



LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

March 14, 2017

Dr. Kelli Joseph, Superintendent
St. Helena Parish School District
254 Sitman Street
Greensburg, LA 70441

Dear Superintendent Joseph:

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 your letter, you referenced the state's gradual shift toward "Mastery" as the expectation for A-rated schools in Louisiana by the year 2025. This shift was [announced](#) by the State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education in 2013, 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 time, it

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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 seven additional issues that you indicated you would like to discuss:

1. The total impact of the plan will have on local school districts

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.

2. The plan to transition to the new standard

The Accountability Commission, of which you are a member, has spent several meetings reviewing and making recommendations relative to Louisiana's gradual shift to the new standard. The commission's recommendations are reflected in the latest draft framework in Challenge One and in Appendix B. The same has been discussed at meetings of the Superintendents Advisory Council, on superintendent conference calls, and at recent regional accountability briefings for superintendents and district leadership. We continue to dialogue with stakeholders about an appropriate transition plan that both communicates accurate information to the public while honoring the hard work of educators and students to make progress in achieving higher expectations.

3. An in depth review of the Growth Index Factor to determine if 25% is an appropriate measurement

The Accountability Commission has also 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](#).

4. Completion of the Interests and Opportunities Component (Leading Indicators) rather than waiting until 2020

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.

5. Clarity on how Peer Group comparisons in the Growth Index Factor are calculated

Based on the recommendations of the Accountability Commission, Appendix B of the second draft framework and pages 30-31 of the draft state plan summarize how the growth index will be calculated using a two-step process. As explained in these documents as well as in Accountability Commission meeting materials, the index will first consider whether students are on track to Mastery and, second, how students' performance compares to that of their peers. The identification of peers will be consistent with the way in which peers have been identified for purposes of educator evaluations for the past several years. Please refer to slide 17 of the presentation used at regional accountability briefing meetings. My staff and I are happy to discuss with you any specific questions you may have regarding peer group comparisons.

6. The amount of points awarded for Proficiency Levels

The Accountability Commission has been focused on developing policy recommendations relative to the state accountability system under ESSA. The LDE will continue working with the commission and other stakeholders to address the exact point structures for implementing those recommendations as part of a cohesive accountability system that raises expectations over time.

7. Clarity on Title I funding in ESSA and its impact if the LDOE takes an additional 3% of much needed Title I funding from school districts

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".

John White
State Superintendent of Education

cc: 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.



St. Helena Parish School District

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March 8, 2017

As Superintendent of St. Helena Parish School District and a member of the Accountability Commission, I feel very strongly that *Louisiana's Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) Plan* must be modified and **complete** before submission to the US Department of Education. Therefore, I formally request that BESE direct the LDOE to submit the ESSA Plan in September rather than April.

While we advocate Mastery being the mark of proficiency by 2025, we also understand this huge shift will affect Louisiana's children for years to come. We must make sure the decisions we make now are positively impactful. The specific components we would like to address include:

- 1) The **total impact** of the Plan on schools and school districts.
- 2) The plan to transition to the new standard.
- 3) An in depth review of the **Growth Index Factor** to determine if 25% is an appropriate measurement.
- 4) Completion of the the **Interest and Opportunities** Component (Leading Indicators) rather than waiting until 2020.
- 5) Clarity on how Peer Group comparisons in the Growth Index Factor are calculated.
- 6) The amount of points awarded for **Proficiency Levels**.
- 7) Clarity on **Title I funding in ESSA** and its impact if the LDOE takes an additional 3% of much needed Title I funding from school districts.

We must also make sure the decision-making process is fair and transparent. For example, the Accountability Commission members made important recommendations to BESE based on huge amounts of information received one day before the meetings. This did not allow members to vet the materials thoroughly. Moreover, school superintendents and other critical educators did not play an active role in the development of the ESSA Plan.

We have the opportunity to create a robust, equitable plan that will yield positive results for children. For their sake, let us get this right instead of forcing an incomplete plan on our teachers and students just to meet an early deadline.

Sincerely,

Kelli Joseph, Ed.D.
Superintendent

District Vision:

To develop a productive educational system that increases student achievement, develops educator effectiveness and builds public confidence.