

Louisiana's Success & Challenge with Struggling Schools

The Louisiana Department of Education invites partners to join the state's effort to transform low-performing schools and ensure that all students—regardless of where they live—have access to schools that prepare them for college and career. Interested partners will engage in a collaborative design process with district and school leaders to support innovative school improvement solutions across the state.

In recent years, Louisiana has become a national leader in improving school and student performance. In 2015, Louisiana 4th grade students made greater gains on the [National Assessment of Educational Progress \(NAEP\)](#) reading than those made by any other state and the second highest gains in math. Since 2012, Louisiana's high school graduation rate has risen by 5.2 percentage points. Louisiana is the most improved state on the ACT among states now using the ACT as their high school test and in 2015 was also the nation's second fastest-improving state on [Advanced Placement \(AP\)](#) tests.

While Louisiana's progress is compelling, so too is the urgent need to dramatically improve persistently low performing schools, particularly in smaller cities and rural communities across the state. In the state's 100 most persistently low performing schools, either no more than 12 percent of students demonstrate mastery levels of proficiency in reading and math, or no more than 66 percent of students graduate from high school. And while African-American students comprise nearly 40 percent of the student population across the state, they make up 75 percent of the student population served in the state's 100 most persistently struggling schools, making the redesign of these schools an issue of civil rights.

Leaders in mid-sized cities, small cities, and rural communities need partners willing to collaborate and able to add expertise and capacity to schools with persistent challenges. Frustratingly, no comprehensive inventory of possible partners exists, and few—if any—opportunities exist for district and school leaders to meaningfully collaborate with industry experts and possible partners.

Together, we can change this reality and ensure that students educated across Louisiana – including in small cities and rural communities – are not left to languish in low performing schools. The Louisiana Department of Education is committed to ensuring that our dramatic improvement efforts touch all districts, all schools and all students. To realize our vision, the Department is looking for expert partners willing to work with school and district leaders to design innovative and community-relevant school improvement solutions.

Louisiana's Plan under ESSA

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) creates an important opportunity to improve achievement for students in persistently low performing schools or those in subgroups persistently under-served within schools. ESSA requires that states identify at least 5 percent of schools as chronically under-performing and in need of comprehensive school improvement and identify schools in which subgroups of students are in need of targeted support. The law further provides a new opportunity to direct resources to the individual needs of students.

The Louisiana Department of Education will build this component of the state's [ESSA plan](#) in partnership with parish school systems and with local and national school improvement experts. Research suggests that while school improvement strategies vary widely, nearly every effective model relies on external support. As such, Louisiana seeks to identify partners that can provide best-in-class supports to districts and schools and that can co-design plans with schools, districts, and the state that will dramatically improve student achievement. Specifically, the Department of Education will use responses to this RFI to:

- Create an inventory of high quality, proven school and district improvement partners.
- Invite selected partners to join district and school leaders for a daylong interactive design summit scheduled for January 18, 2017. This summit will bring together local Louisiana district leadership and the most promising redesign and improvement partners from within Louisiana and across the country. Partners will have the opportunity to share their work with districts; districts will leave with 2-3 potential partners that meet their specific needs; and the Department will have needed input from local leaders and expert partners on how to improve its draft ESSA plan.
- Launch a statewide competitive grant process using the federal funds annually allocated to school redesign.

Request For Information Submission Details

The Louisiana Department of Education seeks to identify expert partners locally and across the country to join our schools and district leaders in their effort to transform Louisiana's lowest-performing schools. These partners may provide a range of supports to schools including but not limited to:

1. Comprehensive school redesign providers who provide holistic support on all aspects of school design/re-design or school operators who are equipped to run schools.
2. Partners with targeted expertise in necessary elements of school improvement such as talent development, data processes or student and school culture.
3. Targeted support to address opportunity and achievement gaps felt by specific subgroups of students such as English Language Learners, students with disabilities or students of color.
4. Direct student services including tutoring, college and career counseling, and alternative access to unique courses such as AP courses.

The Department welcomes responses from a range of entities, including not-for-profits, charter organizations, innovation management organizations, start-up organizations, traditional district school systems, and institutions of higher education. These organizations must be willing to partner with local districts and schools to co-construct and execute improvement plans.

Louisiana's Request for Information

In no more than three pages, please tell us about your organization and its accomplishments, and how your organization can help the students of Louisiana achieve their dreams. In whatever format inspires you, please include the basic information requested below.

1. Partner Background
 - a. Organization name
 - b. Organization contact person and contact email and phone number
 - c. Summarize your organization's mission and its connection to Louisiana's plan for struggling schools
2. Evidence of Track Record of Student and School Outcomes
 - a. In any format, please illustrate your organization's track record in dramatically improving schools or systems of schools and/or radically increasing outcomes for targeted subgroups of students.
3. Your Organization's Model
 - a. How will you differentiate your services to meet the unique needs of schools and districts in Louisiana?
 - b. What are the attributes of your ideal partner school or district?
 - c. Describe your experience working with other third party providers to support coherent school and district improvement.
 - d. What support from the state, district or school partners would enhance your success in Louisiana?
4. Summit Attendance
 - a. If invited, are you able to attend our design summit on January 18th, 2017 in Baton Rouge?
 - b. Which individuals from your organization would attend?

Potential partners should submit information by November 18, 2016 to Hunter Brown at hunter.brown@la.gov. Partners selected to attend the Summit will be notified by December 2nd.