

# THE LAE VOICE

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Great Public Schools for Every Louisiana Child

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## NEA'S CAT-A-VAN READING TOUR VISITS LOUISIANA LAE PARTNERS WITH NEA AND DR. SEUSS FOR TOUR THAT BRINGS GRANTS TO LAFAYETTE AND BATON ROUGE ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS IN NEED



NEA Executive Committee Member Earl Wiman reads "Green Eggs and Ham" to students at Evangeline Elementary School.



The Cat-a-Van arrives at Evangeline Elementary School.



The Magnolia Woods Elementary school crew gathers for a quick photo in between reading celebrations.



NEA Executive Committee Member Joyce Powell and the Cat in the Hat present Magnolia Woods principal Donna Walleette with a donation for school library resources.



East Baton Rouge Parish Association of Educators member Cindy Rutherford dances with the Cat in the Hat at the Westminster Elementary School celebration.



NEA Executive Committee Member Joyce Powell gathers with a group of excited readers at Westminister Elementary School.



St. Bernard and St. John the Baptist Parish students show off their creativity at the Read Across America event at the Louisiana Children's Museum in New Orleans.



LAE President Debbie Meaux, SJA President Iona Holloway, and SBAE President Michelle Nicholson smile alongside the NEA crew as they present a donation check for each district's school libraries.

Hundreds of Louisiana students got some Seussian-style inspiration in March when they were paid a special visit by the National Education Association's Cat-a-Van. The tour, which included the Cat in the Hat and his friends, Thing 1 and Thing 2, is part of the NEA's Read Across America initiative, the nation's largest reading celebration with more than 45 million participating annually.

"NEA sponsors Read Across America every year because our three million members understand that reading is so important for our students in helping them be what they want to be," said NEA Executive Committee Member Earl Wiman, who led Lafayette-area students in a special reading of Seuss classics.

"Whatever their dreams, we want our students to succeed," added NEA Executive Committee Member Joyce Powell, who led the Baton Rouge-area read-alongs. "NEA's Cat-a-Van Reading Tour is helping children gain access to great books so they can go far in school and in life."

NEA's Cat-a-Van Reading Tour is a week-long reading initiative designed to give the gift of reading to students in high-needs schools. Lafayette's Evangeline and J. W. Faulk and Baton Rouge's Westminister and Magnolia Woods elementary schools were among the four Louisiana schools selected for the reading route. In addition to Lafayette and Baton Rouge, the Cat-a-Van stopped in select cities in Oklahoma and Texas.

"Good reading habits can expand children's horizons and really take them places later in life," said LAE President Debbie Meaux. "As we say in French, 'le plus que tu lis, le plus que tu sais.' But no matter the language, the message is the same: the more you learn, the more places you'll go."

The Cat-a-Van's final stop was at the Louisiana Children's Museum in New Orleans, where public elementary school students from St. Bernard and St. John the Baptist parishes attended a day of reading activities, culminating in a read-along led by NEA President Lily Eskelsen Garcia.

The NEA gave away \$15,000 in library grants to support the schools participating in the tour. Students also received red and white stovepipe "reading" hats, books, and other goodies, bringing the grand total of donations to more than \$100,000.

In addition to reading excitement, this year's Read Across America initiative also aimed to promote the kick-off of Dr. Seuss' "Kid, You'll Move Mountains" campaign, a nationwide search for kids ages 5-18 who excel in the areas of STEAM—Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math. This contest recognizes and celebrates children who are living the message of the book, *Oh, the Places You'll Go!* Visit [www.kidsmovingmountains.com](http://www.kidsmovingmountains.com) to learn more.



## FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

*Debbie Meaux, President*

The 2015 Legislative Season is nearly upon us, and it's promising to be an active one. Please be sure to read this issue thoroughly, as several articles can help increase your knowledge of the LAE's legislative priorities and how you play an integral part in making sure the voices of public school employees are heard in the halls of the Louisiana State Capitol.

