Counselor Connect

February 2026

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Student Opportunities

ACT Navigator - College & Career Planning for Families

Please share with system leaders, counselors, teachers, and students.

ACT Navigator is an online resource that allows students to navigate the path through high school and what lies ahead. Access includes:

- Timely and actionable steps from freshman through senior year, organized by season, to help students stay on track.
- Guidance for education and career - whether they are going to college or directly into the workforce.
- Majors and career exploration.
- Resources for college admissions, financial aid, testing advice, and alternative paths.

Please contact charmaine.cureton@la.gov with questions.

ACT - Upcoming Test Dates

Please share with system leaders, counselors, teachers, and students.

Below is the list of upcoming National ACT test dates and the registration deadlines.

Test Date	Registration Date	Late Registration	Scores Released
April 11	March 6	March 24	April 21
June 13	May 8	May 29	June 23
July 11	June 5	June 24	July 21

Please contact charmine.cureton@la.gov with questions.

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Fast Forward

2025-2026 CDF Mid-Year Expenditure Report

Please share with school system leaders and CTE supervisors.

The 2025 - 2026 Mid-Year Career Development Fund (CDF) Mid-Year Expenditure Report is available for school systems to complete. The deadline to report on 2025-2026 CDF mid-year expenditures is February 20. School systems should reference the 2025-2026 Guidelines for Use of CDF Allocation when completing the form.

CDF funds support increased student access to high-value Career and Technical Education courses and training. CDF funds are 6% of the MFP State and Local Base Cost Per Pupil ($241) provided for each qualifying student course enrollment in grades 9-12.

Please contact bonnie.lefort@la.gov with questions.

Standard and CTE Employment Certificates

Please share with CTE supervisors, administrators, WBL teachers, and counselors.

All students in work-based learning programs are required to hold an employment certificate. The specific type (Minor Employment Certificate vs. CTE Employment Certificate) is dependent on the nature of the opportunity.

Internships: Students participating in high-dosage opportunities (a total of 106.2 hours of on-the-job training) must obtain a **CTE Employment Certificate**.

CTE Employment Certificates:

- Require termination date
- Completed and signed by: Training employer, parent/guardian, teacher-coordinator, and student-trainee
- CTE Teacher-Coordinator completes and submits the electronic CTE Employment Certificate via the Louisiana Works website
- Prohibited occupations exemptions exist

Cooperative Education (Co-Op): Students employed in a part-time job (ex, Super 1, Raising Cane's, etc.) must obtain a **Standard Minor Employment Certificate**.

Standard Employment Certificates:

- No expiration date
- Application to employ a minor
- Completed and signed by: Employer representative, parent/guardian
- Prohibited occupations apply

Please contact laborprograms@lwc.la.gov with questions.

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Industry-Based Credential Bundles Update

Please share with CTE supervisors, administrators, WBL teachers, and counselors.

Louisiana Works (formerly the Louisiana Workforce Commission) will lead the development of industry-based credential bundles. Bundle concepts will be shared with regional economic development organizations, LCTCS, and LDOE to validate workforce demand and ensure alignment with post-secondary pathways.

Please note, school systems will not create or submit bundles themselves; however, they will play an important role in the process by recommending employer partners to LA Works for engagement. This approach is intended to ensure that bundles are responsive to employer needs, aligned with labor market demand, and designed to provide students with a clear path from high school into training, postsecondary, and career opportunities.

Please contact ibccouncil@lwc.la.gov with questions.

Course Choice Spring Reporting

Please share with system leaders, CTE supervisors, principals, and counselors.

The Course Choice Portal is open for spring reporting. Please ensure all enrollments are reported by the deadline.

The portal closes for Private Providers on January 30.

The portal closes for Public Higher Education Providers on March 6.

Please contact coursechoice@la.gov with questions.

Course Choice Page Update

Please share with system leaders, CTE supervisors, principals, and counselors.

