



# Principal's Newsletter



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## In This Issue

[Principal Strategy Spotlight](#)

[Announcements](#)

[Resources](#)

[Academics](#)

[Principal's Newsletter Sign-Up](#)

[Principal Appreciation](#)

[Important Dates for School Leaders](#)

## Principal Strategy Spotlight

Jennifer Burris, 2026 Principal of the Year Finalist



As principals, we all know the daily tug-of-war between management and instruction. It is so easy to get caught chasing every operational “squirrel” that darts across our path. Before long, we realize we have wandered deep into the woods, far from the classrooms where our leadership truly makes an impact.

Our school’s recent LEAP success didn’t come from a single big initiative or quick fix. It was the product of steady, intentional work, focused on continuous improvement and capacity building. The truth is, if we want to spend more time in classrooms, we have to trust others to carry part of the load. That means developing confident, capable leaders across our campus.

At Benton Intermediate, our approach centers on distributed leadership. It is not about delegation; it’s about empowerment. When we pour into our people, we multiply our leadership impact.

We start by setting clear expectations and systems for support, especially for new teachers. Our New Teacher Orientation and Induction Program, led jointly by our instructional coach and teacher leaders, ensures every new staff member knows what great instruction looks like on our campus. We use an “always, sometimes, and never see” framework to make expectations transparent and actionable. From day one, new teachers are integrated into their Teacher Collaborative (TC) groups, providing them with a professional home base and instant access to shared expertise.

These TCs are truly the heart of our continuous improvement process. They are not just meetings; they are where growth happens. Teachers plan together, analyze data, and learn from each other every single week. Professional development isn't something we "do" on a special day; it's part of our environment.

We have also structured leadership so that each administrator is assigned to a specific content area, allowing for more focused and intentional support: attending team meetings, conducting observations, creating coaching plans, and participating in professional development. This structure keeps us closely connected to the daily work of each department, giving us a clear understanding of emerging needs, strengths, and challenges. Because we are embedded in the work, we can more accurately identify instructional priorities for ILT, ensure coaching is truly responsive, and support teams with a level of depth that just is not possible when leadership is spread thin.

Another way I'm able to reclaim time is by avoiding a one-size-fits-all approach to teacher support. Just like students need differentiated instruction, our teachers need differentiated support. We use walkthrough data to assign teachers to tiers, and the tier determines the frequency of walkthroughs and feedback. This system allows me to focus my time and energy where it is needed most, providing intensive support for those who need it while maintaining consistent oversight for the rest. By targeting my efforts, I can maximize impact without spreading myself too thin, ensuring that every teacher receives the guidance that will drive both their growth and student success.

The payoff is a staff that feels confident, capable, and connected. A school where leadership is shared, not siloed. And a principal who can finally spend less time chasing squirrels and more time growing great teaching and learning.

## Announcements

### Teaching & Learning Menu of Services

The LDOE Office of Teaching and Learning has officially launched its comprehensive Menu of Services, offering tailored, one-on-one support to meet the specific needs of schools or systems across the state. From strengthening lesson preparation to building collaborative teacher teams, these offerings are designed to enhance instruction and improve student outcomes.

Please note: Only one designated point of contact (POC) per school system is authorized to submit support requests. If you're unsure who your system's POC is, please check with your central office before placing an order.

Please contact [louisianaliteracy@la.gov](mailto:louisianaliteracy@la.gov) with questions.

## Resources

### **Educator Talent and Workforce Development**

#### **Staffing and Scheduling Support Survey**

The Louisiana Department of Education, in partnership with New Solutions K-12, is gathering input from school leaders and system-level academic leaders to better understand how schedules and staffing are

organized across the state. We kindly request your input and feedback to ensure that the challenges you face are reflected in LDOE's upcoming resources and trainings for the 2025–26 school year. By completing a brief survey, you can directly influence the design of statewide supports that enhance scheduling and staffing effectiveness for all Louisiana schools. Survey links are below:

- [School Leader Survey Link](#)
- [School System Leader Survey Link](#)

Surveys are open now.

### **Strategic Scheduling Support Sessions**

The Louisiana Department of Education is excited to announce the SY25–26 Strategic Scheduling Series, a set of professional learning opportunities designed to help school and system leaders strengthen one of the most powerful levers for student success: the school schedule. Sessions are offered throughout the year and tailored for various audiences, including school administrators, school system leaders, and those in different grade bands. Participants will gain practical tools, strategies, and support to design schedules that maximize instructional time and better support teachers. Use the [registration](#) link for additional information.