April is LAE Representative Assembly month! During the annual LAE RA—set to take place April 11 and 12—representatives from LAE affiliates across the state will gather in Baton Rouge to discuss, debate, and conduct the business of the association; recognize and celebrate our top members through the awarding of LAE Image Awards; and interview the candidates running for Louisiana Governor in 2015. We may even entertain a recommendation for an early endorsement of one of the candidates.

Immediately following the RA—the very next day, in fact—the 2015 Legislative Session begins. I, along with the members of the LAE Lobby Team, encourage each of you to join LAE as we defend and promote the priorities of Louisiana's public school educators.

Last month, we shared the goals of our legislative program through a series of legislative conferences held in every region of the state. During these conferences, we recapped past legislative sessions, shared our predictions for the 2015 Session, and introduced and explained bills that LAE lobbyists are hoping to move

through the legislative process. There are several pieces of legislation this session that can either make or break us, and we need you to help us in our efforts to promote positive change in public education. I urge you to get involved this session. Stay in touch with your state senators and representatives. Make a commitment to participate in any LAE Legislative Calls-to-Action that the LAE Lobby Team initiates. The easiest way to do this is to sign up for the LAE's political advocacy tool, Capwiz, by visiting [capwiz.com/nea/la/mlm/signup/](http://capwiz.com/nea/la/mlm/signup/) and completing the step-by-step enrollment. You can also sign up by visiting the LAE website and clicking on the Capwiz banner on the home page. By completing this simple process, you will have access to communications straight from the LAE Lobby Team. LAE lobbyists will use Capwiz alerts to issue urgent calls-to-action on any bill at a critical stage in the legislative process. With a few clicks of a mouse, you can send messages to lawmakers declaring your support or opposition to the passage of a bill. This is extremely important, as each message sent has the potential to reach legislators who—with validation from his/her constituents—could be a deciding vote on key pieces of legislation.

Remember, the most powerful lobbying comes from the discussions individual teachers have with their local lawmakers. Please make plans to join us for any lobby days the LAE team plans this session; so far, we've tentatively scheduled two lobby days for April 16 and June 1, 2015. If attending a lobby day is not possible, we encourage you

to engage your legislators when they are back home in their districts. Face-to-face discussions are always the most effective way to explain your viewpoint to a legislator who may not know the significant impact a certain piece of legislation can have on a community. Whether it's on the street, in the grocery store, or after church, legislators are always eager to hear from their constituents. When one-on-one contact isn't feasible, call or email your local legislators to reinforce the message being carried by LAE lobbyists. These communications make more of an impact than you may think; your voice speaking alongside thousands of other LAE members' voices helps us reinforce our message, which helps LAE lobbyists make their case at the Capitol.

I know you have quite a busy month ahead of you as testing resumes. I want to wish you and your students the best of luck during this stressful time. Remember, no bubble test can truly measure a child's curiosity, creativity, or critical thinking skills—the most important aspects of a well-rounded education. So much more happens in the classroom, with you, every day, that a test will never show. Talented professionals, like yourself, strengthen our students' love of learning by providing them with well-rounded, innovative learning environments. I speak for all LAE leaders and staff when I say how much I admire your commitment to your students. Continue to inspire them to become the successful citizens they're destined to be.

Summer is right around the corner, and you'll soon have the much-needed break from what I'm sure will go down in the books as a successful school year. Until then, keep up the great work and please make a commitment to stay involved this legislative session—dedicate some time to advocate for your profession, but most importantly, for the school children of Louisiana.

In Solidarity,  
Debbie Meaux  
LAE President

# 2015 LEGISLATIVE SESSION PREDICTIONS

## BUDGET WOES, TAX REBATES, AND MORE CUTS



The 2015 Legislative Session is expected to be one filled with ever-increasing budget woes, tax rebate fights, and more cuts to higher education and healthcare as the state braces for a \$1.6 billion budget shortfall heading into the 2015-16 fiscal year. Governor Jindal attributes the state's budget woes to the

decline in oil prices, but according to reports by the state's legislative fiscal office, the bulk of the anticipated shortfall for the fiscal year 2016 budget was projected at nearly 1.2 billion before any oil price revisions were considered. Nearly \$1 billion of the shortfall is associated with the use of one-time resources supporting the 2015 budget that will have to be replaced for the 2016 budget. In his proposal to the joint budget committee, the governor proposed rolling back refundable tax credits totaling more than a half a billion dollars in an attempt to close the funding gap on higher education.