The Course Choice webpage has been refreshed to better support schools, counselors, and families. Updates include new Family Communications Tools under the Resources for Schools & Counselors section:

- Sample Parent Letter
- Parent Flyer
- Social Media Graphics

In addition, the page now features the new Course Choice Road Map for School Leaders one-pager, designed to guide systems through key steps and considerations.

You can view all updates on the Course Choice landing page.

Please contact coursechoice@la.gov with questions.

Medicaid-Training Update

Please share with counselors, social workers, and coordinators.

The Sivic Solutions Group (SSG) conducted training for school districts and LEAs in January and delivered

two webinar sessions to support participants and Time Study Coordinators. The training equipped participants and Time Study Coordinators with the knowledge required to complete sample moments and navigate the LA RMTS e-SivicMACS system.

- Random Moment Time Study (RMTS) Participant Training Video
- LA Time Study Coordinator Training Video

Please contact healthyschools@la.gov with questions.

Professional Opportunities

Spring 2026 Counselor Institute In-Person Sessions

Please share with school counselors, administrators, and CTE supervisors.

Registration for the Spring 2026 Counselor Institute in-person session is now available on Eventbrite. Attendees will participate in sessions focused on interactive, collaborative planning that promotes student success.

Three options for in-person sessions:

Option 1 March 13: Ouachita Parish
Option 2 March 20: St. Bernard Parish
Option 3 March 27: Calcasieu Parish

If you are unable to attend any of the three in-person session options, slide decks and handouts will be provided on the Counselor Support page after the last in-person session.

Please contact candace.joseph@a.gov with questions.

College Board Lunch & Learn Webinars

Please share with administrators, counselors, and testing coordinators.

The College Board is offering the upcoming virtual webinar tailored to the state of Louisiana. The webinar will provide meaningful assistance and resources for the Advanced Placement (AP) program. Participants can also attend to ask general questions. The upcoming webinar on growing AP on your campuses will begin at noon via Zoom.

- February 10: Tips for Growing AP on Your Campuses

Please contact charmaine.cureton@la.gov with questions.

Computer Science Implementation Regional Tour

Please share with administrators, counselors, CTE supervisors, STEM coordinators, and system leaders.

The LDOE is hosting a three-stop regional tour to support school system leaders in developing a comprehensive K-12 Computer Science implementation plan. The sessions will guide participants through developing effective, system-level implementation strategies using state supports and key resources

available in the Louisiana K-12 Computer Science Education Plan. Registration is required to attend the in-person sessions.

- February 24: Bossier

Please contact STEM@la.gov with questions.

2026 Fast Forward Training Catalog

Please share with school counselors, teachers, and CTE supervisors.

The Fast Forward Training Catalog provides a list of professional development and training opportunities available. The catalog includes virtual, in-person, and hybrid training options for many Industry-Based Certifications (IBCs) on the State Focus List. Please be sure to check out the professional development offerings as they are updated regularly.

Please contact fastforward@la.gov with questions.

2026 ACT Summit

Please share with administrators, counselors, CTE supervisors, and testing coordinators.

Registration is currently open for the 2026 ACT Summit. The ACT Summit will be held on July 13-15 in Nashville, TN.

This event unites the expertise and focus of workforce professionals, higher-ed leaders, and K-12 leaders, creating a fully integrated experience that fosters cross-sector collaboration. Sessions are designed to spark collaboration, foster problem-solving, and shape the future of education and the workforce.

Please contact charmaine.cureton@la.gov with questions.

Safe and Healthy Schools Community of Practice Calls

Please share with school counselors, social workers, coordinators, and teachers

Safe and Healthy Schools team hosts monthly Community of Practice Calls on the fourth Thursday of each month at 2 p.m. Each month, an expert presents on topics related to school safety, school health, transportation, nursing, suicide and bullying prevention, health and physical education, School-based Medicaid funding, the Coordinated School Health Initiative, school health advisory councils, and Project Aware.