## **Literacy**

### **ELA Reference Guides for Grades 3-12**

The [ELA Reference Guides](#), originally designed for the [ELA Guidebooks curriculum](#), are a great resource for all students, regardless of the ELA curriculum used in the classroom. These student-facing resources include reading, writing, and speaking and listening supports, separated by grade band.

Each topic in the ELA Reference Guides begins with basic information about the topic before digging deeper into the process. Additional information, including specific details and examples, is provided, along with supplementary resource links for many topics.

Please contact [elaguidebooks@la.gov](mailto:elaguidebooks@la.gov) with questions.

## **Numeracy**

### **Flashcards for Math Fluency**

The Louisiana Department of Education is excited to announce the distribution of flashcards to all elementary schools across the state. These flashcards are designed to support fluency development and help all students build confidence and mastery in math.

Teachers will receive dry-erase addition number bond flashcards for students in grades K-2 and dry-erase multiplication number bond flashcards for grades 3-5. These resources will enhance student understanding of the foundational relationships within these mathematical concepts.

For additional class-ready activities and ideas for families to use flashcards at home, please visit our webpage, [Flashcards for Math Fluency](#).

Please contact [math@la.gov](mailto:math@la.gov) with questions.

### **LANE Numeracy Professional Learning Office Hours**

The LDOE has developed a full suite of Numeracy Professional Learning courses for K-12 math teachers. This includes the training required by [Act 260 \(2023\)](#) and [Act 353 of 2025 \(LANE\)](#). Each month, the LDOE holds office hours to review important components of the Numeracy Professional Learning, including progress completion, monitoring reports, and responses/submissions. Office Hours will be held on December 17 at 9 a.m. All school and system leaders who support math instruction are encouraged to attend.

- **Webinar Date and Time:** December 17 at 9 a.m.
- **Webinar Link:** <https://ldoe.zoom.us/j/6158352036>
- **Meeting ID#:** 615 835 2036
- **Webinar Phone Number:** 312 626 6799

Please contact [math@la.gov](mailto:math@la.gov) with questions.

### **New Unit Study and Lesson Preparation Protocols**

New [Unit Study](#) and [Lesson Preparation Protocols](#) outline best practices in planning for math instruction. The tools are designed to help teachers make the most of high-quality instructional materials.

At their core, these protocols help teachers do four things well:

- clarify the specific learning goals tied to the standards
- anticipate where students may struggle or hold misconceptions
- study how lessons connect within a unit and across units, so instruction feels coherent
- highlight key tasks, questions, and strategies with which every student should engage

Use of the new Unit Study and Lesson Preparation Protocol allows teachers to come into planning with a shared understanding of what matters most, strengthening collaboration during planning and team meetings. Ultimately, this leads to more consistent pacing, higher student engagement, and stronger outcomes in every classroom. These resources, and many others, can be found on our [Louisiana Math](#) webpage.

Please contact [math@la.gov](mailto:math@la.gov) with questions.

## **Academic Content**

### **Social Studies**

#### **Social Studies Office Hours**

The LDOE will hold its fourth social studies office hours session of the 2025-2026 school year on **December 3 at 3:15 p.m.** This session will feature using social studies strategies with high-quality instructional materials. For access to past office hours slides and information on upcoming sessions, please refer to the [Social Studies Office Hours flyer](#) on the [K-12 Social Studies Planning webpage](#).

**Webinar Date and Time:** December 3 at 3:15 p.m.

**Webinar Link:** <https://ldoe.zoom.us/j/97436075546>

**Webinar Phone Number:** 1 346 248 7799

**Meeting ID#:** 974 3607 5546

**Meeting Passcode: 280838**

Please contact [socialstudies@la.gov](mailto:socialstudies@la.gov) with questions.

### **Bayou Bridges and Foundations of Freedom Pacing Guides**

The LDOE has released detailed alternate pacing guides for [Bayou Bridges: A K-8 Social Studies Curriculum](#) and [Foundations of Freedom: A Louisiana Civics Program](#). Developed by social studies educators, these guides offer standards-aligned pacing options that are coherent, flexible, and designed to support student needs. Units 1-4 are available, with the remaining units to be released on a rolling basis. Teachers should use these pacing guides to adjust instruction and better meet the needs of students.

Please contact [socialstudies@la.gov](mailto:socialstudies@la.gov) with questions.

### **Social Studies Frameworks**

To support high school social studies instruction, the LDOE has released [course frameworks](#) for World History and World Geography. Units 1-4 are now available, with the remaining units to be released on a rolling basis. Teachers are encouraged to use these frameworks to ensure alignment with state standards, guide lesson planning, and provide a coherent learning experience for students.

Please contact [socialstudies@la.gov](mailto:socialstudies@la.gov) with questions.