The proposal to rein in corporate giveaways has caused a firestorm within the business sector, specifically from the

Louisiana Association of Business and Industry (LABI). According to a report by Baton Rouge newspaper, *The Advocate*, the corporate inventory tax rebate comes at a huge cost to the state—a cost that is growing rapidly. Louisiana's inventory tax refund program is responsible for a massive hole in the state's budget, totaling \$427 million last year. After years of relative stability, the past seven years have brought a 120 percent rise in costs associated with refunds, raising questions about whether the refund system is being gamed by businesses.

It looks as though K-12 education could go unscathed by the governor's budget after BESE approved an MFP formula resolution that includes a 1.375 percent funding increase. Lawmakers will have an opportunity to either approve or reject the resolution. If rejected, the proposal will be sent back to BESE—the only group with authority to change the formula.

Additional LAE priorities this session include increasing retiree pay through a cost-of-living adjustment, improving the teacher evaluation system, expanding the pool of retirees eligible to return to work, proposing a comprehensive review of the Common Core State Standards, and working to sustain salary increases for teachers and education support professionals. The LAE Lobby Team will keep you posted on these and all other issues set to be discussed during the 2015 Session. Please visit [lae.org](http://lae.org) for updates.

## BESE APPROVES CHANGES TO COMPASS TEACHER EVALUATION SYSTEM

BESE recently approved a set of recommendations from a special committee commissioned to review the state's teacher evaluation system. The special committee, referred to as the Act 240 Subcommittee, made several recommendations in order to help better the system, including an additional one-year suspension of any consequences for teachers rated ineffective under the value-added model (VAM) and removal of the override provision requiring any teacher who is rated ineffective (in either the qualitative or quantitative component of the evaluation) to be rated ineffective in their overall evaluation.

State Representative Frank Hoffman, the author of Act 240 that established the subcommittee and Act 54 of 2010, reminded BESE of a promise he made to teachers when the

law passed in 2010: If the evaluation system did not work as intended, he would do what he could to change or do away with it.

Hoffman testified to BESE saying he, along with other legislators and educators, were concerned about VAM for a lot of different reasons, saying the state needs to make sure the system works before putting it into effect to evaluate teachers. State Superintendent of Education John White made several recommended changes of his own, but they were sent back to the Act 240 Subcommittee for review after several members of BESE raised concerns about the subcommittee not having the opportunity to properly examine them.



# LAE MEMBERS ACROSS THE STATE CELEBRATE READ ACROSS LOUISIANA WITH EVENTS IN BOSSIER CITY, LAFAYETTE, AND ST. MARY



Members of the Lafayette Parish Association of Educators take a group photo with celebrity guests and kids at the Read Across Louisiana event held at the Lafayette Parish Public Library in Carencro.



Caddo Association of Educators members (from left) Ty Malone, Elizabeth Sullivan, Dawn Jordan, Emma Shepard, Donna Festervan, and Daryl Roberson join the members of the Bossier Association of Educators for a Read Across Louisiana celebration in Bossier City.



Readers were in for a treat as the Bossier Association of Educators gave away more than 300 books to those who attended the Read Across Louisiana celebration at the Pierre Bossier Mall in Bossier City.



LAE Vice President Daryl Roberson joins in the reading fun at the Bossier Association of Educators' Read Across Louisiana event.



Lafayette-area kids participate in group activities at the Read Across Louisiana celebration in Lafayette.



Lafayette Parish Association of Educators President Rodolfo Espinoza gathers his daughters, Things 1 through 4, for a family photo shoot at the Read Across Louisiana celebration in Lafayette.





Lafayette Parish School System Health and Wellness Director Bradley Cruice and KATC-TV Anchor Steven Albritton serve as celebrity guest readers at the Lafayette Read Across Louisiana celebration.



The Bossier High School cheerleaders make their annual appearance at the Bossier Association of Educators' Read Across Louisiana celebration.