February – American Heart Month: Protecting Hearts & Minds in Louisiana Schools with updated blood pressure and CPR guidelines, presented by Chelsea Morgan, Community Impact Vice President.

- **Webinar Date and Time:** Thursday, February 26 at 2 p.m.
- **Webinar Link:** https://ldoe.zoom.us/j/9611003422
- **Webinar Phone Dial-In:** 470-250-9358
- **Webinar ID:** 961 1003 4221
- **Webinar Passcode:** 959344

Please contact levillia.moore@la.gov with questions.

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Resources

LEADS Counselor Handbook

Please share with superintendents, human resource directors, school leaders, systems leaders, and counselors.

The Louisiana Counselor Rubric and Evaluation Handbook is now available in the LEADS Library. This handbook provides examples to deepen understanding of the rubric indicators. Coaching questions and sample evidence are also included. Evaluators are encouraged to use this resource to assist with the counselor evaluation process.

Please contact leads@la.gov with questions.

Louisiana Education Loan Authority

Please share with administrators and school counselors.

The Louisiana Education Loan Authority (Lela) is Louisiana's nonprofit resource for free FAFSA completion assistance, college access, and affordable financing. It is a division of the Louisiana Public Facilities Authority (LPFA) — a nonprofit public trust established to provide financing assistance and benefits to the people of Louisiana.

The Lela team assists families with FAFSA-related questions through its FAFSA HELPline (844-463-2372) and scheduled virtual appointments. Lela also offers a $1,000 FAFSA Completion Scholarship and free resources for Louisiana high school counselors, students, and families, including a FAFSA Completion Guide, Parents' Guide to Planning and Paying for College, and a College Planning Checklist at www.lela.org.

Please contact info@lela.org with questions.

Free ACT Practice Materials for Counselors

Please share with administrators, counselors, and testing coordinators.

ACT is offering free ACT practice materials for counselors. These materials will help counselors access the most useful materials. All materials can be shared with students to help with test prep, including practice tests and test guides.

Please contact charmaine.cureton@la.gov with questions.

LOSFA Outreach Events

Please share with administrators and counselors.

The Louisiana Office of Student Financial Assistance provides several outreach events, seminars, and workshops for schools, institutions, and organizations. These events can be delivered virtually and in person. Access the Event Scheduling Guide for more information about LOSFA Events, or submit requests using the Event Request Form.

Please contact losfa.scheduling@la.gov with questions.

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AP Resources for Counselors

Please share with administrators, counselors, and testing coordinators.

The College Board offers free counselor resources needed to support and advise students on their journey to college and career. Resources include assistance with preparing specialized students, advising, reference guides, handouts, and counselor toolkits.

Please contact charmaine.cureton@la.gov with questions.

Reminders

Community Service Diploma Endorsement

Please share with school system administrators and counselors.

Students have the opportunity to earn 80 hours of community service during their high school years and earn the Community Service Diploma Endorsement. Visit the Diploma Endorsement webpage for more information.

Please contact jenny.moran2@la.gov with questions.

America 250 Diploma Endorsement

Please share with administrators and school counselors.

America 250 is a national initiative created by Congress to commemorate the 250th anniversary of the founding of the United States in 2026. Each state, including Louisiana, has established its own commission to plan meaningful programs, recognitions, and events that honor America's past and inspire its future.

The America 250 seal will appear on the diplomas of Louisiana public high school graduates for the Class of 2026. The commemorative emblem honors both the nation's founding and the importance of preparing students to be informed, engaged citizens.

Please contact jenny.moran2@la.gov with questions.

Civics Diploma Endorsement

Please share with administrators and school counselors.

The 2025–2026 school year marks the first time students are eligible to earn the Freedom Framework Diploma Endorsement, a new recognition for high school students who demonstrate excellence in civics education.