## **Science**

### **Updated Science Implementation Guides**

The LDOE is updating the Louisiana guides for implementing high-quality science instructional materials. The updates add new science-released test items aligned with the Louisiana Student Standards for Science (LSSS) for each unit in the respective [high-quality materials](#). These items appear in the “LDOE Formative Assessment Resources” section of each guide. Updated guides for Grades 3 and 4 are now available on the [K-12 Science Planning Page](#), with guides for the other grade levels coming soon.

Please contact [STEM@la.gov](mailto:STEM@la.gov) with questions.

### **Now Available: New Louisiana Implementation Guides**

With the identification of additional [high-quality science instructional materials](#) for high school biology, the LDOE science team has published the following new implementation guides:

- [Louisiana Guide to Implementing BSCS Biology: Understanding for Life;](#)
- [Louisiana Guide to Implementing Activate Learning OpenSciEd Biology;](#) and
- [Louisiana Guide to Implementing Carolina OpenSciEd Biology.](#)

These resources include information about standards, LDOE formative assessment resources for each unit, and more.

Please contact [STEM@la.gov](mailto:STEM@la.gov) with questions.

## Computer Science and STEM

### **Greauxing STEM Stewards**

Funded through The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and [Medicine's Gulf Research Program](#), [Greauxing STEM Stewards \(GSS\)](#) supports Louisiana educators in developing high-quality, open educational STEM resources. As part of the grant, the GSS Fellowship, developed in partnership with [Louisiana Sea Grant](#), engages teachers from across the state in creating place-based STEM experiences that connect students to local aquaculture career pathways. The open-source aquaculture curriculum for grades 6–8 incorporates experiential learning through a new Environmentally Controlled Agriculture (CEA) facility where students explore aquaculture, hydroponics, and sustainable agriculture with real-world data and technology.

For more information about this project or curricula, email [STEM@la.gov](mailto:STEM@la.gov).

### **Computer Science Education Week is Coming Soon!**

Computer Science Education Week (CS Ed Week) is December 8-14. This is an excellent time to foster awareness and prepare for the implementation of the [Louisiana Student Standards for Computer Science](#). Plan engaging [activities](#) that promote student exploration of core computer science concepts such as coding, computational thinking, and cybersecurity. Use this week as an opportunity to explore computer science, whether you introduce a single classroom activity, plan a school-wide spotlight, or organize a system-wide focus on CS Ed Week.

Please contact [STEM@la.gov](mailto:STEM@la.gov) with questions.

## Physical Education

### **LDOE Names Physical Education Standards Review Committee**

On October 15, BESE approved the [Physical Education Standards Review Committee](#) members who will lead the formal review of the state's K–12 physical education student standards. Committee meetings began on October 29 and will continue through February 2026. All meetings will be held in person at the Claiborne Building in Baton Rouge and are open to the public.

Additional information is available on the [Physical Education Standards Review Overview page](#) and the [FAQ](#) page.

Please contact [classroomsupporttoolbox@la.gov](mailto:classroomsupporttoolbox@la.gov) with questions.

## Educational Technology

### **Unleash Innovation with the Presidential AI Challenge**

Get ready to inspire the next generation of innovators! [The Presidential AI Challenge](#) is a new national competition that invites K-12 students and educators to solve real-world problems using artificial intelligence. This is a fantastic opportunity for students of all backgrounds to unleash their creativity and develop essential skills for the future.

The challenge is open to students and educators across all grade levels, with four distinct categories for participation:

- Elementary (Grades K-5): Open to classrooms or groups led by an educator or community leader.
- Middle School (Grades 6-8): Open to teams of 1-4 students with a supervising adult.
- High School (Grades 9-12): Open to teams of 1-4 students with a supervising adult.
- Educators (K-12): Open to teams of 1-3 educators.

Teams can choose a project track that best fits their interests and skills:

- Youth Teams can choose between two tracks:
  - Track I (Proposal): Develop a detailed proposal explaining how AI could be used to solve a specific community problem.
  - Track II (Technical/Implementation): Build an actual AI-powered solution, like an app or website, that addresses a community challenge. 8
- Educator Teams (Track III) will either design an innovative approach to teaching an AI concept to students or develop an AI-based tool to enhance classroom efficiency or communication.

Registration is already open. All projects must be submitted by **January 20**.

Assemble your team and visit the [Presidential AI Challenge website](#) to register and find sample projects, scoring guides, and other helpful resources.

Please contact [digitallearning@la.gov](mailto:digitallearning@la.gov) with questions.

## Diverse Learners

### Introducing Louisiana's English Learner Framework

The Louisiana [English Learner \(EL\) Framework](#) provides a clear roadmap for strengthening instruction and support for English Learners. It helps school leaders integrate language development into daily teaching, build effective planning systems, and ensure that all students have access to high-quality learning experiences.