The Cat in the Hat and Thing 1 and Thing 2 get silly in Lafayette.



Caddo Association of Educators member Ty Malone reads "Oh Say Can You Say?" to a group of eager children in Bossier City.



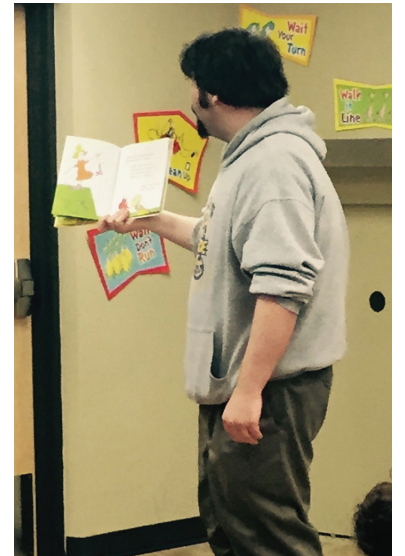
LAE Board of Directors Member Dawn Jordan reads to an excited group of kids at the Bossier Association of Educators Read Across Louisiana celebration in Bossier City.



The Cat in the Hat and LAE's NEA Director Rachel Gifford strike a pose at the Bossier Association of Educators' Read Across Louisiana celebration.



Children in St. Mary Parish gather to read alongside members of the St. Mary Association of Educators during the association's annual Read Across Louisiana celebration.



SMAE Member Brandon Trahan reads to the crowd at the St. Mary Association of Educators' Read Across Louisiana celebration.



## BESE DENIES FULL 2.75% INCREASE TO MFP DESPITE TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATION

BESE recently approved a \$3.7 billion public school funding proposal, despite pleas from the LAE and other stakeholder groups to include additional funding that would allow for a raise in the amount of dollars allocated per pupil. A committee in charge of making funding recommendations for the Minimum Foundation Program (MFP) recommended raising the per-pupil base from \$3,961 to \$4,071—a 2.75 percent increase, but BESE approved a 1.375 percent increase instead, making the total funding for K-12 spending nearly \$36 million less than the MFP Task Force recommendation.

In his budget proposal for the 2015-16 fiscal year, Governor Jindal did not include any increase in funding for K-12 spending other than the normal projected increase for student enrollment. On several occasions, LAE Legislative and Political Director Shane Riddle urged BESE to stick with the task force recommendation of a 2.75 percent increase, expressing the LAE's dedication to always supporting a yearly increase of 2.75% and no less. Riddle pointed out that this will be the sixth year under the Jindal administration that K-12 school funding has been shortchanged, while the state continues to give away billions of dollars annually through

corporate subsidies, official tax breaks, and unofficial tax dodging.

On a positive note, the 1.375 percent increase in the MFP for the 2015-16 requires school systems to sustain the classroom teacher pay raises implemented in 2013—an effort led by Representative John Bel Edwards to make sure that teacher salaries were keeping pace with the Southern Regional Average.

In addition to the 1.375 increase, the MFP resolution also includes increasing the high-cost special education services pool by \$5.4 million, and raising the Course Choice weight from \$26 to \$35 per student to meet demands for dual enrollment and career courses not traditionally offered in high schools. The increase will also allow for an equity study of the MFP formula.

Lawmakers will have their chance to approve or reject the formula during the 2015 Legislative Session. If rejected, the formula will go back to BESE—the only entity with authority to change the formula.

## BILLS TO SILENCE EDUCATOR VOICES UP FOR DEBATE IN THE 2015 LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Living in a right-to-work state, Louisiana public school employees are given a choice on whether to join a professional association. How they pay their membership dues is also their decision, and many opt to have this cost deducted directly from their regular paychecks—the same option is available for other voluntary deductions like insurance, retirement, and charitable donations. With all the other stresses that come with working full time in a public school, this is a simple convenience that takes a task off an already-full plate. Removing this accessibility makes it harder for educators to maintain membership in the professional association of their choice, contributing to the silencing of an important voice representing those who work in public schools with Louisiana's children every day.

