed in a timely manner.

ESSA Plan
March 8, 2017
Page 2

The later submission will allow the state the ability to continue utilizing existing accountability formulas while compilation of actual student data is aligned to the new set of expectations. **ESSA** allows for assessment flexibility and accumulation of two (2) years of data prior to implementation while pursuing the 2025 of Mastery as proficiency.

Additionally, there will be significant reductions in federal funding for title programs impacting local plans. Therefore, I request the department rely on the required 7% reservation and not exercise the optional 3% set aside.

Sincerely,



Donald W. Aguillard, Ph. D.,
Superintendent
Lafayette Parish School System

DWA/dbn