The Framework is organized around five key pillars: Leadership and Program Development, Rigorous Instruction and Collaborative Planning, Data-Informed Decisions, Planning for Future Success, and Family Support Systems. It offers practical guidance and tiered support for schools of every size. By using the Framework as a planning tool, school leaders can align instruction, strengthen collaboration, and create consistent systems that help every English Learner thrive.

Learn more and access resources at the [English Learners Resources](#) page.

## Safe and Healthy Schools

### 2025 - 2026 High School Coaches CPR, First Aid, and AED Certification Survey

[Act 95](#) of the 2024 Regular Legislative Session states that beginning in the 2025-2026 school year, any high school employee serving as a coach for the school shall obtain and maintain certification in cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR), first aid, and the use of automatic external defibrillators (AEDs). The certification shall be consistent with the guidelines of the American Heart Association, American Red Cross, or other nationally recognized, evidence-based emergency cardiovascular care organizations.

Funding is available to assist school systems and schools in complying with the statute.



Please have the principal or Athletic Director complete the [survey](#) by or before November 14, 2025.

Please contact [healthyschools@la.gov](mailto:healthyschools@la.gov) with questions.

## Educator Recognition

### **School Support, Health Provider, and Physical Activity Award Programs- Application Process is Open**

The application process for the following awards initiatives is now open:

- [Outstanding School Support Employee of the Year](#)
- [School Health Service Provider of the Year](#)
- [School Physical Activity Award](#)

#### **Application Deadlines:**

- **By December 9, the state-level applications must be submitted via online application portals. All application materials, timelines, and links to the online application portals are available on the [Awards](#) page.**

All school systems are encouraged to select candidates as their local-level honorees and submit these selections to the state process. School systems without a formal selection process in place may elect to send their candidates directly to the state-level process.

To assist stakeholders with the application process, [Informational webinars](#) will be conducted throughout the application process. On these calls, information will be shared about the timeline/process, as well as steps for using the online portals. Additionally, there will be time for questions.

Please contact the [excellenteducators@la.gov](mailto:excellenteducators@la.gov) with questions about Outstanding School Support Employee of the Year, and [healthyschools@la.gov](mailto:healthyschools@la.gov) for questions about School Health Service Provider of the Year and School Physical Activity Awards.

### **Teacher/Principal of the Year and New Teacher of the Year Application Online Portals Are Now Open**

The online portals for coordinators and state-level applicants for Teacher/Principal of the Year and New Teacher of the Year are now open. All application materials and links to the online portals are available on the [Staff and Educator Awards](#) page.

All school systems are encouraged to:

- Select one honoree per elementary, middle, and high school division level as their local level honorees for the following-
  - Teacher of the Year
  - Principal of the Year
  - New Teacher of the Year (with less than one year of teaching experience)
- Submit these selections to the state-level process.

#### **Application Deadlines**

- Teacher/Principal of the Year applications due January 14.



- New Teacher of the Year applications due January 21.

To support candidates and coordinators in using the online portals, we will host the following informational webinars:

- **Teacher and Principal of the Year Candidates/Coordinators Webinar:**

**Webinar Date and Time:** December 3 at 10 a.m.

**Webinar Link:** <https://ldoe.zoom.us/j/97407452719?pwd=82eF8HhAfDel9IDLqnGRpY451p4Dn2.1>

**Webinar Phone Number:** 346-248-7799

**Meeting ID#:** 974 0745 2719

**Passcode:** 846168

**Webinar Date and Time:** December 17 at 4 p.m.

**Webinar Link:** <https://ldoe.zoom.us/j/96067070050?pwd=1DqbJGWJYRCFIbjeD54t7JsF9TYa.1>

**Webinar Phone Number:** 346-248-7799

**Meeting ID#:** 960 6707 0050

**Passcode:** 155548

The dates and times of future webinars are also listed in the [Zoom Details for Candidates and Stakeholders](#) document.

Please contact [excellenteducators@la.gov](mailto:excellenteducators@la.gov) with questions about Teacher/Principal of the Year, and [laurie.carlton@la.gov](mailto:laurie.carlton@la.gov) with questions about New Teacher of the Year.

## Principal Newsletter Signup

Do you have a colleague who would benefit from receiving this newsletter? Forward this copy and encourage them to [subscribe](#) to receive our next monthly newsletter.

## Principals for Principals Newsletter

The LDOE has released a new monthly newsletter designed to meet the practical needs of principals. Please visit the [LDOE's Principal Development Opportunities](#) landing page to read previous and current entries.