Big business-backed lobbyists and anti-teacher organizations continue their attempts to silence educator voices through anti-labor organization efforts. Designed to tie the hands of organizations that collect membership dues via payroll deduction, some legislators have filed legislation in the 2015 session that proposes prohibiting any group that engages in political activity from receiving membership dues through

this manner. If passed, the law would make it difficult for the LAE to take part in such important member advocacy efforts as member opinion polling on critical education issues like Common Core and teacher evaluations. It would also adversely affect the way the LAE communicates with members on urgent legislative matters that stand to directly impact their professional futures. This attempt is designed to make it more difficult for educators to be members of their professional association of choice, removing their constitutional freedoms of speech and association.

Remember, your LAE membership gives you a voice. The loss of payroll dues deduction could have a devastating impact on the association and the voice it gives you and your colleagues in the policy making process for your professional interests. The LAE has fought for public school educators for more than 40 years, and we plan to do so for the next 40. It is up to us to stand up for Louisiana's students and public schools. Over the coming months, we will bring you important updates concerning this matter through our legislative advocacy tool, Capwiz, as well as our website, [www.lae.org](http://www.lae.org). Please stay tuned and stay vigilant.

# EBRPAE MEMBER CRYSTAL WILLIAMS GORDON HONORED AT THE NEA FOUNDATION'S 2015 SALUTE TO EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION AWARDS GALA



*LAE Horace Mann Award for Teaching Excellence Award Winner Crystal Williams Gordon*

East Baton Rouge Parish Association of Educators member and high school biology teacher Crystal Williams Gordon was recently recognized as one of the nation's top educators at the NEA Foundation's Salute to Excellence in Education Awards Gala in Washington, D.C., where NEA leaders presented Crystal with the prestigious Horace Mann Award for Teaching Excellence and \$10,000.

The NEA Foundation live streamed the event on its website, enabling students, peers, and families of the awardees to join in the celebration from communities around the country. All five of the awardees' students benefitted from their teachers receiving the award by receiving a special digital arts training from Scena Media, which they used to create an original video honoring their teachers.

The NEA Foundation Awards for Teaching Excellence are presented annually at an awards gala, which attracts more than 800 national leaders from the public education, philanthropic, and business sectors. The awards recognize, reward, and promote excellence in teaching and advocacy for the profession. Gordon was nominated for the

award by the LAE after she won the association's annual Teacher Image Award at the LAE's 2014 Representative Assembly.



*LEFT TO RIGHT:*

*John Stocks, NEA Executive Director*

*Crystal Brown, Chair of the NEA Foundation Board of Directors*

*Harriet Sanford, President and CEO of the NEA Foundation*

*Awardee Allison Riddle (UT)*

*Awardee Anna Baldwin (MT)*

*Marita Zuraitis, President and CEO of the Horace Mann Educator Corporation*

*Awardee Crystal Williams Gordon (LA)*

*Awardee Terri Butts (SC)*

*Awardee Richard Erickson (WI)*

## ATTENTION: LAE BOARD VACANCIES

The LAE Board of Directors is composed of association leaders who are active education employees elected by their peers to act for the association in between meetings of the Representative Assembly. You must be a member for at least three years to be eligible to apply for the following vacancies:

**First Associational District, Seat C:** Allen, Beauregard, Bienville, Bossier, Caddo, Claiborne, Desoto, Jackson, Jeff Davis, Lincoln, Natchitoches, Red River, Sabine, Union, Vernon, and Webster

**Sixth Associational District, Seat A:** Jefferson, Lafourche, Orleans, Plaquemines, St. Bernard, St. Charles, St. John, St. Mary, St. Tammany, and Terrebonne

If you are interested in applying, please send your letter of intent and resume to Laurie Guillot at [lguillot@lae.org](mailto:lguillot@lae.org) by June 10, 2015. The next LAE Board meeting is scheduled for June 13, 2015, and the seats will be appointed at this meeting.

# THE LAE VOICE

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## **UPCOMING EVENTS**



April 10  
LAE Board  
Meeting

April 11-12  
LAE  
Representative  
Assembly

April 13  
2015 Louisiana  
Legislative  
Session begins

May 4 - 8  
Educator  
Appreciation  
Week