The endorsement is awarded to students who score Mastery or above on the LEAP 2025 civics assessment. Recipients will receive an additional seal on their diplomas and wear a red, white, and blue honor cord during graduation ceremonies.

Please contact amy.willis@la.gov with questions.

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2025-2026 Graduate Diploma and Seal Orders: Extended Deadline

Please share with school counselors, principals, data coordinators, and system personnel responsible for ordering diplomas and seals.

Please use the Diploma and Seal Order Form to submit an order for 2025-2026 graduates. All diploma and seal requests must be submitted through the electronic form by **February 13, 2026**. Only one form should be completed for each school system. The LDOE will cover the costs for the initial order and distribution.

Please contact jenny.moran2@la.gov with questions.

Financial Aid Planning

Please share with school system counselors and personnel who assist students with financial aid planning for postsecondary opportunities.

The 2026-2027 Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) is now open to help students fund postsecondary education.

Students should complete the FAFSA if applying for the federal Pell Grant, federal student loans, the Louisiana GO Grant, and TOPS.

The TOPS application is on the LOSFA website if applying for TOPS only.

Please contact ldefinancialaid@la.gov with questions.

Ask CoCo

Q & A With COunselor COnnect!

Q: What exactly is a Registered Apprenticeship?



A: Registered Apprenticeship is a federally regulated, workforce development "earn and learn" strategy. Registered Apprenticeships are work based learning experiences where students with an employer directly aligned to their chosen career pathway. The apprentice acquires competencies and knowledge in their field through hands-on experiences and classroom instruction. By the end of their apprenticeship, students will receive a portable nationally recognized credential to showcase their skills in their chosen industry.

Registered Apprenticeships must be approved by Louisiana Works.

Scholarship/Funding Opportunities

Scholarship awards can range significantly, from modest amounts, such as $50-$500, from local organizations to substantial sums, including full tuition, from larger institutions. Smaller scholarships, despite their lesser amounts, can be a great way to secure funding and often have fewer applicants.

Regions Riding Forward Scholarship Contest (Deadline: March 31, 2026)

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College Board: Big Future Scholarships (Deadline: Varies)

SkillPointe Foundation Scholarship (Deadline: Every Quarter)

Home Depot Foundation's Path to Pro Scholarship (Deadline: Last day of March, June, September and December)

Southern Foundation: Clyde and Carrie W. McHenry Endowed Scholarship (Deadline: Varies)

Southern Foundation: City National Bank Endowed Scholarship (Deadline: Varies)

Southern Foundation: Dow Alumni Scholarship Fund (Deadline: Varies)

SkillsUSA Member Scholarships (Deadline: Varies)

Teacher Education Assistance for College and Higher Education (TEACH) Grant (Deadline: Varies)

1st Financial Bank USA Financial Goals Scholarship (Deadline: Monthly Drawing)

LELA: $1,000 FAFSA Completion Scholarship Drawing (Deadline: Varies)

LELA: $1,000 Choose Louisiana Scholarship Drawing (Deadline: Varies)

Connect With Our Office

Office of Career and College Readiness Contact Information

highschoolacademics@la.gov	General questions about the office and about graduation requirements
ldefinancialaid@la.gov	Questions related to the financial aid policy or for assistance with FAFSA completion
coursechoice@la.gov	Questions related to Course Choice/Supplemental Course Allocation
fastforward@la.gov	Questions related to Fast Forward and Jump Start
healthyschools@la.gov	Questions related to healthy schools, healthy communities, and the whole child
ppp@la.gov	Questions related to pupil progression
transcripts@la.gov	Questions about duplicate high school transcripts for graduates

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Monthly Calls

Alternative Education	February 12 @ 10 a.m.
Office of Career and College Readiness	February 19 @ 3 p.m.
Safe and Healthy Schools	February 26 @ 2 p.m.

Do you or a colleague need to sign up for the **Counselor Connect** newsletter? Please subscribe via the following link.